

Raw Metaphors: Cannibal Poetics in Early Modern England

By

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Dissertation

Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Graduate School of Vanderbilt University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

in

English

August, 10, 2018

Nashville, Tennessee

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work would not have been possible without the support of the Vanderbilt English department. I thank my peerless dissertation committee – Kathryn Schwarz, Leah Marcus, Lynn Enterline, and Beth Conklin – for their insights and support throughout this process. Thank you for challenging me and for enriching my intellectual life in countless ways over the past years. I would also like to thank my colleagues in early modern literature, Deann Armstrong and Kirsten Mendoza. Your brilliance inspires me, and I am honored to call you not only my colleagues, but dear friends.

Thank you to Ruth Evans of St. Louis University for your encouragement and faith in my writing, as well as for introducing me to Kristeva’s *Black Sun*, which proved crucially illuminating for my fourth chapter.

Thank you to the ladies of Thistle Farms, especially Ashley, Taylor, Erica, and Yolanda. Your generous spirits buoyed me up every morning, and I am grateful for every conversation and every pot of green tea.

Profound thanks to Stephanie Straub, Martin Brown, Shelby Johnson, Sari Carter, Don Rodrigues, and Lauren Mitchell for being such sources of joy in my life. Thank each of you for being you.

Thank you to my loving parents, Bruce and Emily Lehr, for getting me this far. Thank you to Eric Lehr – even if you weren’t my only brother, you would still be the best. I would also like to thank Sel Jenkins; I’m so glad to have you as part of my family. I would like to thank my feline editors, Beatrice and Baldwin, for their extensive, if fleeting additions to my manuscript. Most of all, thank you to my partner in everything, Henry Gorman. You are my heart.

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## INTRODUCTION

### Reading the Raw

This project concerns the cannibalistic tropes of four major poets in early modern England. Let me begin, however, with the story a Protestant cleric on a mission in Brazil.<sup>1</sup> In 1556, Jean de Léry accompanied a small group of French Calvinists to “France Antarctique,” an island in the Bay of Rio de Janeiro.<sup>2</sup> In his extraordinarily detailed records, Léry recounts the both the development of the colony and his anthropological observations about local indigenous tribes. While Léry’s writings are perhaps best known for their documentation of Tupi ritual cannibalism, his *History of a Voyage to the Land of Brazil* contains passing commentary on two more cannibal societies in the New World which he perceives as more savage. The first, the “devilish Ouetaca,” are portrayed as “among the most barbarous, cruel, and dreaded nations that can be found in the West Indies and the land of Brazil” in part because “like dogs and wolves, [they] eat flesh raw” (de Léry 29). The second “tribe,” by contrast, could be found within the French settlement: Catholics. Following a string of rancorous debates over the nature of the Eucharist, Léry railed against Nicholas Durand de Villegagnon, founder of *France Antarctique*, and the Dominican friar Jean de Cointa with this polemical comparison<sup>3</sup>:

they wanted not only to eat the flesh of Jesus Christ grossly rather than spiritually, but what was worse, like the savages named Ouetaca, of whom I have already spoken, they wanted to chew and swallow it raw (41).

Léry’s rhetorical posture of equating Catholic transubstantiation with cannibalism is nothing new.<sup>4</sup> The cleric’s literacy in cannibal practices, however, makes this specific instance remarkable. Léry does not condemn Catholics for being cannibals, but for being cannibals *like*

*the Ouetaca*. His relatively friendly and respectable relations with the Tupinambá documented in his *History* demonstrate that, for Léry, eating human flesh is an insufficient reason to condemn an entire people as evil.<sup>5</sup> The cannibal practices of the Tupinambá, however, differed in one key dimension from those of their foils: the Tupinambá cook their meat, whereas, in Léry's estimation, both the Ouetaca and French Catholics relish eating it "raw" (29, 41).

Even taking his rhetorical aims into account, Jean de Léry's fixation on raw flesh in this passage is revealing. In early modern English as well as French, the word "raw" was used not only to refer to uncooked or unprocessed meat, but to identify human beings as "uncivilized," "coarse," or "brutal" ("raw, adj., 5b.").<sup>6</sup> (Indeed, one 1611 English dictionary even differentiates between *anthropophago*, "an eater of men," and *cannibal*, "an eater of man's raw flesh," suggesting that the cannibal's preference for raw human meat necessitated its own analytical category.)<sup>7</sup> Using the logic that "you are what you eat," Léry infers that only the rawest of people prefer raw flesh, thus designating Villegaignon's people and the Ouetaca to be "the most savage of savages" (Whatley "note 7," p. 236). By contextualizing Léry's passage as a response to Eucharistic debate, however, his words yield another, subtler critique of Catholic "rawness." When the Calvinist cleric claims that Villegaignon and Cointa "wanted to chew and swallow [Christ's flesh] raw," he uses visceral language to deride a "grossly" literal reading of scripture (41). By adhering to transubstantiation over consubstantiation, his fellow colonists reject the "spiritual" and symbolic in favor of "raw" material flesh. In other words, Catholics eat both their Christ and their metaphors raw: "uncooked," "unprocessed," and "unassimilated" into the world of figure ("raw, adj, 1a,b."). Léry's complaint also establishes his notions of the cannibal and of *those who eat the raw* to be mutually porous, yet not synonymous. As a Calvinist and an amateur anthropologist, Léry does not hold all varieties of cannibalism mentioned in his text – from

versions of the Christian Eucharist, to tribal exocannibalism, to survival cannibalism among his fellow Europeans – to be semiotically identical or equally offensive.<sup>8</sup> Nevertheless, his passage juxtaposing the Ouetaca and the Catholics make two values clear: first, that flesh and figure exist upon a continuum, and, second, that the worst offense is to consume either of them raw.

After the fashion of Léry's response, my project takes up the concept of the "raw" to interrogate the uses and functions of cannibal tropes in early modern poetry. While my primary texts are European, my critical approach is indebted to another French observer of Amerindian cultures, Claude Lévi-Strauss. In his classic of structuralist anthropology, *The Raw and the Cooked* [*Le Cru et le Cuit*], Lévi-Strauss analyzes almost two hundred Bororo and Tupi myths, discerning sociocultural value systems through the juxtaposition of sensory opposites (the raw/cooked, fresh/decayed, moisted/burned, etc.). Noting the number of key myths that involve digestion, excretion, and rot, he concludes that

they are not embroidering 'crudely' on metaphors that are still used today even in our societies. . . In fact, the opposite is true: thanks to the myths, we discover that metaphors are based on an intuitive sense of the logical relations between one realm and other realms; metaphor reintegrates the first realm with the totality of the others, in spite of the fact that reflective thought struggles to separate them. Metaphor, far from being a decoration that is added to language, purifies it and restores it to its original nature, through momentarily obliterating one of the innumerable synecdoches that make up speech (339).

By portraying metaphors as "restoring [language] to its original nature," their immediacy fracturing the gulf between the real and symbolic crystallized by "reflective thought," Lévi-Strauss indicates that the very concept of the metaphor can be identified with the raw – an

intuition shared by many early modern rhetorical theorists, as my next section will show. While this concluding passage from *The Raw and the Cooked* applies to metaphors generally, I contend that cannibal metaphors possess a particular “rawness” that complicates their function as tropes, due to the combination of their sensory intensity and implication in a network of cultural taboos.

My terminology of rawness is meant to capture two dimensions of cannibal metaphor that affects its uptake and performance in literary texts. First, cannibal tropes are “raw” in the sense of being extremely visceral, provoking both fascination and disgust. As shown by the work of Louise Noble, Margaret E. Owens, and Susan Zimmerman, the omnipresence of cannibalism on the early modern stage attests to a public appetite for anthropophagy as display. The material spectacle of cannibalism also makes it perversely attractive fodder for figurative language; it takes only a passing reference to the subject to summon a host of related images, sounds, and smells in the reader’s mind. This heightened sensoriality, however, also makes cannibalism resistant to becoming figural. While this is not to say that cannibal metaphors cannot bear abstract meaning, the transition from vehicle to tenor is often incomplete or unstable, because of the lingering power of these sense impressions of the dismemberment, consumption, and annihilation of human bodies. (Consider, for instance, how Léry’s comparison nominally makes an equivalence, but focuses on the Ouetaca: we see their material practices superimposed over the Eucharist, bloody flesh instead of bread, rather than vice versa.) As a result, cannibal tropes can be functionally understood as “raw” in the sense of resisting assimilation by their texts, authors, and readers. By taking up “Raw Metaphors” as its title, my work endeavors to capture the complex effects of cannibal tropes deployed in early modern poetry: as a result of their visceral impact upon readers and uneasy incorporation within the surrounding text, figurative uses of cannibalism inflict their own rawness upon their receivers as they lay cultural anxieties



bare, chafe against expectations of figurative language, and unsettle preconceived boundaries between word and flesh.<sup>9</sup>

My gloss of the passage from Jean de Léry also expresses two key values structuring this study: first, that cannibalism is not a monolith, and, second, that the materiality of language in early modern texts relates to realities of embodiment that must be historicized. While not all early modern people had set foot in the New World, they were, nevertheless, aware of not only tales of cannibals abroad, but of cannibal practices taking place on England's own soil. In addition to continuing debates over the nature of the Eucharist, English Jews and Catholics were derided in pamphlets as ritualistic cannibals.<sup>10</sup> As the work of Richard Sugg and Louise Noble has shown, a thriving trade in corpse medicine – and, particularly, in mummy – turned many proper English citizens into anthropophagi themselves, as they sought to cure their ailments by digesting human matter.<sup>11</sup> Ongoing campaigns to subdue Ireland resulted in horrifying tales of the starving Irish people engaging in survival cannibalism, as my first chapter will discuss in greater detail. The proliferation of discourses about eating human flesh during this period had the simultaneous effects of solidifying cannibalism as a set of real, material practices and making it ripe for appropriation as a literary figure. When these discourses are taken up by early modern poets, the resulting tropes functioned differently depending on the specific associations and anxieties attached to each form of cannibalism. The extent of these anxieties depend upon how the texts engage with questions of what it means to be human, what happens to the soul when the body is destroyed or eaten, what is the difference between self and other, and whether language can have material effects on bodies in the world. Consequently, the meaning of the rent, gnawed human body's refusal to recede into abstraction varies in accordance with what that body represents in context. The cannibalized corpse and the vital body of the cannibal can be

destabilizing, repellent, engaging, exhilarating, or all of the above, based on how it fits into the narrative frame of the poem. Consequently, by attending to both the historicized sources of each trope, as well as the poetic structures enclosing them, *Raw Metaphors* aims to demonstrate the specificity of each writer's engagement with cannibalism, as well as a related specificity of each trope's textual effects, whether intended or unintended.

### **Tropes with Teeth: On the Violence of Poetic Rhetoric**

Hannibal Lecter: Words are living things. They have personality, point of view, agenda.  
Will Graham: They're pack hunters.  
– "Sorbet," Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*

In addition to contextualizing early modern cannibal metaphors within the material practices from the period, my project also considers their place within another historically specific landscape of violence: that of tropes and figures of speech. While Shakespeare's Juliet may protest that "that which we call a rose / By any other name would smell as sweet," sixteenth and seventeenth century texts on poetry stressed that the figures used to express thought carried ethical weight and posed significant danger for both poet and reader if used wantonly (*Romeo and Juliet* 2.2.47-48).<sup>12</sup> In his exemplary *Arte of English Poesie*, George Puttenham affirms that poetic speech makes the mind vulnerable to becoming "disorderly or confused with any monstrous imaginations or conceits" (34).<sup>13</sup> An unsavory phrase has the power to "breede Chimeres and monsters in mans imaginations, and not onely in his imaginations, but also in all his ordinarie actions and life which ensues" (35). Although some of these sinister effects can be attributed to the craft of an individual writer or orator, Puttenham portrays tropes as inherently manipulative "trespasses in speech," which

deceive the eare and also the minde, drawing it from plainnesse and simplicitie to a certaine doublenesse. . . for what else is your Metaphor but an inversion of sense by transport; your allegorie by a duplicitie of meaning or dissumilation under covert and darke intendments... (166).<sup>14</sup>

Beyond ascribing an errant force to all poetic figures – indeed, he glosses “trope” (*Tropus*) as “lively and stirring”– Puttenham depicts figures which “geve dolour and disliking to the eare and minde” as akin to wild beasts, calling them “the vicious parts” of language (168, 167). While Lévi-Strauss envisions metaphors as “raw” in the sense of “pure” or “unadulterated,” Puttenham presents their rawness in terms of brutality. In *The Arte of English Poesie*, tropes can clearly be savage and threaten to infect the writer’s audience with further savagery.

The proximity between rhetorical choice and mortal danger thematized by early modern books of figures perhaps contributes to the surprising prominence of cannibalism amongst their examples. Puttenham explicitly tips his hat to the cannibal in an opening section of his text on the universality of poetry, writing that “the American, the Perusine, and the very Canniball, do sing and also say, their highest and holiest matters in certaine riming versicles and not in prose” (26). His egalitarian (if condescending) vision of Cannibal eloquence suggests that even eaters of human flesh can evade the capital rhetorical sin of “speak[ing] barbarously” (257). As someone who admits cannibals as lingerers on the outer reaches of poetic genius, however, Puttenham’s own vocabulary bears the mark of their predilections. He repeatedly discusses rhetorical trends in terms of “appetites,” and he defines elision as “your swallowing or eating up one letter by another when two vowels meete” (31, 272, 174). More subtly, his explanation of *metaphora* describes “a kinde of wresting of a single word from his owne right signification, to another not so natural, but yet of some affinitie or conveniencie with it, as to say, I cannot digest your unkind

words” (189). While only the example is explicitly digestive, Puttenham’s image of the metaphor “not so natural[ly]” and violently (“wresting”) assimilating a word that is both like and unlike itself evokes early modern anxieties about cannibalism’s power to dissolve or shift the relationship between self and other. Similarly, his translation of *soriasmus*, meaning the intermixture of languages, as “mingle mangle” invites comparison between Puttenham’s own disdain for English mingling with foreign tongues and broader national concerns, borne of the age of exploration, about English bodies mingling with foreign flesh – particularly, in the stomachs of cannibals (259).<sup>15</sup> In George Puttenham’s imagination, the “Chimere” of cannibalism appears to be a potent stand-in for fears about the contingency and malleability of both human language and the human body – as well as their capacities for mutual transformation.

Puttenham is not the only figurist, furthermore, with cannibals on the brain. While Richard Sherry lets only one cannibal intrude on his *Treatise of Schemes and Tropes* – the giant “Poliphemus” – Henry Peacham, Angel Day, and Thomas Wilson make numerous references to the eating of human flesh in their respective texts of rhetoric (Sherry 76).<sup>16</sup> If, as Puttenham asserts, “men do chuse their subjects according to the mettall of their minds,” then English figurists appear to have agreed upon cannibalism as a capacious vehicle for intellectual work (161). Peacham generally uses the language of cannibalism in the service of personification and playful misdirection, as when, in his example of *anigma*, the speaker who “consume[s] my Mother that bare mee” is revealed to be a candle (26).<sup>17</sup> Day and Wilson, by contrast, continually seem drawn back toward the material bodies that furnished their figures of consumption. Day’s *The English Secretarie*, which introduces itself as a “booke rudely digested and then roughly delivered,” displays its author’s particularly baroque flair for cannibal gore (A2). Among its exemplary “Letters Descriptive,” “Another example wherein the State of a Countrey is soly

described” paints a picture of its speaker trapped in a “savage” nation of man-eaters, “into whose hands if any of us doe chauce to fall, our dead carkasses in hastie morsels are conveied into their intrailles” (27). Day’s lapses into cannibal fancy, however, do not merely add intrigue to his text’s formal exercises, but structure his most basic explanation of tropes. Distinguishing between tropes and schemes, he writes that

the difference is, that the trope changeth the signification, as in these words Generation of Vipers, meaning thereby homicides of their owne issue or antecessors, as the Viper devoureth her owne broode (77).<sup>18</sup>

While “Generation of Vipers” is nominally just an illustrative example, Day’s first explicates the function of tropes in terms of infanticidal cannibalism, imbuing the idea of a figure with transgressive destruction of the self or others. Through this clutch of serpents, Day offers a glimpse of what it might look like when a trope “changeth the signification” of a phrase: swallowing, disrupting, and reshaping its linguistic function, “as the Viper devoureth her owne broode.”<sup>19</sup> In *The English Secretarie*, cannibalism becomes a means of articulating the transformative violence of poetic language itself.

Amidst cannibal allusions ranging from Tantalus to the Eucharist, Thomas Wilson’s *The Arte of Rhetorique* also lingers on the example of the viper and her brood to an instructively different end (220, 165). Wilson invokes the viper in concert with the stork to show the expressive power of “contraries set together”:

Againe, in younge Storckes, wee may take an example of love towards their damme, for when she is olde, and not able for her crooked bill to picke meat, the youngones fede her. In young Vipers, there is a contrary example (for as Pliny saieth) they eate out their dames wombe, and so come forth (149).<sup>20</sup>

Wilson uses both of these well-known early modern animal myths to create a narration about food and filiation. Rather than embodying the caprices of figurative language, this brood of vipers provides a cautionary example of anti-social predation: whether the young devour their dam or vice versa, the viper betrays society and family to satisfy of its own base appetites. By contrast, the stork – a figure associated with gratitude since the time of the ancient Egyptians<sup>21</sup> – returns to feed its aging parents in recognition of their former caretaking, creating a cycle of mutual nurturance. Palpably moved by the stork’s filial piety, Wilson praises its show of “natural love” twice in the text and expresses hope that “shal we so lyve” (40). By pairing the stork with the viper, he balances his vision of a pro-social utopia with its foil – a cautionary tale in which every man fendes for himself, “[t]he whiche custome if all men followed, the earth woulde soone be voide for want of men, one woulde be so gredie to eate an other” (39). The act of eating – what, how, and with whom – stands in for an entire socio-political orientation.

Wilson’s fable of the stork and the viper, however, does not necessarily treat cannibalism as synonymous with anti-social predation. While it is not specified what kind of meat the stork brings back for its aging parents, during the early modern period, the stork was sometimes symbolically conflated with the pelican, a bird with a similarly pious, but bloodier, reputation (Fleming 42).<sup>22</sup> Closely associated with Christ, the pelican was said to tenderly nurture its young, until they rebel and force the pelican to kill them; after three days of mourning, the pelican tears open its breast and restores the chicks to life by feeding them its own blood (Jacob 306; Ferguson 23).<sup>23</sup> In the case of the pelican, cannibalism serves not only as an act of care, but a tool for reconciliation and a remedy to violence. As an extension of the example of the stork, the pelican’s revered status in the early modern symbolic aviary shows a place for cannibalism as an expression of kinship and affiliation. While it is never a good thing to shelter vipers in one’s

bosom, to nestle in the bosom of the pelican and drink its blood promises resurrection and transformation, afforded by the creature's loving sacrifice.<sup>24</sup> In this vein, *Raw Metaphors* considers how the troping of cannibalism in early modern poetry models a variety of social relations and how these "cannibal" relations were often in friction with the existing orders of early modern England.

### **One Flesh?: Cannibalism, Individualism, and the Socio-Political Sphere**

"It's only cannibalism if we're equals."  
– Hannibal Lecter, "Antipasto," Bryan Fuller's *Hannibal*

Though it may seem like an unlikely lesson to come from such a highly educated, pointedly erudite aesthete, Dr. Lecter has a point: there is something profoundly leveling about cannibalism. By definition, to be a cannibal, one must recognize oneself and one's meal as being of a single kind. Despite the apparent power imbalance between the cannibal and his victim, cannibalism as an analytical category affirms their equivalency as two human bodies. In the heavily stratified society of early modern England, cannibal relations promised a kind of radical egalitarianism, where a "king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" without any animal intermediaries (*Hamlet* 4.3.30-31). Hence, beyond representing a confrontation between self and other, the figure of the cannibal in the seventeenth-century English imaginary can be understood as heralding either an anarchic collapse of civil society, in which "the weak are meat, the strong do eat," or a merit-based utopia, depending on one's perspective (Mitchell 503).<sup>25</sup> This dynamic underpins the portrayal of the cannibal as antithetical to "citizenship" in political tracts up through the eighteenth century, and the simultaneous association of the cannibal with a specific type of society: "savage communism," where government is casual and collective, wives are shared, and "flesh" in every sense is "property of the entire group" (Avramescu 216). By

raising questions about human beings' ownership over their own bodies, the communist cannibal – “raw” foil to European sovereignty – threatens by extension institutions of class hierarchy, marriage, property, and nationhood.

While Cătălin Avramescu's *An Intellectual History of Cannibalism* argues that, during the late eighteenth-century, the “cannibal disappears as a subject of the science of moral order, because he has been eclipsed by the state, the new agent of absolute cruelty,” I contend that the preceding century was a period of peak relevance of the cannibal in popular European discourse as a means of understanding state power and the place of the individual (262). The cannibal and the sovereign nation often appear in opposition: consider, for instance, the “savage nation” episode of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, in which the savages are unsubtly coded as renegade Scottish and Irish.<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, as Montaigne and Swift notoriously displayed in “Of the Cannibals” and “A Modest Proposal,” respectively, the boundary between state-sanctioned cruelty and cannibal “savagery” was thin and porous. The cannibal and the sovereign could work side by side; as Louise Noble observes in her reading of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, Titus's cannibalistic revenge reveals a “disturbing contiguity between early modern corpse pharmacology and the harsh realities of retributive state justice,” meant to heal an ailing body politic with blood (42). If cannibalism could mirror to the abuses of state power, however, cannibal practices of the period could also be infected with the values of the existing social order.<sup>27</sup> In the case of corpse medicine, the bodies of marginalized peoples – “alienated, in various ways, from ordinary humanity”– were worth more dead than alive, selling at exorbitant prices to the rich and privileged (Sugg 102).<sup>28</sup> The bodies of maidens and vigorous young men were particularly fetishized for their “potency,” carrying popular obsessions with youth, beauty, and virginity over from the bedroom to the slab (Sugg 71, Noble 3). Due to the dialectical



relationship between cannibal practices and English social mores, cannibal discourses in literature of the period could expose the rawness at the center of English society or be culturally cured into a more acceptable ceviche – cooked just enough to be incorporated smoothly into the surrounding social systems. *Raw Metaphors* examines not only how cannibal metaphors of this period blur the line between flesh and figure, but rest on the cusp of acculturation, an unstable contact zone where prescriptions for individual and collective behavior can be reshaped and contested.

### **Verse Off the Bone: Raw Poets of the Early Modern Period**

Whereas previous studies of cannibalism in early modern literature tend to focus on the stage, I have selected lyric poetry as my locus of inquiry in order to explore how cannibal tropes interpolate material bodies that intensify or disrupt their function as figures.<sup>29</sup> My poets of interest – Edmund Spenser, John Donne, Richard Crashaw, and John Milton – are featured not only because of their canonical status (demonstrating that cannibalism has been hiding in plain sight within the English literary pantheon), but because each makes use of the symbolic capacities of cannibalism through different tropes. Therefore, while my chapters are sequenced in rough chronological order, they also model a spectrum of cannibal poetics through their pairings of poet and literary figure: Spenser and allegory; Donne and metaphor; Crashaw and translation; and Milton and allusion.<sup>30</sup> In combination, they display a range of creative and destructive potentialities of cannibalism when it vacillates between the realms of material flesh and literary figure, revealing the boundaries between the two to be productively permeable.

Chapter One, “‘His Owne Sinews Eat’: Spenser’s Ireland, *The Book of Holinesse*, and the Carcass of Allegory,” focuses on Spenser’s political tract *A View From the Present State of*

*Ireland* and the first book of *The Faerie Queene*, titled “The Book of Holinesse.” While critical readers of *A View* tend to read Spenser as advocating a scorched earth policy to compel Ireland to submit to the English crown, I argue that the text’s convictions are more inwardly fraught, as shown through the dissonance between Spenser’s use of cannibal metaphors and his portrayal of literal cannibalism among the starving Irish. As Spenser’s text literalizes Michel de Certeau’s paradigm of history as “cannibalistic,” I demonstrate how the silenced Irish subjects in *A View* “bite back [*remord*]” as they resist state and narrative incorporation.<sup>31</sup> Turning to *The Faerie Queene*, I consult two episodes from “The Book of Holinesse,” Redcrosse’s encounter with Error and his experience at the house of Holinesse, to show the dissonant depictions of cannibalism undermining his allegory. I show how the overlooked brutality of the house of Holinesse – whose curatives cause Redcrosse to gnaw himself – identifies it with the matricidal cannibalization of Error, troubling the allegory’s progress narrative. My analysis of Spenser’s texts argues that the poet’s figurative uses of cannibalism founder when they interpolate human bodies literally traumatized by forced subjection, resulting in texts which revolt against their own ends.

Chapter Two, “‘So Let Us Melt’: Anatomy, Cannibalism, and the Contingent Body in the Work of John Donne,” juxtaposes selected poems and prose excerpts by John Donne against his last major sermon, *Deaths Duell*. The arc of the chapter examines how Donne’s cannibalistic imagery for the dissolution of the body demonstrates an investment in materialism that it struggles to reconcile with the promise of resurrection. In the first half of the chapter, I argue that Donne’s bloodless anatomy tropes are self-conscious sanitizing gestures meant to lend coherence and narrative to the destruction of the corpse. Closer inspection of poems like “The Dampe or “The Legacie,” however, show the deceased body’s disturbing vulnerability to consumption,

whether by rot or by the gallery's hungry gazes in the anatomy theater. By contrast, *Deaths Duell* uses cannibalism as a trope to communicate the consummate horror of decomposition and to interrogate how the destruction of the embodied self affects the soul. Using Kolnai's essays on disgust, the latter half of the chapter examines how the sermon's fixation on worms devouring and intermingling anonymous corpses expresses anxiety over the physical logistics of the Resurrection and the recuperation of the individual self. While both varieties of corpse tropes function differently in context, my chapter argues that Donne's bodily metaphors are infested with materialism: the cannibalistic qualities of the tropes convey the mutual permeability of solid flesh and textual abstraction, the metaphysical crisis animating Donne's texts.

Chapter Three, "To Serve Man: Cannibal Translation and the Crashavian Eucharist," engages Richard Crashaw's unusually frank, and much reviled, portrayals of consuming flesh and blood in his Eucharistic poetry. The critical literature on Crashaw tends to claim that his emblematic Catholic imagery has a deadening effect on his poetry, making it a static, overstuffed, and grotesque. Nevertheless, I counter that Crashaw's cannibal tropes function differently, and more coherently, than those of Spenser or Donne. Whereas, in Spenser and Donne, the vivid materiality of their metaphors refuses to yield to the conceptual, Crashaw's reliance on emblematic imagery makes his verse an uncommonly hospitable haven for the cannibal: the potency of the image is allowed to take precedence. Rather than relying on the images to articulate meaning, however, Crashaw embeds his commentary on the Eucharist *around* them, rather than within them, based on the circumstances and spiritual conditions of his participants in sanctified cannibalism. In order to show Crashaw's process of meaning-making in action, I focus on Crashaw's translated works. I demonstrate how Crashaw's translations increase the viscosity of any references to the Eucharist to demonstrate that the key quality

distinguishing Holy Communion from common cannibalism is not bloodlessness, but an ethic of nourishing mutuality. In addition to presenting a new, anthropological perspective on Crashaw's craft, the chapter considers the resonances between translation and transubstantiation as processes which transform both material objects (texts and bread) and the interiors of their consumers.

Finally, Chapter Four, "'My Viscera Burdened': Creative Indigestion and the Miltonic Imagination," takes up the narrative cosmos and poetic production of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Numerous critics have noted Milton's use of digestive imagery in the epic, from Sin's gnawed bowels to the "Intestine war" in Heaven.<sup>32</sup> Through these and other examples, my chapter argues that *Paradise Lost* presents an autocannibalistic model of the universe that is a direct reflection of the text's ambition to explain and contain all things. Drawing on the humanist idiom of assimilation for internalizing and transforming one's literary sources, I classify Milton's appropriation of manifold Classical and Biblical texts for *Paradise Lost* as a massive act of digestion. Contemporary praise of the "heat" of Milton's imagination implicitly elevates the fully "cooked" transformations of his intertexts, versus the "raw" products of mere plagiarists or imitators.<sup>33</sup> Regardless of Milton's achievements as a stylist, however, I argue that the autocannibalistic images in *Paradise Lost* enact the epic's struggle with ontology: the text can "consume" and "digest" all of postlapsarian literature, yet accessing Eden remains as impossible as "un-eating" the fatal apple. In addition to glossing the digestive motifs of *Paradise Lost*, my chapter makes a case for humanist digestion being a distinctly "fallen" mode of literary production. Milton's encyclopedic consumption of others' texts attempts to compensate for the loss of prelapsarian knowledge, but violates Raphael's doctrine of temperance to the point that the world of the text becomes dyspeptic.

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<sup>1</sup> Carla Freccero's chapter "Queer Spectrality" in *Queer/Early/Modern* devotes significant attention to Léry's *History*.

<sup>2</sup> Established by Nicholas Durand de Villegaignon and six hundred colonists in 1555 (Johnson 276).

<sup>3</sup> Both figures have names with variant spellings: "Villegaignon" vs. "Villegagnon" (Léry uses the latter); "Cointac" vs. "Contat" vs. "Cointa" (Léry uses the latter).

<sup>4</sup> For select accounts of Catholic-cannibal conflation during the early modern period, see Scholz, *Body Narratives*, 64; Sugg, *Mummies*, 30, 90-116; Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism*, 83.

<sup>5</sup> Léry celebrates the conversion of some of the Tupi, writing that "several of them promised to live as they had taught them, and even to leave off eating the human flesh of their enemies" (147). Nevertheless, he does not condemn those who persist in eating human flesh and speaks complementarily of the Tupi as a whole, calling them trustworthy and physically beautiful (56).

<sup>6</sup> Lévi-Strauss further cites the French idioms "to dance raw" (to dance barefoot), "raw boots" (to wear boots without stockings), and "in the raw" (naked), showing an association between rawness and savage nudity (335).

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Sugg's *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians*, pg. 134.

<sup>8</sup> Léry's account includes a detailed account of Tupi ritual cannibalism, including a comic incident in which he is offered a cooked foot in fellowship and assumes he is about to be murdered (122-27, 163-64); cannibalism by Norman interpreters in Brazil (128); a pre-Montaigne catalogue of the abuses of Western European civilization that he compares to cannibalism (132); the selling of human fat after the St. Bartholomew's massacre in 1572 (132); starving parents in Sancerre who killed and ate their own child (212); and a confession of his own temptation to eat human flesh during the "famine on the sea" during the return voyage to France (212-14).

<sup>9</sup> See the following definitions of "raw": "bare" ("raw, adj., 7e"), "to chafe/abrade" ("raw, v., 2"), and "to unsettle (a person) by alluding to or acting in a certain way with regard to a particularly sensitive matter" ("raw, v. 3a.")

<sup>10</sup> See Price, *Consuming Passions*, 33, 36; Walton, *Our Cannibals, Ourselves*, 11; Sugg, *Mummies*, 19; Noble, *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*, 70-71; Guest, "Are You Being Served?," 109; and van Court's "The Siege of Jerusalem and recuperative readings," 161.

<sup>11</sup> See Sugg's *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires* and *Murder After Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early Modern England*, as well as Noble's *Medicinal Cannibalism in Early Modern English Literature and Culture*.

<sup>12</sup> Though especially pronounced during the early modern period, this suspicion of tropes extends back to Classical culture, including Plato's expulsion of poets in the *Republic* and Ovid's banishment by Augustus (Callaghan 32).

<sup>13</sup> The text is generally ascribed to Puttenham, but is technically anonymous.

<sup>14</sup> Puttenham cites a certainly spurious, though entertaining, anecdote from Egypt, in which the orator Hegesias speaks so sweetly of death that citizens begin committing suicide en masse, compelling Ptolemy to exile Hegesias and forbid him from speaking publicly (153-54).

<sup>15</sup> Though "mingle-mangle" means a general mixture or mishmash, the word was first used in 1549 to describe the confused, varied contents of a hog's trough, giving the word a history of denoting dubious cuisine (*OED* "mingle-mangle, n. A.").

<sup>16</sup> Sherry's use of the trope "dissectio" can also be considered to be related to cannibalism, as discussed in Chapter 2 (31).

<sup>17</sup> Peacham includes an even more explicit cannibal misunderstanding in his entry for "Amphibologia": "Buy you any Mutton to day neighbour, quoth one neighbor to another, no by my troth neighbour quoth the other, for I meane to have a leg or a shoulder of my father, another man ryding bye, understood the meaning of this saying, according to the order of hys words: Surely (quoth he) he is an hungry childe that can fynde in his harte to eate his father, with that they all fell a laughinge" (38)

<sup>18</sup> I am indebted to Dr. Kathryn Schwarz for bringing this passage to my attention. Also note that Day's account of the mother devouring the children reverses the polarity of many early modern stories about the viper; see the ensuing discussion of Wilson for the more common version.

<sup>19</sup> Similarly, his first illustration of *metaphora* is "to call them eaters or devourers of men and houses, / who undo the poore, or extort from them their goods or livings," as if cannibal violence has become the de facto model for figures (77-78).

<sup>20</sup> Wilson begins "Againe" here because alludes to the stork earlier in the text; the viper is not included in the first instance (40).

<sup>21</sup> According to Horapollo's *Hieroglyphica* (2, 58: 122; cited in Cohen 71).

<sup>22</sup> Fleming observes that "[a] cursory iconographic survey of the well-known emblem of the 'Pious Pelican' in the Middle Ages and Renaissance will reveal an entire aviary, birds we would be disposed to call pelicans, egrets,

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herons, eagles, storks, and swans, not to mention many that we would be hard-pressed to give a name at all. In ornithological terms, the ‘pelican’ seems to be any large bird, especially any large water bird” (42).

<sup>23</sup> Beyond the clear parallels to the Crucifixion in its fabled life cycle, the pelican-Christ association is Biblically reinforced by Psalms 102:6: “I am like a pelican of the wilderness” (*KJV*).

<sup>24</sup> Variations of this phrase can be found in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* (3.2.129-31), Chaucer’s “The Merchant’s Tale” (1786), and Milton’s *Samson Agonistes* (763).

<sup>25</sup> Mitchell adapts this phrase from a Chinese and Japanese proverb, given here in Chinese, 弱肉強食 (“weak meat strong eat”), often translated to “survival of the fittest.” (Williams 134).

<sup>26</sup> Spenser’s savages subtly play “bagpypes” and horns (6.8.46). For more on Spenser’s use of Irish and other Celtic signifiers for his cannibals, see Robert Viking O’Brien’s “Cannibalism in Edmund Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*, Ireland, and the Americas” in *Eating Their Words: Cannibalism and the Boundaries of Cultural Identity* (Ed. Guest).

<sup>27</sup> In the words of anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday, “Cannibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for nongustatory messages – messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order” (3).

<sup>28</sup> By 1650, mummy was included on registers of popular goods subject to import duty, costing one shilling a pound (Sugg *MCV* 75). Sugg also compares the opportunistic upcharges on mummy and adulteration of the product to modern practices surrounding leisure drugs (76).

<sup>29</sup> See Noble, Owens’s *Stages of Dismemberment*, and Zimmerman’s *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre*.

<sup>30</sup> My focus on a particular form of poetics for each poet does not imply that they did not practice the others; rather, I paired each poet with a device based on which case studies were most instructive, while remaining generally representative of the poets’ work.

<sup>31</sup> Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986), 3, 8.

<sup>32</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, eds. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (New York: Random House, 2007), 6.259.

<sup>33</sup> Samuel Johnson and William Hazlitt both used this idiom to praise Milton. See Maggie Kilgour, *From Communion to Cannibalism: An Anatomy of Metaphors of Incorporation* (Princeton: Princeton U P, 1990), 133. My raw and cooked dichotomy is, of course, indebted to Claude Lévi-Strauss. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Raw and the Cooked*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman, (Chicago: Chicago U P, 1983).

## CHAPTER 1

“His Owne Sinews Eat”: Spenser’s Ireland, *The Book of Holinesse*, and the Carcass of Allegory

My first chapter examines two works of Edmund Spenser, *A View from the Present State of Ireland* and *The Faerie Queene*, through the lens of cannibal allegory. In keeping with the figurists’ fleshly readings of tropes, I propose that the generally structure of allegory can be described as a symbiotic relationship between the raw and the cooked, in which every event in the surface narrative (the raw) can be processed by its reader into symbolic meaning (the cooked). In the case of cannibal allegory, however, the visceral rawness of the allegory’s vehicle can leave a more lingering impression than the “cooked” significance it is meant to convey. To demonstrate what I mean by this, let me turn to a text more infamously associated with both cannibalism and Ireland than any of Spenser’s works: Jonathan Swift’s *A Modest Proposal* (1729).<sup>1</sup> Swift’s essay has become a staple in many classrooms for those of us teaching satire and, once read, is nearly impossible to forget, reliably producing snickers of recognition among students “in the know.” Despite Swift’s genuine attention to solutions to Irish poverty, however, I suspect that, for many of us, our memories of the essay are dominated by a single sentence:

I have been assured by a very knowing American of my acquaintance in London, that a young healthy child well nursed, is, at a year old, a most delicious nourishing and wholesome food, whether stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled; and I make no doubt that it will equally serve in a fricasie, or a ragoust (9).

While, historically, discussions of Swift’s pamphlet have been prefaced with the sanitizing assurance that it’s “only a satire,” the image of a roasting infant is too grotesque, horrific, and darkly humorous to be softened by any mitigating context. Indeed, Swift paints such an indelible

picture of infanticidal cannibalism that, even as we present the essay as a gold standard of satire, we are more likely to attend to his rhetorical means than his aims.<sup>2</sup> Even the most casual readers of *A Modest Proposal* know that Swift does not *really* advocate eating Irish babies, but when it comes to the specifics of the essay's genuine policy recommendations, including taxing absentees, exclusively buying native goods, and teaching landlords "to have at least one degree of mercy toward their tenants," we come a bit too close to obeying the Proposer's ironic order to "let no man talk to me of these and the like expedients" (17). While we never completely lose sight of his satiric point, Swift's unholy buffet of cooked children commands our utmost attention. We understand that Swift is not speaking in earnest, yet it feels somehow appropriate to describe *A Modest Proposal* as being "about" eating babies.

These interpretive tensions surrounding *A Modest Proposal* show us what happens when an image refuses to be banished. While Swift uses the figure of the butchered babe as a symbolic repudiation of the treatment of Ireland's poor, his ghastly trope refuses to cede its place in the readerly imaginary to abstract meaning. Once conjured, the army of cannibalized Irish children hangs over the text like a visual afterimage: it does not occlude Swift's political point, but it projects itself upon every inch of the text, demanding that the reader look through it and refusing to entirely fade even after the essay has been set aside. Although the persistence of Swift's central image may seem to show evocative writing at its best, it also represents a breakdown in the hierarchy of figurative language. After all, a symbol or metaphor is only useful insofar that it gestures to meanings beyond its literal surface. Once Swift's "young healthy child well nursed" has been "stewed, roasted, baked, or boiled," however, the horror of cannibalism seems to stubbornly insist on its own significance. The translation of flesh into metaphor stalls and, even as Swift protests the Irish's suffering in the iron grip of colonial capitalism, the image



he chooses to represent his beleaguered nation – the butchered child – refuses to be subordinate to the message it serves. In this way, *A Modest Proposal* expresses the contradiction at the heart of many cannibal metaphors: the cluster of cultural taboos and visceral associations surrounding cannibalism make it both ideally suited and completely unsuited for bearing abstract meaning.

By juxtaposing Swift with Spenser, I mean to demonstrate that the stability or instability of cannibal allegory is a product of context. When Swift uses images of infants being eaten like veal, he makes a calculated effort to provoke self-indicting discomfort among his English readers; as a result, the potency of his allegorical vehicle overshadows his political rhetoric without undermining it. By contrast, Edmund Spenser's use of cannibal allegory in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* are at odds with his literal descriptions of Irish cannibalism he experienced during his tenure as a colonial officer. The degree of dissonance between Spenser's rhetoric and the traumatic images of devoured human bodies lying in the wake of the colonial regime renders his speaker's policy recommendations suspect and hollow. With respect to *The Faerie Queene*, I argue that a similar dynamic undercuts Spenser's allegorical uses of cannibalism in the *The Book of Holinesse*, as the grotesquerie of the poet's figurative language swallows the metaphor of redemption that it is meant to convey.

### *A View of the Present State of Ireland*

Stephen Greenblatt famously describes *The Faerie Queene* as a display of “passionate worship of imperialism,” yet Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* (1596)<sup>3</sup> has perhaps done more work cementing its author's reputation as a colonial apologist (Greenblatt 174).<sup>4</sup> *A View* never appeared in print during Spenser's lifetime, and it enjoyed a very limited manuscript circulation before being reproduced in James Ware's *Ancient Irish Chronicles* in

1633 (Read 115; Ware, vol. I).<sup>5</sup> Although Spenser's text likely had little to no influence on popular conceptions of Elizabethan state policy in Ireland, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* has become a contested part of the poet's legacy (Read 118). Critics may vary in their assessments of Spenser's level of commitment to the colonial project, but it is impossible to make his goal to abolish the Irish language or his willingness to leverage Ireland's submission out of the nation's destitution look admirable. Critical readers of *A View of the Present State of Ireland* often claim that Spenser endorses a scorched earth policy to starve the Irish into subjection – an interpretation which elides the conflicted loyalties that animate his text. In particular, I argue that Spenser's attempts to discuss literal cannibalism in *A View* create fissures in his call to reform the “savage nation” by creating lingering impressions of Irish bodies as victims, rather than perpetrators, of savagery, epitomized by the eating of human flesh<sup>6</sup> (*A View* 3). The text's fundamental ambivalence about Ireland's self-cannibalization makes *A View* into an exemplar of what Michel de Certeau calls “heterologies”: discourse on the other “built between the body of knowledge that utters a discourse and the mute body that nourishes it” (*WoH* 3). In the case of Spenser's tract, however, the “mute bodies” of the colonized Irish can be briefly heard on their own terms through the “speech-act” of cannibalism (Certeau, *H* 76).

Before I discuss these episodes in depth, I wish to interrogate what we scholars of Spenser mean when we discuss “his” statements or “his” beliefs in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*. Rather than writing a first-person political tract, Spenser elected to structure his report as a Platonic dialogue between the fictional “Eudoxus” and “Irenius.” Despite the polyvocal nature of the text, many readers of *A View* assume that Irenius speaks for Spenser, while Eudoxus serves as little more than a foil whose interjects criticisms of Elizabeth's regime in order to be corrected by Irenius.<sup>7</sup> As John M. Breen and Andrew Hadfield have argued, however,

interpretations of *A View* which take Irenius's word as Spenser's ignore the deliberately complex form of the text, which features two thoughtful and well-written voices in conflict.<sup>8</sup> The fact that the name of Spenser's alleged opponent, Eudoxus, roughly translates from Latin as "good belief or opinion" should be evidence enough to suggest that Spenser did not create his colonial skeptic lightly. My analysis of *A View* seconds Andrew Hadfield's observation that "Spenser's works participate and reflect on [colonial] enterprise in an active way" by taking both Irenius and Eudoxus seriously as vocal extensions of the author (12). My aim is not to give Spenser a pass or to mitigate his complicity in Irish colonialism, but to show how, on closer examination, his text fails to uphold the critical narrative of its untroubled commitment to the subjugation of the Irish state. These polyvocal fissures in Spenser's project become most clear when *A View* fails to reconcile its abstract use of cannibalism as a trope with literal descriptions of cannibal acts on Irish soil.

For those familiar with *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, the most memorable appearances of cannibalism in the text are Irenius's narratives of two blood-curdling events he witnessed during his tenure abroad: a mourner's grief-stricken hematophagy (or, blood-drinking) at Murrough O'Brien's execution in 1577 and survival cannibalism during the Munster famine in 1581-82 (Rawlinson 224; O'Brien 37). Nevertheless, Spenser subtly inscribes cannibalism into the text's metaphoric regimen for disciplining the body of the Irish state. At the beginning of *A View*, Eudoxus compares Ireland's plight to that of a "deseased patiente" at the mercy of a "Desperate Phisician" who would sooner kill one of his charges than allow any form of corruption to persist (*A View* 4). Irenius parries in kind with another analogy that compares "lawes" and "Physick," and the two perpetuate a discourse of national sickness and health throughout the remainder of their discussion (6). In *Body Narratives: Writing the Nation and*

*Fashioning the Subject in Early Modern England*, Susanne Scholz rightfully identifies some of Spenser's medical rhetoric in *A View* as "surgical" in nature: indeed, Irenius paraphrases Eudoxus's discomfort with a scorched earth policy in Ireland by stating that

yt would seme to yowe [verie] evill surgerie to cut of everye unsound or sicke parte of the bodye, which being by other due meanes recovered might afterwarde doe verie good service to the bodie again, and happily helpe to save the whole (Scholz 135; *A View* 105).

Nevertheless, with the exception of this passage, the rest of Irenius's medical metaphors do not focus on surgery as his curative of choice. Instead, he states multiple times that "this general disease" which plagues the Irish state can "onely with verie stronge purgacions bee clesnsed and carryed away" (*A View* 111).<sup>9</sup> While early modern medicine featured multiple kinds of purgative remedies, including laxatives, diuretics, emetics, and bloodletting, Eudoxus notably associates healing with ingestion when he claims that "wise physicions" are obligated to "prescribe a dyet" to restore their patients' welfare (Schäfer 137; *A View* 5). Though Eudoxus speaks metaphorically, the type of "dyet" which most preoccupies Spenser in *A View* involves the ingestion of human flesh – a gruesome motif which suggests that the medical paradigm which consistently structures the political discourse in the text is actually corpse pharmacology.

As addressed in my introduction, early modern corpse pharmacology – henceforth denoted simply as "corpse medicine" – was based on a Hippocratic principle called "pollutant theory," which posited that ingesting a bodily contaminant (in this case, human waste or human remains<sup>10</sup>) could drive out disease (Noble 18). Hence, corpse medicine would fit the bill of a necessary purgative or cleansing agent described by Irenius. By "prescribe[ing] a dyet" of corpse food, to use Eudoxus's phrase, early modern medical professionals could paradoxically drive out

their patients' fleshly corruption by feeding them corrupted flesh. Given the ongoing dialogue about purgation, "dyet," and the politics of hunger in *A View*, it seems entirely plausible to count corpse medicine among Spenser's chosen medical paradigms for figuratively describing his cures for Ireland's ills. The material realities of the marketplace in this period, however, makes corpse medicine a particularly sinister model to invoke in an Irish colonial context. Although Egyptian mummy was the most famous and prized curative in corpse medicine from this era, demand understandably outstripped supply (Sugg 2). Consequently, many vendors supplemented or replaced their stock of genuine embalmed mummy with dried flesh of the recently dead (Sugg 15). Not just anyone, however, became fresh fodder for physicians and apothecaries. In Richard Sugg's incredibly thorough historical overview of corpse medicine practices<sup>11</sup>, he observes that "corpse medicines were most often derived from bodies alienated, in various ways, from ordinary humanity – distant, most of all, from *you*" (152). In an early modern English context, this meant that new bodily materials were most likely to be taken from the corpses of felons, the unclaimed poor, and, with increasing frequency, the Irish (Sugg 15, 145, 151). The ongoing war between England and Ireland left thousands of slain Irish in its wake (Sugg 154). No less than Francis Bacon himself proposed that the "heaps of slain bodies" moldering in Ireland would be a practical source of cranial materials – a remark which Sugg takes as an indication of a trade already underway (152).<sup>12</sup> In this way, even slant allusions to corpse medicine in *A View of the Present State of Ireland* invoke England's predatory relationship with its Irish colony, "literally and metaphorically feeding off the body of Ireland and its people" (Sugg 157). Whether or not Swift knew it, England had already enacted its own version of *A Modest Proposal* for years before his pamphlet – only feeding upon the newly dead, rather than the newly born.

I belabor the material realities of corpse medicine for the English and Irish during this period not only to remind us of the literal bodies at stake, but to demonstrate how the context of Spenser's metaphor impedes its efficacy. By using a medical framework that includes corpse medicine to propose a plan for healing Ireland's national body, Spenser's Irenius configures Ireland as the ailing patient and harsh measures like eliminating spoken Irish or confiscating property as the "violent," but efficacious, "remedie" for its "infeccions" (*A View* 43, 88). The dissonance between the status of the Irish in Spenser's metaphor and in the commercial market for corpse medicine, however, creates a representational crisis: is Ireland an ill subject in need of healing, or is it a useful, though unsavory, commodity for improving the welfare of "real" English subjects? While *A View* remains inconsistent in its appeals to sympathy to improve the plight of the Irish versus its mercenary pragmatism in laying out conditions for securing submission, the matter becomes even more complicated when literal spectacles of cannibalism intrude on the text's metaphorical landscape. The political narrative of *A View* nominally presents cannibalism as a symptom of Irish barbarism or, paradoxically, as its metaphorical curative administered by the state. Nevertheless, in context, *A View*'s most vivid visions of Irish cannibals disrupt these convenient paradigms: when the real Irish do eat human flesh, they are driven to it by extremity, directly or indirectly caused by English colonial imperatives. Rather than supporting the medicalized progress narrative endemic to the text, the literal eating of corpses in *A View* testifies to brokenness and suffering, not healing. In *The Writing of History*, Certeau speaks directly to the narrative effects of writing about broken bodies, claiming that such bodies "can only be 'represented' by a discourse that in turn is wounded – that is analytical and fragmented – while what it narrates as true assumes the form of fiction" (314).<sup>13</sup> The scenes of

cannibalism woven into *A View* break the narrative along the lines of hewn, devoured bodies, exposing its wavering moral authority and turning the gaze of the colonizer back upon itself.

As previously mentioned, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* features two major episodes in which Irenius and Eudoxus confront the literal eating of human flesh. On both occasions, Irenius recounts a specific incident that “he”—and, by proxy, Spenser<sup>14</sup>—witnessed during his tenure in Ireland, the stark realism of each tale contrasting with the hypothetical or figurative discussions of cannibalism in the rest of the text. As a result, each grisly anecdote has the effect of bringing the dialogue to a grinding halt as it both demands attention and resists easy incorporation into the rest of the narrative. The first of these incidents occurs within the section on Irish customs and heritage. Digressing from contemporary history, Irenius makes a case for the Irish being descents of the Scythians, “the most barborous nacion in Christendome” who were widely held to be cannibals<sup>15</sup> (*A View* 56). Rather than letting this last part be inferred, Irenius describes how the Scythians would reportedly “drincke a bowle of blood” to seal contracts and, in a seldom-heard embellishment<sup>16</sup>, turn into bloodthirsty wolves once a year—an ability, Irenius claims, that has also been attributed to the Irish (76, 77). In addition to describing similarities of their weapons, Irenius supports his assertion that the Irish come from a Scythian line by citing their shared customs of “seeth[ing] the flesh in the hyde” and “boyl[ing] the bloode of the beast lyvinge [. . .] to make meate thereof” (74, 77). The dialogue starts to take a turn, however, when Irenius tries to use a graphic anecdote from a public execution to corroborate his ancestry narrative.

Irenius’s notorious passage about the quartering of Murrough O’Brien is worth quoting in full. Spenser reportedly witnessed O’Brien’s execution for treason during his service as a colonial official in 1577 (Renwick 224). He embeds this graphic anecdote into Irenius’s

discussion of Gaulish traditions which persist in Ireland, drawing a through line between the Gauls' war rituals and the display he saw in Limerick:

Also the Gaules used to drinke their enemies bloode and to painte themselves therewith, So also they write that the ould Irishe were wounte, and so have I sene some of the Irishe doe not to their Enemies but frindes bloode, as namelie at the execution of a notable traitour at Lymbricke called Murrough O'Brien, I sawe an old woman which was his Foster mother tooke upp his heade whilst he was quartered and sucked upp all the blood running there out saying that the earth was not worthie to drinke yt, and therewith also steeped her face and brest and tare her hair crying and shriking out most terrible (81).

While Irenius ostensibly offers his story as evidence of Irish blood-drinking that provides a "genetic trace" of the Gauls, as Linda Gregerson puts it, his tale seems to evolve into something else by the end (96). Sensory detail suddenly abounds – vivid images and a cacophony of sounds. The prose turns muscular and immediate. Again, the mechanisms of Spenser's text find a voice in Certeau's *Heterologies*, which delineates the role of the senses in recording history in its treatment of, fittingly enough, Montaigne's "Of the Cannibals":

Only an appeal to the senses (hearing, sight, touch, taste) and a link to the body (touched, carved, tested by experience) seem capable of bringing closer and guaranteeing, in a singular but indisputable fashion, the reality that was lost by language (74).

Visual, sonic, and gustatory, the encounter between the dying O'Brien and his foster mother re-corporealizes both of them and interpellates Spenser's reader as a fellow witness to the bloody scene. The narrative shift from a policy discussion to a kind of reportage exposes the doubleness of the text's title. Through the O'Brien episode, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* transforms



from a secure statement of conviction to an optic for seeing the price of those convictions inscribed upon real human bodies.

While the dominant impression left by the passage may be one of sensory shock, Irenius's description of the blood-drinking is further distinguished by its framing. Spenser distributes his speaker's use of detail and commentary to make the act intelligible without foreclosing its significance. First, rather than treating cannibalism as undifferentiated, the passage clarifies that O'Brien's blood was "friendes bloode," marking the act as semiotically different from Gaulish custom of drinking one's enemies. Secondly, the spectacle that Irenius paints of Murrough O'Brien's foster mother – horrible though it is – is eerily pathetic. Her performance of grief may be alien to him, but Spenser's speaker takes care to describe the relationship of the mourner to the dead man. The woman's status as O'Brien's "foster mother" is particularly humanizing to them both, since the relationship was based not simply on blood, but chosen kinship – a distinction reinforced by the phrase "friendes bloode."<sup>17</sup> The text elaborates on the woman's subjectivity by reporting her words that "the earth was not worthie to drinke" O'Brien's blood – a detail which makes the symbolism of her act legible, rather than a random illustration of Irish savagery. Though Patricia Palmer argues that Irenius "withholds all sympathy for the old lady whose grief triggers only ethnocentric condescension," the details provided by Spenser in the text facilitate her reading of the old woman's actions as related to "a very old grieving ritual" in *Aided Chloinne Uisnig* ("The Death of the Sons of Usnech"), which portrays the bereft Deirdre drinking the blood of her beheaded lover, Náisi (91). Spenser's rendering of the keening (via Irenius) as "cryinge and shriking" may seem reductive or dehumanizing, but he represents the woman's behavior and motives with sufficient fidelity that those more literate in Irish culture can discern the broader significance of her attempt to lap up her son's blood.<sup>18</sup> More

than her weeping, her seemingly “savage” act of cannibalism is what preserves a particular, articulate, and human portrait of her in the historical record.

In addition to his sensitive attention to detail, Irenius’s handling of the O’Brien episode also features no direct attempt to interpret the event or reduce it to a talking point. Beyond his preceding remarks about the Gauls, he is uncharacteristically reticent about editorializing at the end of the episode, letting the woman’s “terrible” shrieks be the last word on the subject. Even more curiously, Eudoxus offers no comment on the story and abruptly changes the subject to how old English customs influence the contemporary Irish (*A View* 81). In a text predominantly focused on justifying English colonialism of the Irish, both speakers’ silence in the wake of the O’Brien episode seems like a missed opportunity: it takes little cynicism to imagine how Irenius could have used the horror of the story to more strategic advantage by segueing the potent image directly into another argument about Irish barbarity. The fact that he does not, however, suggests that Spenser includes the story less out of secure “condescension” than haunted compulsion, like Coleridge’s sinning Ancient Mariner (Palmer 91).<sup>19</sup> While the story may start out as an illustration of Irenius’s argument about inherited customs, by the time he arrives at the image of the blood-spattered old woman screeching in anguish, the anecdote has outgrown its context and pulls Irenius and Eudoxus into an interpretive void – an “abject” realm “where meaning collapses” (Kristeva 2). They may comfortably use cannibal idioms throughout the text, yet the actual cannibal spectacle refuses domestication, creating in a rift in the fabric of *A View*’s political agenda.

One reason that the O’Brien episode resists assimilation into *A View* is that its vision of cannibalism involves English complicity. When Irenius initially introduces literal blood-drinking into *A View*, he frames it as a ritual practiced by the Irish, upon the Irish. The contemporary

O'Brien story, however, puts a wrinkle in Irenius's attempt to establish a cannibal lineage, not only because the ritual itself is different (using "friendes bloode" instead of blood from the enemy), but because English colonial officers are the ones to spill Murrough O'Brien's blood. I do not mean to suggest that Spenser perceived O'Brien's execution as unjust. It is two entirely different matters, however, to support a man's execution in theory and to witness said execution in person. Even if early modern subjects were more accustomed to the *idea* of quartering as a legal form of punishment that we are, the gory act of quartering a traitor – as anyone who has read Foucault's account of Damians's interminable execution in *Discipline and Punish* will recall<sup>20</sup> – would have been excruciating to watch. With the added spectacle of O'Brien's aggrieved foster mother lapping up the blood from his ruined head, the image would have been traumatically indelible and defiant of narrative recuperation.

While the suffering of witnesses pales in comparison to that of the executed man and his grieving family, for an observer like Irenius or Spenser, the scene would not only assault the senses, but disrupt the Foucaultian grammar of the public execution, making the event even more difficult to process. By dismembering Irish men like O'Brien as punishment for treason, colonial officers appropriated the prisoners' bodies as lessons: the disobedient will be figuratively and literally un-personed, unmade as subjects. By drinking her surrogate son's blood, however, O'Brien's foster mother takes the state's display of power off script, defamiliarizing the act's brutality and drawing attention to aggrieved humanity of the prisoner and his family. Rather than serving as puppets of the state, the unruly bodies of this Irish family speak on their own terms. This event supports Certeau's claim that cannibalism comprises "a speech-act" that "does not behave as a legend or narrative," but confounds his assertion that "it transmits nothing and is not transmitted" (*H* 76). The Irish woman's act of cannibalism speaks loudly in the unmistakable

voice of grief. Her speech-act communicates, but not on the terms of the accustomed narrators of history: it is not unintelligible, but unbidden. Hence, the O'Brien episode in *A View* does not represent a narrative lacuna – a black hole of aghast contemplation – but an interpretive crisis. Creating a chink in the curative discourse of corpse medicine that permeates *A View*, it allows the realities of English violence in their governing of Ireland intrude upon Irenius's abstract language. The passage nightmarishly literalizes the text's metaphors by showing the English feeding Ireland to itself in the course of maintaining law and order, calling into question the colonial project and its designations of which bodies deserve personhood and narrative authority.

The narrative fissures evident in the O'Brien episode only intensify during *A View*'s second, and most famous, discussion of cannibalism: Irenius's account of the Munster famine. In his textual commentary, W.L. Renwick calls it "unfortunate" that Irenius's passage on the famine is "the best-written paragraph in the *View*, and therefore the most quotable, and therefore the only one most people know" (244). While one might argue, in the manner of Richard McCabe, that Spenser found violence in general "aesthetically stimulating," I suggest that, as with *A Modest Proposal*, the taboo spectacle of cannibalism is particularly adept at capturing the authorial and readerly imagination (215). Calling this passage "the best written" in the text says as much about our priorities as it does about Spenser's skill. Nevertheless, Irenius's words about the famine – itself a product of England's scorched earth warfare during the Desmond Rebellions – paint an inarguably haunting picture of a devastated Munster and of a people reduced to the condition of animate corpses:

[E]rr one yeare and a half, they were brought to such wretchedness, as that any stonie harte would have rewed the same, out of everie Corner of the woodes and glennes they came crepinge forth upon their handes, for their legges could not beare them, they

looked Anatomies of death, they spake like ghosts cryinge out of their graves, they did eate of dead Carrions, happye were they could fynde them, yea and one another soone after in so much as the verie Carcasses they spared not to scrape out of their graves, and yf they founde a plott of watercresses or shamrocks, there they flocked as to a feast for the tyme, yet not able longe to contynewe therewithal, that in short space there were none almost left and a most populous and plentyfull Countrie suddenlie lefte voyde of man or beast, yet sure in all that warr there perished not manye by the sword, but all by the extremitye of famyne, which they themselves had wrought (135).

This passage has led many interpreters of *A View* to argue that Spenser uses Irenius here to endorse Lord Grey's scorched earth policy as a tactic for subduing the Irish.<sup>21</sup> For instance, Linda Gregerson glosses the passage as communicating, on behalf of Spenser, that "the power of her Majesty's sword is augmented by the instrumental power of starvation. Pity must not be allowed to blunt the sword. The Irish have been reduced to carrion before; to carrion they can and must be reduced again" (96). While W.L. Renwick argues that Spenser did not advocate such treatment and was instead citing the probability of national collapse if guerrilla warfare sprang out, I am not prepared to let Spenser completely off the hook (244). Irenius holds the Irish overwhelmingly responsible for their plight, framing the anecdote as proof that "by this hard restraint they would quicklie consume them selves and devoure one another" and concluding by reiterating that this was a "famyne, which they themselves had wrought" (135).<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, even if Spenser intended to endorse using starvation to secure Irish loyalty, his text actually offers a more fraught or ambiguous impression than has been widely claimed.

As with the O'Brien episode, the potent imagery of Irenius's speech drowns out the voice of policy. While his claim about the melting "stonie harte[s]" among the English may ring

hollow, Irenius's hellish descriptions of these "Anatomies of death" feeding on "dead Carrions" and "Carcasses" seem poised to disturb even the most cynical, jaded, or Anglophilic of *A View's* readers. The ghoulish spectacle further rebukes metaphors of medicinal cannibalism for colonial policy: in this case, the proverbial "patient" is not only sick and suffering, but appears like one of the undead. Irenius conjures an uncanny scene of corpses feasting upon other corpses, showing that if all Ireland was actually reduced to such straits, there would be nothing left for their monarch to "purify." Ironically, at an earlier point in the text, Irenius uses a similar argument to make a case for why "settling a course of government" should be the priority for the Irish state (112). After Eudoxus declares that "the care of the soule should have been preferred over the care of the bodye," Irenius counters him by comparing Ireland's condition to that of a "a wicked person dangerouslie sicke, having now both soule and bodie greatly deseased, yet both recoverable" (112). He then claims that it would be folly to summon the preacher before the physician to treat the patient

for if his bodye weare neglected, yt is like that his languishing soule being disquieted by his dyseasefull bodie would utterlie refuse and loath all spirituall comfort: But yf his bodie weare first recurred and brought to good frame, should there not then be found best tyme to recure his soule also? (112).

By acknowledging the soul's dependence on the body, Irenius's metaphor seems to extend some humanity toward the Irish. His treatment of the Munster famine, however, shows the toxic disconnect between figurative "ailing" body of the Irish state – defined as such on English terms – and the actual ailing, imperiled bodies of Irish citizens. Even if Spenser does not directly advocate the use of famine to subdue the Irish, his speakers' acceptance of Irish surrender under such duress shows their rhetoric of healing to be purely persuasive and aesthetic. The image of

the starving residents of Munster “crepinge forth upon their handes,” “cryinge,” and eating the bodies of the recent dead alongside the symbolic shamrock destroys the image of a national body “brought to good frame,” its soul “recure[d],” because the individual members seem to languish among the dead and the damned.<sup>23</sup> This discussion of the famine upsets the metaphorical registers previously established in *A View*, so the text begins to tear at itself from the inside.

In significant contrast to the O’Brien episode, however, both Eudoxus and Irenius reflect on the harrowing story at length, giving narrative space to the kind of trauma of witness that was previously implied. Whereas he listened to Irenius’s earlier story of the execution without comment, after hearing of the Munster famine, Eudoxus now marvels at the “these ruefull spectacles of so manye wretched carcasses” and articulates that “as even I that doe but heare it from you and doe picture yt in my minde, [I] doe greatlie pittie and commiserate itt” (136). Even though he is recreating the “spectacles” in his mind, Eudoxus acts as if the image is so powerful that even imagining it constitutes a kind of witness. Furthermore, he assumes the effect to be communicable, claiming that if this “lamentable image of thinges shal be told and felinglie presented to her sacred majestie” then she “will not endure to heare such Tragedyes made of her people and poore subjects” (137). Eudoxus’s focus on sight and hearing frames the scene of cannibalism as a kind of sensory assault that elicits sympathy by pushing the audience – in this case, her royal highness – past the point of endurance.

While Irenius spends most of his response defending Lord Grey<sup>24</sup>, claiming that “the necessitie of that present state enforced him to do that violence,” he temporarily stalls his rejoinder to acknowledge that “I maye not forgot so memorable a thinge” (139). To a cynical reader, Irenius may appear to be paying lip service to the suffering of the Irish before hastening to vindicate the agent of their suffering. While this may be true to an extent, Irenius also exhibits

a curious phrasal tic that bookends his discussion of the famine. He initially introduces the anecdote as “thee proof whereof I sawe sufficientlie ensampled in those late warrs in Mounster”—meaning his evidence that, in extremity, the Irish would “consume them selves and devoure one another”—and later promises that starvation conditions would deliver Irish submission “by the proof of that which I sawe in Mounster” (135, 159). By repeatedly alluding to the horrors of the famine as “proof” which “I sawe,” Irenius echoes Eudoxus’s association of cannibalism with heightened sensory experience. Rather than processing it in Eudoxus’s affective language of “Tragedyes” and duty, Irenius attempts to contain this experience within an empirical framework. Nevertheless, when he describes the incidents in detail, they seem to expand beyond their allotted role in the text as “proof.” Instead of performing only as evidence of a broader argument, the descriptions of literal cannibalism in *A View* insist upon their own significance with their sensorial immediacy. Consequently, even though Irenius uses the anecdote to argue that “I nothinge doubtte but that they will all most readylie and upon their knees submitte them selves. . . for in that case who will not accepte almost of anye Condycions, rather then dye of hunger and myserie,” the image of Munster’s beleaguered people refuses to be subordinate to *A View*’s political narrative (*A View* 159). (The archaic spelling of Munster as “Mounster” also increases its resemblance to the word “monster” and its root *monēre*, “to warn.”<sup>25</sup>) Like the butchered children conjured by Jonathan Swift, Spenser’s spectral army of the starving Irish close ranks against the onslaught of abstraction: they will not cede their place in the reader’s consciousness to the “meaning” of the story that strives to enclose them. Whereas Swift banks on this effect, in Spenser’s text, this breakdown of the usual exchange of power between image and meaning constitutes a coup. Spenser may memorialize them at their most weak, literally crawling upon their knees, but, by animating the “the best-written” and most memorable “paragraph in the



*View*,” the people of Munster resist being further cannibalized: their bodies will not be seamlessly absorbed into a narrative that furthers the agenda of their persecutors (Renwick 244).

In this way, *A View of the Present State of Ireland* enacts a shockingly literal version of Michel de Certeau’s argument that history is “cannibalistic” (3).<sup>26</sup> In *Heterologies*, he claims that the displaced voices “– whose disappearance every historian posits, but which he replaces with his writing – ‘re-bite’ [*re-mordent*] the space from which they were excluded” (8). In *A View*, the voices of Irish citizens are subject to incomplete erasure; they are not conventionally silenced, but their complaints are degraded into “crying and shrieking” (*A View* 81). The captivating horror of the text’s cannibal scenes, however, create a space in which the Irish literally and figuratively bite back. While these spaces are produced by Spenser – a testament to the complex relationship between the colonizer and the colonized – Irish cannibalism in *A View* has the effect of a dissenting speech act by the actors involved, bringing the surrounding arguments to a temporary halt and exposing gaps in Irenius’s and Eudoxus’s narratives that neither can satisfactorily fill. The literal eating of human flesh epitomizes what Certeau calls “the return of what was forgotten” to Spenser’s speakers (3-4). Even as Irenius advocates forcing the Irish into cultural amnesia, stripping them of their ancient Brehon laws and Gaelic language, he is, ironically, undone by memories he cannot banish – those which gnaw him from the inside. Hence, in spite of the cannibal metaphors implicit to the text’s plan for curing Ireland,<sup>27</sup> the representation of literal Irish cannibalism under imperial duress causes moments of textual indigestion – internal resistance to incorporation.

My language of perpetual return and autocannibalism (whether textual or psychic) may seem to suggest that representations of flesh-eating can backfire or “bite back” only in cases when they correspond to material bodies existing in the world. In addition to complicating

Spenser's political writing, however, I argue that depictions of cannibalism in his epic poem *The Faerie Queene* create similar types of representational crises. In particular, the poem's first book, "The Legend of Holinesse," mirrors *A View of the Present State of Ireland* with its fraught use of autocannibalism as an act with allegorical implications, yet that refuses to play by the rules of allegory.

### **"The Legend of Holinesse"**

At first glance, "The Legend of Holinesse" may not seem like the most intuitive choice of book of *The Faerie Queene* for discussing cannibalism – especially in connection with Ireland.<sup>28</sup> After all, it does not take much imagination to decode the identity the "Savage nation" in Book VI, who "eate the fleshe of men," play upon "bagpypes," and lasciviously carve up Serena with their eyes, though their literal attempts to slay her on an altar are thwarted (*The Faerie Queene* 35, 36, 46, 39-45).<sup>29</sup> This encounter, however, seems like less of a traditional allegory than a thinly veiled caricature of England's Celtic neighbors, though some scholars also discern references to the empire's colonial territories in America.<sup>30</sup> In any case, the interpretive gulf between what is represented and what seems to be intended is uncharacteristically shallow.<sup>31</sup> For my purposes, rather than focusing on literal connections to Spenser's Ireland, I have chosen "The Legend of Holinesse" because it contains representational problems with its allegories most similar to those which plague *A View* – and both of which coalesce around cannibal spectacles. In a broader sense, however, Book I makes a particularly appropriate case study for this venture because it often treated as the most straightforwardly "allegorical" book of *The Faerie Queene*. Historically, it is the book most frequently excerpted for students of literature<sup>32</sup> and even adapted for small children, as if it provides a self-contained lesson on allegory with training wheels<sup>33</sup>.

While no book of *The Faerie Queene* can be fairly called “simple,” I want to unsettle the comparatively reader-friendly reputation of “The Legende of Holinesse” by showing fissures within its allegorical vocabulary, which rends along the lines of gnawed flesh.

To clarify, when I refer to allegorical “fissures,” I mean more than ambiguity or inconsistency between signifiers and signified. Richard Helgerson perhaps put it best when he characterized *The Faerie Queene* as “a poem divided against itself”: while Helgerson specifically refers to the poem’s shifting generic allegiances toward classical epic and chivalric romance, the phrase captures the estimations of countless critics who comment on *The Faerie Queene*’s labyrinthine inward complications and variance among its books (54). Rather than tracking inconsistencies in how a certain allegorical trope is used throughout the epic, or even uncertainty about how it signifies in a single context, I will be focusing on instances in which the cannibalistic images Spenser uses to convey meaning resist the basic workings of allegory.

My isolation of cannibalism— and, particularly, autocannibalism — as counterproductive to Spenser’s allegory may initially seem counterintuitive, due to the rich critical dialogue characterizing allegory as a violent, predatory mode. In his text *Allegory and Violence*, Gordon Teskey claims that “more powerful the allegory, the more openly violent the moments in which materials of the narrative are shown being actively subdued for the purpose of raising a structure of meaning,” and describes the hierarchical struggle between figure and concept as a form of “allelphagy,” or mutual devouring (23, 8).<sup>34</sup> When speaking directly of Spenser, his language becomes even more graphic as it represents allegory as the means “whereby abstractions abduct, seize, and tear open physical bodies in which to represent themselves as embodied, and therefore as real” (“Death in Allegory” 76) — the literary equivalents of the xenomorphs in Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979). Though her language is equally dramatic, Patricia Palmer counters that “part of

allegory's violence is its concealment of physical violence," masked by the "smooth passage from vehicle to tenor" as the material is "'capture[d]' and transform[ed] into symbolic meaning" (78). While they diverge on whether allegory's violence is overt or covert, both Teskey and Palmer describe surface meaning being ripped apart<sup>35</sup> and converted into the more edifying symbolic – a process which sounds startlingly akin to a cannibal butchering and digesting his fellow men for their nutritional value.<sup>36</sup> Ironically, it is precisely images of cannibalism in *The Faerie Queene* that interrupt this process, because, as in *A View*, they remain powerfully co-present with the "real" meaning that they are meant to yield to. We can understand the implications of these "afterimages" of cannibal allegory more clearly if we consider Walter Benjamin's evocative comparison of allegory to a decaying corpse which shows new life (the persistent growth of its hair and fingernails<sup>37</sup>) during "all the processes of elimination and purification" when "everything corpse-like falls away from the body piece by piece" (218). In Benjamin's vision of allegory, interpretation acts as the carrion beetles that strip away the flesh from the hidden skeleton of meaning which gives the surface its structure – in essence, a passive version of the carnivorous allegorical mechanisms of Teskey and Palmer. When cannibalism is the image to be stripped away, however, the process falters because of the horrifying allure of the spectacle: since cannibalism is an affair of the flesh, whose symbolic meaning resides in the treatment of that flesh<sup>38</sup>, material realities remain at the forefront, and the "bones" of Benjamin's corpse can never be fully cleaned. Essentially, a collision of values unsettles cannibal allegories because, to the cannibal, the flesh is the prize; to the allegorist, it is waste – a husk in which meaning is temporarily cloaked. With respect to Spenser's "Legende of Holinesse," the persistence of the "fleshly" dimension of its cannibal allegories even seems to suspend the temporality of death. Whereas Teskey claims that death in allegory is "so rapid that it functions

as a revelation of truth of the allegorical character's meaning," cannibalism in Spenser seems to deliver traumatized bodies which never definitively become corpses, reframing allegorical interpretation as an indeterminate process, rather than a moment of arrival ("Death in Allegory" 65).<sup>39</sup>

As I have already alluded to Spenser's use of autocannibalism as figure in "The Legende of Holinesse," I will now turn to the book's perhaps most graphic example in order to show how this allegorical dissonance works in context. I am referring, of course, to the House of Holinesse. In canto ten, *The Redcrosse Knight*, exhausted by his encounter with Despayre, is brought to the house of Holinesse by his faithful Una. There, Redcrosse undergoes the ministrations of the house's Dame Coelia, "[w]hose only joy was to relieve the needes / Of wretched soules," and that of her charming assortment of allegorical caretakers, including Fidelity, Speranza, and Patience (1.10.3.6-7). Naturally, they successfully patch up our hero to fight another day, but their methods deserve a little more scrutiny. Redcrosse is first tended to by Fidelity, an allegorical embodiment of faith who rather ominously arrives carrying a goblet "In which a Serpent did himself enfold, / That horror made to all, that did behold" and a "booke, that was both signed and seald with blood" (1.10.13.4-5, 8). In "her schoolehouse," Fidelity instructs him from "her sacred Booke, with bloud ywrit, / That none could read, except she did them teach" (1.10.18.4; 19.1-2). The lessons contained within the bloody volume are clearly those of Christ, who saw "His chosen people purg'd from sinfull guilt, / With pretious bloud," to use the words of the old man Contemplation (1.10.57.4-5). Nevertheless, the strange corporeality of Fidelity's book, paired with Contemplation's language of "purging," foretells that Redcrosse will soon undergo a purification ritual out of a Galenic nightmare.

Having conversed with Fidelia and Speranza, Redcrosse finds himself in the care of the “Leach” Patience, who earns his title with his doctor’s fervor for blood-letting (1.10.23.7). The “soule-diseased knight” suffers from “Inward corruption, and infected sin, / Not purg’d nor heald”—highly similar to Irenius’s assessment of the Irish nation in *A View* (1.10.24.1; 25.2-3).<sup>40</sup> In keeping with early modern humoral theory, Redcrosse is subsequently subjected to a regimen of “corrosives” and a “straight diet” to expel the sin-sickness from his body. Although James W. Broaddus has also identified a Galenic bent to the house of Holinesse’s healing practices, he focuses on Redcrosse’s diagnosis: Broaddus reads the “crudled cold” that assails the knight’s “corage” as a depletion of vital spirits from his dalliance with Duessa/Fidessa, making him a victim of a kind of physical and spiritual syphilis (Spenser 1.7.6.7; Broaddus 197). While this very well may be the source of Redcrosse’s malaise, the resonances between Galenic medicine and Patience’s cures are not only explicit, but startlingly violent. At first, the good doctor attempts to force Redcrosse’s “proud humors to abate” through “fasting every day” (1.10.26.2-3). On top of this prayerful austerity, Redcrosse is beset by a cohort of sanctified furies: Amendment plucks out corruption with “pincers firie whot”; Penance scourges him with “an yron whip”; Remorse “prick[e]s” his heart like a stuck pig; and Repentance solemnly bathes his wounds in “salt water smarting sore” (1.10.26.8; 27.1, 3, 6). As Redcrosse’s purgative treatment sounds increasingly like martyrdom<sup>41</sup>, his body, which now resembles a “daintie corse,” tries to contribute in the only way it knows how: by cannibalizing itself (1.10.26.2). Not only does Redcrosse passively waste away “[a]s ever superfluous flesh did rot,” but, during his ordeal, “like a Lyon he would cry and rore, / And rend his flesh, and his owne synewes eat” (1.10.26.6; 28.2-3). Just as Spenser portrayed the Irish state devouring itself as a necessary step for its

purification, here, Redcrosse forays into self-administered corpse medicine, feeding upon his own “daintie corse” as it “lay at deathes dore” (1.10.26.2; 27.9).

As the allusions to corpse medicine exaggerate the horror of Redcrosse’s treatment, the text becomes suddenly resistant to its own spectacle. From the scene of the self-cannibalizing knight, Spenser transitions to focus on a parallel image of Una tearing “[h]er guiltlesse garments, and her golden heare”– a softened echo of Redcrosse’s rages that drains them of gore (1.10.28.6). After diverting the reader’s attention to Una, however, Spenser announces at the beginning of the next stanza that the knight was “thus recover’d by wise Patience,” giving no account of how Redcrosse, last seen near-feral and gnawing his own sinews, was restored to himself (1.10.29.1). While Una’s plea to Redcrosse that he put aside “consuming thought” creates a weak thematic precedent for the cannibal imagery, there is an air of peculiar discontinuity between Redcrosse’s graphic treatment and abrupt recovery (1.10.29.5). The erasure of Redcrosse’s ordeal, however, is not simply a narrative issue. Though I cheekily introduced the house of Holinesse as *the* blatant episode of autocannibalism in Book I, the critical void surrounding Redcrosse’s self-mutilation suggests that the incident does not really “stick” – a surprising effect that I attribute to a failure of allegory. Typically, an allegorical scene uses imagery tonally related to the abstract idea that it represents. Redcrosse’s autocannibalism, however, grates against the salvific narrative of his recovery to the extent that the narrative tries to move on without addressing it. Whereas, in *A View*, cannibal imagery eclipsed the political aims of Spenser’s narrative, here, the interpretive imperative that the reader understand the house of Holinesse as a nurturing place of healing occludes its torturous methods, as long as they are effective. Consequently, the narrative briefly fractures, leaving a gap between Redcrosse *in extremis* and Redcrosse restored, because it lacks a thematically appropriate link

between anguished autocannibalism and spiritual redemption. While early modern Christian writing provides countless examples of the sanctified cannibalism<sup>42</sup> – Spenser’s own portrayal of Charissa with her “multitude of babes” and bared breasts “[t]hat ay thereof her babes might sucke their fill” constitutes one example in the mold of the Virgin Mary and Crashaw’s Christ (1.10.31.1; 30.8-9)<sup>43</sup> – Redcrosse’s autocannibalism does not involve the radical dependency that would make the image spiritually potent. The elevation of Redcrosse’s soul is less vivid than the mortification of his flesh. Consequently, the scene darkly recasts *The Faerie Queene*’s stated mission “to fashion a gentleman”: Redcrosse’s treatment “fashions” his redemption by inscribing penance into his flesh like that of the prisoner in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony”– two sinning men reduced to messages “with bloud ywrit” (cite; 1.10.18.4).<sup>44</sup> As Certeau observes, “once the relevance of the subject is lost, the imprintable body can be nothing more than a text” (*H* 165). At his moment of most anguished embodiment, Redcrosse is disembodied by the imperatives of allegory, which needs him to be a text instead of flesh.

The cannibal scene in Spenser’s house of Holinesse demonstrates a fundamental tension between the fleshly and spiritual concerns of allegory. “The Legende of Holinesse” is rife with equally graphic scenes of mutilation and mayhem, yet unlike Redcrosse’s self-consumption, these incidents explicitly end in the release of death. For instance, when Sansfoy tumbles to the earth “with bloody mouth” from his grievous head wound, we learn that “his grudging ghost did strive / With the fraile flesh; at least it flitted is, / Whither the soules to fly of men” (1.2.19.6, 7-9); Sanloy later reiterates how his brother was slain “with bloudie knife” yet “his ghost freed from repining strife” (1.3.36.4, 5). Compared to the Sarazins, the giant Orgoglio suffers a very prolonged death as Arthur hacks his limbs and head away, but, “soone as breath out of his breast did pas,” his body deflates “like an emptie bladder” (1.8.24.6, 9). Supporting Teskey’s claim that



death in allegory is a “rapid” event that “functions as a revelation of truth of the allegorical character’s meaning,” these deaths very deliberately facilitate allegory by shifting narrative attention from the body to the soul or by eliminating the body altogether (“Death in Allegory” 65). Redcrosse’s display of “rend[ing] his flesh” is all the more unsettling and incongruous because it delivers bodily trauma without the narrative fulfillment that accompanies allegorical death. His participation in autocannibalism designates the knight to be both predator and victim: one cannot survive without the other, so, like Redcrosse, allegory itself lingers at “deaths dore” without being able to enter (1.10.27.9). Not only does this suspension keep Redcrosse’s recovery from feeling truly triumphal, but this interminable scene of self-injury identifies him with his very first adversary in “The Legende of Holinesse”: the monster, Error.

### **Error’s Maw**

Unlike his stay in the house of Holinesse, Redcrosse’s battle with Error is arguably the one part of “The Legende of Holinesse” that no reader forgets. An enormous, snaky creature that dwarfs the serpent in Fidelity’s chalice, she is the first threat to slither across Redcrosse’s path, leading Gordon Teskey to designate her to be the creature that sets the interpretive rules for the entire book: “We have been told to interpret in a similar way every other figure we encounter in the poem. Error tells us not only what she means, but what sort of book we are reading, what conventions apply” (*Allegory and Violence* 3). Although Error establishes *The Faerie Queene* to be allegory, her meaning is not as easily deciphered as Teskey claims. If allegory is a form that focuses on the surfaces of its figures, Error has an unusually cavernous interior: her gullet can hold not only her entire brood of baby monsters, but a flood of “bookes and papers” that she vomits forth when assailed by Redcrosse (1.1.20.6). Naturally, much of the critical literature

surrounding Error has focused on these texts: while the papers have conventionally been assumed to be heretical texts or Catholic doctrine<sup>45</sup>, some interpreters, such as James Kearney and Patricia Palmer, see the printed books as a red herring and the monster herself as the embodiment of poor readings of allegory.<sup>46</sup> While it is not my primary objective to intervene in this debate, Kearney and Palmer's meta-readings of Error hit upon a quality of Error's that is key to understanding her in context: she appears to be a cautionary tale against imprecise readings of allegory because she subtly frustrates conventions that typically make allegory legible. Like Redcrosse in his autocannibalistic furor, Error not only self-devours (albeit unconventionally) but unsettles the boundaries between flesh and text that allegory hierarchically separates.

Although I have referred to Error above as a singular being, she might be more accurately described as a monstrous assemblage.<sup>47</sup> When Redcrosse first spies the monster, she is lying in coils with her "thousand yong ones, which she daily fed, / Sucking upon her poisonous dugs"—the mirror image of Charissa and her throng of nursing babes from the house of Holinesse (1.1.15.5-6). While I have already argued that nursing constitutes a sort of benevolent cannibalism, in the same stanza, we learn that Error's young can re-enter her body through her mouth, a visual inversion of childbirth that seems to "re-feed" them to the mother who sustains their bodies.<sup>48</sup> After Redcrosse fatally wounds Error, her brood takes the cannibalistic resonances of "their wonted entrance . . . / At her wide mouth" to their logical extreme by "flock[ing] all about her bleeding wound, / And suck[ing] up their dying mothers blood"—a depraved echo of O'Brien's death in *A View* (1.1.25.5,6, 7-8).<sup>49</sup> By the end of their appearance in the text, Error and her tiny monsters have completed all possible permutations of feeding off each other. Since the boundaries of their bodies are so mutually permeable, Error and her brood

seem to compose a collective noun called “Errorr” that paradoxically preserves its mass by devouring itself. In contrast to Redcrosse’s autocannibalism, however, Errorr’s perverse self-consumption is thematically in keeping with her allegorical function: it makes sense for the figure of Errorr to sustain itself through self-destruction. If anything, Errorr’s indeterminate boundaries are what make her work as an allegorical figure, since an allegorical character of Errorr devoid of uncertainty would be antithetical to the concept she represents. Consequently, while the boundary violations inherent to (auto)cannibalism may disrupt the clarity of allegory, this disruption is essential to depicting a credible figure of Errorr – a character treated as the prototypical example of Spenser’s allegory, yet that resists allegorical representation.

Similarly, the suspension of allegorical death that complicates Redcrosse’s treatment in Book X defines the figure of Errorr. While Errorr nominally dies after the encounter with Redcrosse, her (or their) exact moment of death is difficult to isolate. Errorr’s brood are depicted lapping up “their dying mothers blood,” but she is never explicitly described as dead (1.1.25.8). Instead, the reader is left to infer her death as the monstrous creatures “[d]evoure their dam,” “[m]aking her death their life” (1.1.26.3; 25.9). The situation becomes more complicated, however, when Redcrosse watches Errorr’s young glut themselves until their stomachs literally rupture: “Having all satisfide their bloody thirst, / Their bellies swolne he saw with fulnesse burst, / And bowels gushing forth” (1.1.26.4-6). Rather than presenting the expected death of the mother and endurance of her children, Spenser shows the mother seemingly destroying her children from the inside out. Nevertheless, even as Redcrosse bemusedly concludes that “[h]is foes have slaine themselves,” the words “satisfide,” “fulnesse,” and “gushing” emphasize abundance, even generativity, within the scene of carnage (1.1.26.9). In their introduction to *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton*, Elizabeth Jane Bellamy, Patrick Cheney, and Michael

Schoenfeldt propose that the “engorged, bursting bowels” of Error’s little ones “propelled the narrative into an allegorical ‘life’ of Errour” and “constitute a kind of bizarre life force that unleashes Errour throughout Faerie land, nourishing the ‘endlesse traine’ of moral error in the epic as a whole” (6). In order to draw this conclusion, Bellamy, Cheney, and Schoenfeldt treat the mobility of Errour’s flesh as evidence of life – even if that movement is from a mortal frame, to manifold stomachs, to being scattered upon the grass. Since cannibalism draws attention to the movement of matter from body to body, it creates an illusion of continued animacy. Narratively, Errour appears to avoid a discrete moment of death that would stabilize its allegorical significance. Nevertheless, this second deviation from the “rules” of allegory solidifies Errour’s status as an ongoing threat in the epic. As Redcrosse’s ordeal of sickness and healing shows, his near-fatal mistake in “The Legende of Holinesse” is assuming that he vanquished his first enemy.<sup>50</sup> Errour’s autocannibalism may seem to eliminate the monster, but it ultimately perpetuates her thematic survival in the text.

This narrative about the protean assemblage of Errour’s flesh, however, has yet to address one key component: her stomach contents. While scholarly literature on *The Faerie Queene* has been understandably preoccupied with the mass of “bookes and papers” that floods from Errour’s maw, it has yet to fully explore the relationship between the texts and the other matter in her gullet, namely the “great lumpes of flesh and gobbets raw” (1.1.20.6, 3). As the text gives no indication that Errour consumed the books she vomits forth, the simultaneous presence of raw flesh and papers with her digestive tract suggests that one material may derive from the other. In other words, Errour’s stomach contents indicates that texts exist on a continuum with flesh – a relationship further insinuated by Spenser’s diction. In *The Incarnate Text*, James Kearney observes that, in religious controversies of the early modern period, the word “gobbets”

was used to designate “undigested scraps of text (usually from scripture or the church fathers) that were quoted out of context and thus misunderstood” (96). Consequently, the fact that the flesh in Errour’s stomach is still “gobbets raw” suggests that the texts within her are also unprocessed and unfinished, like the lumpen offspring of the bear who, in the early modern imagination, had to lick her formless cubs into shape.<sup>51</sup> Emerging from the wrong end of the mother’s body and still partially embryonic, Error’s vomit indicts sloppy intellectual creation by materializing its deficiencies.

Spenser’s witty use of Errour to condemn poor authorial production, however, introduces more complications for his allegory. By presenting the contents of shoddy texts as equivalent to under-digested meat, Spenser levels the hierarchy between the material world and the world of ideas that allegory typically uses to function. Furthermore, he demonstrates how our vocabulary for describing textual creation, even in the best of circumstances, conflates authorship and readership with embodied biological processes. As discussed in my introduction, the metonymic association of authors’ bodies with their textual corpus was a particularly well-worn cliché during the early modern era.<sup>52</sup> By extension, metaphors of birth and digestion – both invoked here with Spenser’s Errour – stand in for writing or interpretation, respectively. Digestion, in particular, becomes shorthand for understanding a text by actively engaging it. In *The Gospel Treasury Opened* (1657), John Everard urges good Christians to take “the Letter of the word” and to metaphorically “tear it, *champ*, it, *chew* it between their *teeth*” like meat in order to “get *all the nourishment out* they possibly can” (325). In contrast to Errour’s “gobbets,” Kearney cites John Bale’s idiom of truths “in faith devoured” and in “pure love digested” as a positive example of how texts should be consumed (Kearney 96; Bale 150). Representing a different poor outcome

of digesting a text than regurgitation, John Donne's "Satyre II" reminds potential plagiarists that

hee is worst, who (beggarly) doth chaw  
Other wits fruits, and in his ravenous maw  
Rankly digested, doth those things out-spue,  
As his owne things; and they're his owne, 'tis true,  
For if one eate my meate, though it be knowne  
The meate my mine, th'excrement his owne (25-30).

By framing the products of poor reading and writing as shit or vomit, however, Spenser and Donne implicitly affirm that *good* writing depends on the same gastro-intellectual tract that produced the waste. In other words, even though the interpretive conventions of allegory dictate that the "best" readers must be able to strip away the material trappings that cloak truth, early modern thinkers framed reading as a material, embodied process: less of an affair of the mind and its spirits than of the soft, fleshy organs of the gut. While they may seem to represent diametrically opposed types of reading, both the flesh-tainted books in Errour's stomach and Fidelia's sacred text "in bloud ywrit" affirm the materiality of thought and interpretation – even in the unlikely genre of allegory. The body will not be banished; whether it is fleshly or textual, consuming it does not erase its existence as much as it alters its form for the consumer's use.

### **The Learned Cannibal**

When examined together, Spenser's *A View of the Present State of Ireland* and "The Legende of Holinesse" express a paradox about figurative language in the early modern imaginary: the former demonstrates how cannibalized bodies resist sublimation into metaphor, yet the latter shows how models for engaging with metaphor never stray far from cannibalism.

After all, if one accepts the conventions that books are bodies and that good readers are good “digesters,” then the reading public is but a horde of anthropophagi who, like Error or the sickened Redcrosse, gnaw eternally on their impossibly resilient meals. This implicit framing of early modern intellectual culture as a flesh market, however, introduces new questions of ownership: in an economy where the widespread consumption of texts does not translate to scarcity, to whom does a body of work belong – its producers or its consumers?<sup>53</sup> If a cannibal devours a body of a fellow human, does an exchange of property take place, or is the cannibal’s claim as fraudulent as that of the plagiarist in “Satyre II”? My next chapter will examine how John Donne tackles these questions (and the manifold authorial anxieties that accompany them) from his positions as a poet and theologian. Even as he sustains Spenser’s vision of uncannily animate flesh, however, Donne’s discomfort with the metaphysical implications of cannibalism leads him to cling to another ignominious medical model as his metaphor of choice: the anatomy.

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<sup>1</sup> Or, to give its full title, *A Modest Proposal for Preventing the Children of Poor People From Being a Burthen to Their Parents or Country, and for Making Them Beneficial to the Publick*.

<sup>2</sup> Providing insight into modern popular perceptions of Swift’s essay, Wikipedia’s entry on *A Modest Proposal* helpfully situates itself by telling us “‘*Eating babies*’ *redirects here*” (“*A Modest Proposal*”).

<sup>3</sup> While this date is approximate, we can infer that Spenser wrote the text while back in England because of how he applies the words “here” and “there.” (Renwick 223-4).

<sup>4</sup> Greenblatt actually goes further and characterizes Spenser as “an agent of and an apologist for the massacre” in Ireland during the Desmond Rebellions (186).

<sup>5</sup> It was entered into the Stationer’s Register in 1598 (Brink 295).

<sup>6</sup> As I will discuss, the Irish are portrayed as cannibals in *A View*, yet that all contemporary incidents of cannibalism in the text are under imperial duress.

<sup>7</sup> There is a significant amount of scholarly disagreement about Elizabeth I’s relationship with her colonial officers and role in determining colonial policy in Ireland; see *Elizabeth I in Ireland*, edited by Brendan Kane and Valerie McGowan-Doyle.

<sup>8</sup> See Breen’s “Imagining Voices in *A View of the Present State of Ireland: A Discussion of Recent Studies Concerning Edmund Spenser’s Dialogue*” and Hadfield’s “Who is Speaking in Spenser’s *A View of the Present State of Ireland? A Response to John Breen*.” While Hadfield challenges facets of Breen’s argument, he clearly states that “there is little in Breen’s analysis that I wish to challenge and, if I read my own work aright, I have been independently making a similar case (albeit not always as directly or eloquently) in some of the work which Breen cites” (233-34).

<sup>9</sup> Elsewhere, Irenius refers to two physicians administering contraindicative treatments to an ill-fated patient, writing how “the former would minister all thinges meete to purge and kepe under the bodye, thother to pamper and strengthen yt suddenlie againe” (142). Since Eudoxus is frequently the only advocate for more gentle treatment of the Irish, Irenius implicitly suggests that the hypothetical patient’s inevitable and “most dangerous relapse” is the fault of the second doctor for interfering with the strict, but effective ministrations of the first (*A View* 142).

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<sup>10</sup> While I focus here on human flesh, materials used in early modern “corpse” medicine more broadly included hair, flesh, fat, brain, skin, other organs, urine, placenta, menstrual blood, earwax, saliva, and feces (Sugg 1).

<sup>11</sup> Colorfully titled *Mummies, Cannibals, and Vampires: The History of Corpse Medicine from the Renaissance to the Victorians* (2011).

<sup>12</sup> This trade was not limited to the seventeenth century: Sugg reports that an eighteenth-century English customs book includes records of import and export duties levied on Irish skulls (156).

<sup>13</sup> Certeau also resorts to medical metaphors here, writing that the “suture” of the historical narrative “only conceals the break,” without “effacing the scar of an initial wound” (*WoH* 338-39).

<sup>14</sup> O’Brien’s execution took place in 1577, evidently while Spenser was in Ireland (Renwick 224).

<sup>15</sup> References to cannibal Scythians were commonplace in early modern literature as classical references. Herodotus’s *Histories*, one of the first recorded texts to describe anthropophagy, uses the Scythians as its paradigmatic example (Watson 24, 26). Book VII of Pliny’s *Natural History* also cites Scythian cannibalism (513).

<sup>16</sup> Spenser attributes this anecdote to a “Master Cambden” (*A View* 77). In his textual commentary, Renwick states that “I find no evidence for Scythian lycanthropy, but Olaus Magnus, XVIII.32-33, discusses the subject” (272). Moryson, however, cites tales of men in Kilkenny who are “yearly turned into wolves” (361). The Werewolves of Ossory were also a staple of medieval Irish myth who, like the men of Kilkenny, experienced transformations at regular time intervals (Sconduto 26-38).

<sup>17</sup> This point emerged through a discussion with Beth A. Conklin.

<sup>18</sup> The woman’s shrieks uncannily anticipate Certeau’s description of the return of the historical repressed, when “[t]he other returns in the form of ‘noises and howls’ or ‘softer and more gracious sounds’” (*WoH* 231).

<sup>19</sup> From *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge.

<sup>20</sup> Foucault spends the first three pages of his book detailing the botched execution of Damians the regicide in Paris on 2 March, 1757. While Foucault includes the graphic details at length (preserved by Bouton, an officer of the watch), the *Gazette d’Amsterdam* from April 1, 1757 succinctly, if no less gruesomely, relates that the quartering “was very long, because the horses were not accustomed to drawing; consequently, instead of four, six were needed; and when that did not suffice, they were forced, in order to cut off the wretch’s thighs, to sever the sinews and hack at the joints. . .” (Foucault 3).

<sup>21</sup> Willy Maley reads Spenser’s description of the devastation of Munster as “an advocacy of its repetition” (61). Richard McCabe similarly argues that “[f]ar from recoiling from the experience of the 1580s, Spenser demands that it be repeated in the 1590s” (“The fate of Irena” 117). Linda Gregerson also interprets the passage as Spenser indicating that “[p]ity must not be allowed to blunt the sword. The Irish have been reduced to carrion before; to carrion they can and must be reduced again” (96).

<sup>22</sup> He also denounces opinions of Lord Grey as “bloodye and Crewell” as slander (*A View* 139).

<sup>23</sup> While the shamrock had not reached the level of national symbolism it earned in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, by the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, the shamrock was not only specifically associated with the Irish but mistakenly assumed to be eaten by them (S., “The Shamrock” 222-23).

<sup>24</sup> Eudoxus cites complaints about Lord Grey being a “bloodye man” (136).

<sup>25</sup> See “monster, n., adv., and adj.: Etymology” (*OED*).

<sup>26</sup> In *Queer/Early/Modern*, Carla Freccero also discusses this passage from Certeau in connection with cannibalism, but focuses on spectrality, rather than the corporeality that is central to my project (70-71).

<sup>27</sup> One might argue that said curing occurs in a different sense.

<sup>28</sup> Following the lead of Stephen Greenblatt’s discourse on Spenser and empire, most discussions of cannibalism in *The Faerie Queene* have centered on the more overtly “colonial” narratives of Books II, V, and VI. See O’Brien, Read (39, 83, 106, 139), and Rufus Wood’s *Metaphor and Belief in The Faerie Queene* (157-164).

<sup>29</sup> Though he argues that cannibalism in the Americas has been overlooked as an influence for the “Savage Nation” sequence, Robert Viking O’Brien affirms the strength of the connections between the behavior of the unnamed tribe and the incidents of cannibalism Spenser witnessed as a colonial officer (36-37). In his *Account of Two Voyages to New England, Made 1638, 1663*, John Josselyn digresses from his remarks on Algonquin cannibalism to claim that “Heathen-Iriss” used to “feed upon the Buttocks of Boyes and Womens Papes” (98). Josselyn’s discourse not only treats the Irish and Native Americans as alike in savagery, but his conflation of cannibalism with deviant sexuality mirrors the coarse erotics of Serena’s encounter with the Savage Nation.

<sup>30</sup> See O’Brien’s “Cannibalism in *The Faerie Queene*, Ireland, and the Americas.”

<sup>31</sup> David Read also uses similar spatial vocabulary in his work on Spenser’s allegory, writing that “[w]hat distinguishes allegory from other modes of writing is its constant acknowledgement of the distances that must be covered in making these connections [between things concrete and abstract]” (120).



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<sup>32</sup> *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature*, for example, includes only Booke I of *The Faerie Queene*, plus Canto VI of Book III (xvi). The introduction to the section on *The Faerie Queene* treats the student as a kind of squire in the world of allegory, stating “Spenser’s readers may (and perhaps should) find his allegory confusing, but his knights are usually just as confused. Eventually both hero and reader realize what is happening, but each experiences the error and puzzlement that, for Spenser, characterize human life” (445).

<sup>33</sup> The first adaptation of *The Faerie Queene* explicitly for children, Eliza A. Bradburn’s *Legends from Spenser’s The Faerie Queene for Children* (1829), focused on Books I and II. The first American version, Elizabeth Palmer Peabody’s *Holinesse, or the Legend of St. George: A Tale from Spenser’s Faerie Queene, by a Mother* (1836), featured only Book I. Peabody’s text was profiled in *The Kindergarten for Parents and Teachers*, vol 14, as well as in the *American Journal of Education*, vol. 32 (Page 460; Mann 748). See also R.A.Y.’s *The Story of the Redcrosse Knight from Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (1885), Mrs. F.S.’s *The Quest of the Redcrosse Knight, A Story from Spenser’s Faerie Queene* (1911), Sister Mary Charatina’s *The Adventures of the Redcrosse Knight* (1945), Sandol Stoddard Warburg’s *Saint George and the Dragon, Being the Legend of the Red Cross Knight from the Faerie Queene* (1963), Margaret Hodge’s *St. George and the Dragon* (1981) (Hosington and Shaver 289-91).

<sup>34</sup> In Teskey’s own words: “The radical form of this confrontation is of two bodies engaged in a mutual devouring as each strives to enclose the other in itself. . . For mutual devouring – or, as I shall call it, allelophagy – is the corporeal expression of the symmetrical otherness we have seen in the word allegory, each body being radically other to the other. If instrumental meaning is the point of contact between allegory and violence, allelophagy is the violence itself. When our horizon is expanded beyond the limits of poetics, we see how allegory as a means of expression does not simply refer upwards, anagogically, toward the absolute other. Allegory oscillates between a project of reference and a project of capture” (Allegory and Violence 8).

<sup>35</sup> While the violence is only implied, Spenser’s own description of the import of *The Faerie Queene* as “clowdily enwrapped in Allegoricall devises” similarly suggests that surface meaning is a casing which must be removed (“A Letter of the Authors” 16).

<sup>36</sup> Indeed, the only thing missing from Teskey’s construct of “allelophagy” that separates it from cannibalism is an understanding of simultaneously devouring the Other and a reflection of oneself – and this double knowledge is arguably implied by the hierarchical struggle between “two things, both of some complexity, but one is of less importance than the other” (2).

<sup>37</sup> The continued growth of hair and fingernails after death is actually a common medical myth (Bernal, Culver and Gert 389).

<sup>38</sup> This may seem to be an imprecise generalization because the Yanomami do consume bone ash as part of their endocannibalistic funeral rituals (Ramos 295). I argue, however, that this practice treats bone as equivalent to flesh, rather than fetishizing bone as the main object of the ritual (as allegory does figuratively).

<sup>39</sup> While Teskey clarifies that the condition of the allegorical body is “having death at work within it but not being dead,” his denial of death seems to be based on the body maintaining narrative significance through allegory, rather than actually cheating death (“Death in Allegory” 75).

<sup>40</sup> This disease rhetoric was also used in reference to the colonial Americas. In the *Discoverie of Guiana*, Walter Raleigh wrote of the new territory that “I will thus conclude, that whatsoever kingdome shalbe inforced to defend it selfe, may be compared to a body dangerouslie diseased, which for a season may be preserved with vulgar medicines, but in a short time, and by little and little, the same must needs fall to the found and be dissolved” (15).

<sup>41</sup> James Kearney calls Book I in particular “an unholy hybrid of the Catholic and the Protestant” – an apt observation, considering how this scene intermingles the interpreting of holy texts with bodily penitence as demonstrations of faith (86).

<sup>42</sup> See my later chapter on Crashaw.

<sup>43</sup> See, for instance, Crashaw’s “Luke II: Blessed Be the Paps Which Thou Hast Sucked,” “Upon the Infant Martyrs,” and “Sancta Maria Dolorum; or the Mother of Sorrows” (23, 24, 201-3). Crashaw’s conflation of blood and milk is hardly idiosyncratic. Early modern medical theories held milk to be a whitened, purified form of blood, intensifying the similarities between breastfeeding and cannibalism (Sugg 19).

<sup>44</sup> In a complementary vein, Theresa M. Krier addresses the violence of reducing individuals to exempla in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* in “Psychic Deadness in Allegory: Spenser’s House of Mammon and Attacks on Linking.”

<sup>45</sup> See D. Douglas Waters’s “Error’s Den and Archimago’s Hermitage: Symbolic Lust and Symbolic Witchcraft,” John M. Steadman’s *Spenser Encyclopedia* entry on Error (252), Karen Nelson’s “Pastoral Forms and Religious Reform in Spenser and Shakespeare” (150), and Thomas Herron’s *Spenser’s Irish Work: Poetry, Plantation, and Colonial Reformation* (128-29, 133).

<sup>46</sup> See Kearney, 94-98, and Palmer, 86.

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<sup>47</sup> My discussion of assemblages and what may be termed “vital materiality” are indebted to Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*.

<sup>48</sup> “Soone as that uncouth light upon them shone, / Into her mouth they crept, and suddain all were gone” (1.1.15.8-9). Drawing on Erich Neumann, the cultural anthropologist Diane Sanday describes the “maternal ouroboros,” a figure of the primal mother found in numerous cannibal societies who unites the processes of reproductive and alimentary incorporation (47). Many characteristics of Spenser’s *Error* resonate with this archetype, though the poem affords her no reverence. In terms of precedents for *Error* from the early modern era, Spenser may have been inspired by bestiaries’ depictions of vipers or young crocodiles crawling back into their mothers through their mouths. Shortly after the first three books of *The Faerie Queene* were published, for instance, Raleigh’s *Discoverie of Guiana* described “the beast which is called by the Indians, Jawarj, written of by Pliny in his natural history, whose yong, after they are brought forth by the damme, do again enter into her body upon anie freight or chase, till they be of a certain age” (22). Raleigh likely spotted a mother caiman, as caimans and other crocodilians do indeed transport their young in their mouths (del Toro, in Gorzula and Seijas 51).

<sup>49</sup> This image is shockingly reminiscent of a scene of famine from Moryson’s *History of Ireland*, depicting “the most horrible Spectacle of three Children (whereof the eldest was not above ten years old,) all eating and gnawing with their Teeth the Entrails of their dead Mother, upon whose Flesh they had fed 20 Days past, and having eaten all from the Feet upwards to the bare Bones, roasting it continually by a slow Fire, were now come to the eating of her said Entrails in like sort roasted, yet not divided from the Body, being as yet raw” (2:283-84).

<sup>50</sup> James Kearney similarly argues that “[t]he danger lies in the assumption that readerly error is easily found, easily avoided, easily overcome. The error lies in the assumption that error can be defeated in a fallen world” (98).

<sup>51</sup> In *Microcosmographia*, Helkiah Crooke cites the belief that “the Beare. . . alwayes bringeth foorth her young rude and vnformed, and perfecteth them by licking, either we say it is a Fable, or else that their young doe appeare deformed or vnformed but are not so indeede, but because they lurk all winter in the caues of the earth, they are couered with a slimy and Flegmaticke moysture which the Dam lickling of makes their proportion appeare” (297).

<sup>52</sup> For relevant scholarship on this phenomenon, see Leah Marcus’s *Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton*, Jeffrey Masten’s *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama*, and James Kearney’s *The Incarnate Text: Imagining the Book in Reformation England*.

<sup>53</sup> As Maggie Kilgour observes, Spenser’s *Error* is cannibalized to produce Swift’s *Criticism* in *The Battel of the Books* and Milton’s *Sin* in *Paradise Lost* (238).

## CHAPTER 2

“So Let Us Melt”<sup>1</sup>: Anatomy, Cannibalism, and the Contingent Body in the Work of John Donne

On November 19, 1627, acting as the Dean of St. Paul’s, John Donne delivered a rather curious sermon at the wedding of the Lady Mary Egerton and Richard Herbert, 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Herbert of Cherbury. Elaborating on Matthew 22:30 – “For, in the Resurrection, they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in Heaven”– Donne’s thoughts on the institution of marriage are soon diverted by those on the resurrection of the body (“A Sermon” 2). Rather than focusing on the occasion’s joining of hands, his sermon takes a grimly literal turn, conjuring a vast field of corrupted body parts being reunited by the will of the Almighty:

Where be all the splinters of that Bone, which a shot hath shivered and scattered in the Ayre? Where be all the Atoms of that flesh, which a Corrasive have eat away, or a Consumption hath breath’d and exhal’d away from our arms, and other Limbs? In what wrinkle, in what furrow, in what bowel of the earth, ly all the grains of the ashes of a body burnt a thousand years since? In what corner, in what ventricle of the sea, lies all the jelly of a Body drowned in the general flood? What cohærence, what sympathy, what dependence maintains any relation, any correspondence, between an arm that was lost in Europe, and that legge that was lost in Afrique or Asia, scores of yeers between? [. . .] and still, still God knows in what Cabinet each *seed-Pearle* lies, in what part of the world every graine of every mans dust lies (5).

For the bride and groom, the Dean’s assurances that their moldering corpses would be ably reassembled may have provided little immediate comfort, but the sermon reveals much about

Donne's preoccupation with the fleshly minutiae of the Resurrection. While one could argue that his remarks are a simple, if graphic, illustration of the extent of God's perfect knowledge of his own creation, Donne's subsequent comments about the restoration of individual bodies contextualizes his investment in the fates of every wayward atom and grain of dust. After clarifying that, in cases of illness and disability, God raises "a body, such as it should have been, if these infirmities had not interven'd and deformed it," Donne claims that in Heaven "I shall have mine old eies, and eares, and tongue, and knees, and receive such glory in my body my selfe, as that, in that body, so glorified by God, I also shall glorify him" (5). Donne's ecstasy at the thought of specifically having "mine olde eies" and other parts restored to him, combined with the emphatic phrasing of "my body my selfe," suggests that a portion of the promise of the Resurrection involves the reclamation of personal property. Regardless of one's manner of death and how much one's flesh has disintegrated, Donne conveys that what is ours, "our selfe," will be returned to us in the fullness of time. Those affected by disease or disability will be given what is due to them – their bodies as they "should have been." In this context, Donne depicts God not as a monarch or even an artist, but as a merchant counting and sorting his precious inventory. This is not to say that Donne has translated a sacred event into something profane; he takes pains to state that the resurrected body will not partake in "feasting and banqueting, and all carnall pleasures," but will unite with the soul to magnify the Lord (6, 5). Still, Donne's careful accounting of the restoration of each bit of flesh to its owner makes his focus on the day of Resurrection a surprisingly fitting choice for presiding over a marriage: both are occasions lofty with spiritual purpose – a holy contract – with practical implications for the consolidation of proprietary flesh.

In this chapter, I will explore how Donne's conception of the Resurrection as restoring a perfect, "original" body attempts to accommodate what I would term property disputes. Whereas, in Donne's 1627 wedding sermon<sup>2</sup>, God seems to be tasked with reassembling his creations from doll parts ("an arm that was lost in Europe", a "legge that was lost in Afrique") and dust (discrete particles as easily distinguishable to God as lost limbs), the vogue of corpse medicine in early modern England and reports of anthropophagous tribes in the Americas introduces a significant complication to Donne's cosmos: cannibalism. If a man eats and assimilates part of another man, to whom does the flesh belong at the time of resurrection? Like Augustine before him and Boyle after him<sup>3</sup>, Donne endeavored to imagine a divine Solomonic ruling of how the body should be divided. While he seemingly resolves this question in his "Obsequies to the Lord Harrington," Donne's poetry and prose express persistent anxiety over the intermixture of bodies through their attitudes toward cannibalism and towards a process Donne treats as analogous to cannibalism – decomposition. I argue that Donne's tonally and stylistically similar portrayals of cannibalism and decomposition reflect an underlying investment in materialism. Regardless of the particulars of one's resurrection, the inevitable disintegration of the body into its raw materials (whether in foreign soil or a foreign stomach) temporarily dissolves the boundaries of the self, seemingly obliterating the individual for an uncertain period of time. Engaging again and again with the specter of self-loss, Donne's work struggles to rhetorically domesticate the idea of the destroyed human body, in order to make the carnage legible or even instructive. As I will show through my analysis of Donne's anatomy poems, however, his sanitizing metaphors are self-conscious salves to psychic wound that will not heal: the dissected body, like the cannibalized body, confronts spectators with their own annihilation.

## **Rotten Knowledge: Anatomy and its Discontents**

Among Donne's anatomy poems, only "The First Anniversarie: An Anatomy of the World" admits decay. Though an occasional work for the late daughter of one's patron may seem like a curious space in which to engage death's most unsavory reality, the poem's subtitle – "Wherein, By occasion of the untimely death of Mistris Elizabeth Drury the frailty and the decay of this whole World is represented" – overtly gives rot top billing. Initially, "The First Anniversarie" proceeds in step with the rest of Donne's post-mortems; in particular, the repetition of "And learn'st thus much by our Anatomee" emphasizes knowledge production in a manner consistent with his other anatomy poems (185, 239, 327, 371, 429). In keeping with its subtitle, however, the "Anatomee" begins to yield a narrative of global entropy. Since the "Sicke world" has lost Drury as "[its] intrisique Balme, and [its] preservative," Donne's speaker pronounces that the world itself is "dead" with "none / Alive to study this dissection" (56, 57, 63, 65-66). Not only is the world disintegrating, cannibalized by the "consuming wound"<sup>4</sup> of its own grief, but the practice of anatomy bears witness to its own destruction (248). Why this creeping influx of putrescence into Drury's tribute? Donne's speaker breaks the fourth wall of the poem's central metaphor with this startling reply:

But as in cutting up a man that's dead,  
The body will not last out to have read  
On every part, and therefore men direct  
Their speech to parts, that are of most effect;  
So the worlds carcasse would not last, if I  
Were punctuall in this Anatomy (435-40).

To paraphrase, as much as this poem pretends otherwise, anatomies are constrained by the limits of material flesh: bodies decay, and time causes the fruits of the anatomist's labors to degrade beneath his scrambling fingertips<sup>5</sup>. In this excerpt, the poem acknowledges material truths, but pleads to maintain a palliative fiction. The anatomy at the center of "The First Anniversarie" is revealed to be a self-sanitizing narrative that combats unsavory biological realities. The speaker's aside, however, exposes Donne as he covertly performs the labors of an embalmer, futilely trying to preserve a corpse for posterity that already needs aromatics to protect mourners from its stench.<sup>6</sup>

Donne's revelation in "The First Anniversarie" that he uses anatomy tropes as sanitation tools invites several pressing questions: what precisely is being scrubbed from his verses, and why is anatomy an appropriate implement?<sup>7</sup> These questions are made more puzzling by the uncertain status of the anatomy in his era's imaginary. Early modern Europe as a whole held anatomies to be "uniquely dishonoring" to the deceased<sup>8</sup> (Park 19). In a particularly colorful articulation of this sentiment, the surgeon Edward May complained in 1639 about the general public "think[ing] their children or friends murdered after they are dead, if a surgeon should but pierce any part of their skins with a knife" (Sugg, *MAD* 30).<sup>9</sup> Consequently, legal avenues for conducting anatomies were limited, and dissected corpses tended to belong to criminals, the destitute, or even animals (Park 19). In England, Henry VIII's Act of 1540 permitted surgeons to claim exactly four corpses of executed murderers per year to use in teaching dissections (Quigley 293; Gittings 74). The dissections were often conducted over a period of three days in the dead of winter in order to stave off decomposition (Waddington 101). Despite these meager legal accommodations, the supply of corpses could not keep up with the demand, so medical students were known to resort to ignominious means in order to obtain fresh bodies (Quigley

293)<sup>10</sup>. Naturally, popular fears of grave-robbing only intensified the animus against anatomists and their trade. In *Hydriotaphia*, Thomas Browne wrote of the indignity of being “gnawed out of our graves, to have our skulls made drinking bones, and our bones turned into pipes,” not knowing, alas, that his own skull would eventually be stolen (478; *MCV* 96). Browne’s language of “gnawing” also shows how anatomy could be understood as a form of predatory cannibalism, a sentiment echoed in other literary works from the period.<sup>11</sup> Anatomists and their underlings consequently acquired reputations as voracious ghouls, akin to cannibals. While bodies of hanged criminals were routinely allowed to swing until their bones fell, crowds would attack the assistants who tried to claim the body for the anatomists – a conflict that eventually became predictable enough to motivate moving the hangings from Tyburn to Newgate, near the prison and Surgeons’ Hall (Houlebrooke 25; Tarlow 93; R. Richardson 75).

Even while condemning the anatomists, the English public clearly had an appetite for information about anatomy. In addition to public dissections, the recent availability of texts like Galen’s *On Anatomical Procedures*, translated in 1531, and Vesalius’s landmark *De humani corporis fabrica* (1543) stoked readers’ desire for knowledge about the open body (Waddington 99; Rifkin 14). Interest in anatomy truly began to surge during the seventeenth century: while only nine anatomical texts (in twenty-seven editions) were published in England between 1500 and 1600, by the 1650s, an average of eighteenth books on dissection were published every single year – three times the rate before the English Civil War (Furdell 50; Sawday 232). These texts, however, disseminated not only knowledge about the human body, but new ways of seeing. In *The Body Emblazoned*, Jonathan Sawday makes a case for the early modern period cultivating a “culture of dissection,” in which



an incisive recomposition of the human body . . . entailed an equivalent refashioning of the means by which people made sense of the world around them in terms of their philosophy of understanding, their theology, their poetry, their plays, their rituals of justice, their art, and their buildings (ix).

Anatomy was no longer just a procedure; it was also a lens and mode of inquiry. Between 1575 and 1625, at least fifteen titles were published in England that promised an “Anatomie” of a philosophical concept, like “Wit,” “Mortalitie,” or, of course, “Melancholie”<sup>12</sup> (Tarlow 60). Sarah Tarlow glosses such uses of “anatomie” to denote “a systematic ordering, minute examination and classification” (60). Hence, anatomy occupied a vexed space as a material practice and cultural metaphor: it represented both a desecration of the body and an exalted form of self-exploration.

The speaker’s aside in “The First Anniversarie” makes clear how the fraught status of anatomy in early modern England shaped its use as a metaphor: in order to emphasize coherent knowledge production, the grotesqueries of the flesh must be repressed. Contrast Donne’s chaste, figurative dissection of Elizabeth Drury with the real seventeenth-century autopsy of James I, in which the late monarch’s head was cracked open “with a chisel and saw” and found to be “so full of brains as they could not, upon the opening, keep them from spilling” (Sugg, *MAD* 89-90). Similarly, the famed anatomical illustrations of Andreas Vesalius, Juan Valverde de Amusco, and Charles Estienne – with the corpses compliantly displaying their own bodies in perfect, bloodless layers – would have hardly prepared spectators for the stink of rotten flesh, prodded at for three days in the open air with only winter’s chill to act as a preservative.<sup>13</sup> Along these lines, many early modern representations of anatomy – Donne’s tropes included – engage with a body

that is already a figure, cleaned up and clarified for public consumption.<sup>14</sup> Luc Sante writes eloquently of the kind of alchemy needed to sublimate flesh into figure:

We think we know how to look at death because we've looked at paintings: the dead Patroclus, the dead Ajax, the dead Christ, the dead Marat, dire tableaux of butchered limbs in baroque versions of antiquity. . . . Those bodies become historical or symbolic, and their flesh is thus transubstantiated mentally into some odorless and enduring substance like marble or wax (60).

Both early modern anatomy illustrations and Donne's verse similarly substitute "idealized classical forms"—figures that are visual or rhetorical—for the banal body-as-meat (Harcourt 34). As a result, the "body" portrayed in either medium can be understood as a Butlerian copy of a fantasy original<sup>15</sup>, distanced from the messier realities of embodiment. Nevertheless, I argue that this process of sanitization never fully succeeds. In particular, Donne's anatomy tropes in his prose and poetry are characterized by tension between the text's efforts to domesticate death's horrors by rendering de-articulated flesh into something articulate and orderly, and the inevitable failure of this project of containment. As explicitly revealed in "The First Anniversarie," the palliatives of poetry are insufficient to ward off literal and figurative "rot"—the breaking down of categorical barriers between living and dead, anatomist and corpse, order and entropy.

Donne's use of anatomy tropes to mask decay also reveals an instructively different conceptualization of "rawness" than that of Spenser. To use Lévi-Strauss's terminology, the poets engage with rawness from different axes of opposition: Spenser juxtaposes the raw and cooked, whereas Donne considers the opposition between the raw and the rotten. Distinguishing these two modes of relation, Lévi-Strauss writes that

the raw/cooked axis is characteristic of culture; the fresh/decayed one of nature, since cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw, just as putrefaction is its natural transformation (142).

In other words, whereas Spenser uses cannibalism to grapple with the cultural dynamics of colonialism, Donne treats the destruction of the body by human hands and by organic processes as distinct forms of cannibalism to defamiliarize questions about materialism and metaphysics. The tonal differences between Donne's anatomy tropes and meditations of decay, however, also reveal an understanding of what constitutes "rawness" that may not be immediately intuitive. Whereas an opened corpse on the anatomy table would seem to have more conventional affinities with the raw than the dust of corpse than has finished its decomposition, Donne's works appear to experience the raw as a spectrum of dissolution that gradually evacuates the body's humanity. The most dreadful form of the raw is not bloody flesh, but flesh reduced to its raw materials, until it is no longer recognizable as part of a human form, once a worthy vessel for an immortal soul.

### **"Worke on Them as Me": Anatomy and the Permeable Body**

Beyond "The First Anniversarie," Donne's works express a complex range of attitudes towards anatomy. Whereas many early modern texts tend to focus on the grotesque and punitive dimensions of the process – for instance, consider Ferdinand's threat to "flay off [his doctor's] skin / To cover one of the anatomies this rogue hath set / I'th' cold yonder, in Barber-Chiurgeon's Hall" in Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* (5.2.67-69)<sup>16</sup> – few of Donne's tropes fit this grim template. His most brutal variations serve sardonic ends, as when the speaker of "Love's Exchange" dares Love to dissect him, taunting that "Rack't carcasses make ill Anatomies," or

when he renders his “ragged bony name” as a “ruinous Anatomie” in “A Valediction of my name, in the window” (42; 23-24). Nevertheless, in most instances, Donne’s references to anatomy can be construed as more ambivalent. For the sake of illustration, I will draw my initial examples from *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, which features some of Donne’s most protracted and detailed anatomical conceits.

Donne’s Ninth Meditation – “Upon their Consultation, they prescribe”– opens with a surreal image of a living corpse facing a crowd of physicians:

They have seene me, and heard mee, arraign’d me in these fetters, and receiv’d the evidence; I have cut up mine Anatomy, dissected my selfe, and they are gon to read upon me (48).

While the first sentence evokes punitive or voyeuristic depictions of dissection from the period, the second strays from tradition with its surprising assignation of agency: the corpse actively “dissect[s]” itself while the doctors only interpret. Although the meditation expresses gratitude toward the physicians for their “prescriptions” (metaphorically, spiritual counsel), the manual anatomy is completely controlled by the subject on the table – emphasized by the possessive repetition of “my Anatomy of my selfe” (50). Similarly, in the Ninth Expostulation, Donne recreates this unusual transaction between diagnostician and corpse, writing, “I offer not to counsell them, who meet in consultation for my body now, but I open my infirmities, I anatomise my body to them”<sup>17</sup> (51). Here, the self-administered anatomy models man’s responsibility to investigate and display his inner self to God in “humble confession” (51). This deep responsibility, however, may also be understood as a form of power. As Donne’s textual self offers a catalogue of how each “Artery,” “bone,” “sinew,” and “ligament” in his body bears the mark of sin or “chain[s] sin and sin together,” this litany displays both the extent of self-

interrogation demanded by God, but also the extraordinary depth of self-knowledge and inward sight acquired by the worshipper in order to be up to the task (51). The gift and curse of the anatomy is ultimate intimacy with one's own interior, weighing new depths of self-knowledge against the wages of pain.

This enmeshment of enlightenment and suffering, however, does not capture the deeper conflicts at the heart of this portrayal of anatomy. Strictly considered, these selections from *Devotions* do not show an anatomy at all, but rather, a Vesalian fantasy of auto-vivisection. As a realized version of this spectacle would make any gawker at a public dissection blanch, why does Donne choose to up the ante from anatomy to lucid self-surgery? The answer seems to lie in a telling shift in the power dynamics of the Ninth Meditation. Before the semicolon, Donne relates that an anonymous, authoritative "they" have "seene" him, "heard" him, "arraign'd [him] in these fetters," and "receiv'd the evidence" – a quartet of offenses that aligns the quantification and evaluation of the body in terms of evidence with forceful imprisonment and consumption (48). (Indeed, the language of flesh-trafficking overlapped with that of cannibalism in the early modern imaginary.<sup>18</sup>) Consequently, when the corpse reclaims its "I" and conducts its own anatomy along the meticulous lines of the Ninth Expostulation, it represents a grab for the authority and autonomy taken first by death and then by the anatomists<sup>19</sup>. While poetically evocative, however, this move is physically impossible: in a real anatomy, the corpse cannot resist the scalpel, remaining in the "fetters" to which Donne alludes. Perhaps even worse, the body of the deceased may appear to exude a liveliness without agency<sup>20</sup>. According to Katharine Park, whereas Italians understood the body and soul as immediately parting company at the moment of death, Northern Europeans inclined to view death as an extended process, with the corpse's life gradually fading during the process of decay<sup>21</sup> (115). Hence, building on Park,

Hillary Nunn argues that “onlookers in early modern London were more likely to have seen the dissector’s knife cutting into flesh from which signs of life, even if muted, still emanated” (73).<sup>22</sup> Rather than serving as an effective palliative, the image of the living, self-dissecting corpse in *Devotions* exposes the horror of anatomy as the deconstruction of the individual self along uncertain lines, blurring the boundaries between life and death, body and soul, corpse and anatomist. In this way, the text’s attempts to remedy the threat to embodied selfhood posed by anatomy actually exposes the crises of definition that put the concept of “the self” at risk.<sup>23</sup>

While Donne’s anatomy conceits in his poetry may forgo the lofty spirituality of his *Devotions*, the internal logic remains fundamentally similar: efforts to sanitize anatomy through figurative language expose the conceptual ruptures that make human dissection so disturbing. For my present purposes, I will focus on two of Donne’s anatomy poems, “The Dampe” and “The Legacie.” Like the Ninth Meditation, “The Dampe” also opens with its speaker’s body on a slab, being attended to by a group of well-meaning inquisitors:

When I am dead, and the doctors know not why,  
And my friends’ curiosity  
Will have me cut up to survey each part,  
When they shall find your picture in my heart,  
You think a sudden dampe of love  
Will thorough all their senses move,  
And work on them as me, and so prefer,  
Your murder to the name of massacre (1-8).

Here we have two unusual indices of affection: autopsy as the apex of friendship, and the face of the beloved becoming a literal coronary structure.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, the true romance of this stanza

is arguably between the speaker and the idea of his dead self. The speaker of “The Dampe” boasts a body so intact that it can be painstakingly dissembled in layers. In addition to maintaining its structural integrity, the corpse retains the desires and longings of the deceased to the point that they become legible on its flesh. The anonymous anatomists, configured again as an undifferentiated “they,”<sup>25</sup> are dwarfed by the lingering presence of the authorial “I.” Here again, we seem to see the same fantasy enacted in *Devotions*: neither death nor surgical trauma can extinguish the individual identity of the poem’s speaker.

The price of preserving the illusion of an enduring self, however, is an unsettling convergence between the corpse and the anatomists. While the speaker of “The Dampe” hardly seizes the scalpel as in the Ninth Meditation, the corpse remains an effectual actor in the world, in addition to retaining traces of life. Rather than submitting to the anatomy as an inert object, the body produces discoveries that rebound upon the anatomists. Donne may prettily attribute the anatomy’s effects to the beauty of his mistress, but it is really the revelation of his body’s interior that allows the corpse to “work on them as me,” anatomizing the anatomists by opening their channels of feeling. This potent “dampe of love” passing from cadaver to anatomists gives the unmistakable impression of contagion, as if they may literally “catch their deaths” from being too proximate to death’s handiwork (3). The corpse consumes its anatomists, however, as a direct result of their having figuratively consumed the corpse. Their intense, affective responses to seeing the hidden “picture” within the heart suggests a voyeuristic thrill afforded by peering into the secrets of the open body, to the point that they see a beautiful woman superimposed upon dead muscle (2). As a direct result of Donne’s partial reanimation of the cadaver, the body on the slab and the bodies of the anatomists enter a reciprocal relation of enmeshed flesh, imbued with life yet tainted by the touch of death.

This scene of taboo enmeshment during an anatomy is not peculiar to Donne's work. Juxtaposing a portrait of Vesalius dissecting a human hand (in which the anatomist's fingers seem to sprout from those of the flayed corpse) with Crooke's punning on hands and touch in *Microcosmographia*, Katherine Rowe argues that the anatomist simultaneously displays the corpse and his own body on the anatomy stage (34-38). The same touch that connects both bodies also "helps make the audience comfortable with the movement of the anatomist's hand in and out of the corpse"—an interpretation that does not seem to comfortably differentiate the bodies as much as it configures them as part of one morbid assemblage<sup>26</sup> (38). Luke Wilson observes a similar dynamic in his analysis of the title illustration from a 1493 edition of Mondino's *Anathomia*, which depicts an anatomist reaching into a cadaver's worm-like intestines. He observes that

What arrests attention there are not only the viscera themselves but also the surgeon's hands placed in the opening of the body; most strangely, his fingers are so similar in form to the viscera that where they meet the two can scarcely be distinguished. The fingers almost seem to have taken root in the viscera, and in a projection of our own resistance to this loss of visual differentiation, it may seem that the surgeon resists a sort of flow of his own body into that of the cadaver (66).

In both examples from Rowe and Wilson, the relations we observe in Donne's figures of speech are borne out in iconographic figures from anatomy texts of the period. While seemingly intended to display the authority of the anatomist against the impassive corpse, the points of contact between the near-indistinguishable tendrils of flayed muscle, exposed viscera, and professional fingers show both parties to be permeable to one another and entangled. In illustrations meant to differentiate bodily structures — as well as the open, criminalized body



from that of the living expert – these members are remarkably indistinct as parts of either body *and* as specific body parts: the snaky forms may be fingers, tendons, veins, unnatural umbilici linking the (seemingly) quick to the (seemingly) dead, or even mutually tasting tongues, savoring their uncanny twins in a new area of a new body. While rot does not explicitly enter the picture, these images enact the decay of “colour and proportion” from Donne’s “First Anniversarie” (250); categories and frames of reference central to anatomical inquiry are losing their definition. As in “The Dampe,” the display of anatomy implicates and preys upon the anatomist, extending, rather than delimiting, death’s figurative reach.

While it does not engage the figure of the anatomy as deeply as “The Dampe,” “The Legacie” elucidates both the abstracted appeal of anatomy metaphors and the inevitable, yet adversarial, intrusion of materiality. “The Legacie” features another self-anatomizing subject after the fashion of the Ninth Expostulation. Rather than searching for spiritual infirmities, however, this speaker seeks his heart to send to his beloved from his deathbed. Like the posthumous speaker of “The Dampe,” he narrates his self-surgery even as “[he] felt [himself] die,”<sup>27</sup> as if auto-anatomy serves as a triumphant expression of his enduring spirit that allows the poem to be crafted beyond death, in past tense (11).<sup>28</sup> His sustained animacy, however, is shadowed by estrangement from himself and his beloved. When initially searching for his own heart, he “could there find none / When I had ripp’d and search’d where hearts should lie”; having discovered “something like a heart,” he finally identifies it as her heart (“‘twas thine”) (13-14, 16, 23). In addition to making exchanging affections into a gory, black comic farce, the speaker’s imprecise anatomy shows an uncomfortable truth about the human body: on the inside, we all are far more disgusting and less special than we might hope. Though romanticized as the seat of feeling, the heart, in the hand, is a lump of flesh like any other,<sup>29</sup> and no secret engraved

image or initials identifies his from hers. In addition to collapsing differences between anatomist and corpse, the anatomy in “The Dampne” does the same with corpse and corpse – and, in this figurative context, lover and lover. While Sawday has done much to show the compatibility of the anatomy and the blazon, Donne’s example exposes how both anatomy and love poetry have an internally conflicted relationship with individuality and intimacy. Though often framed in a rhetoric of revealing “secrets,” anatomy makes secrets obsolete by visually annihilating the identity of the person who once held them<sup>30</sup>. Similarly, while the namelessness of lovers in early modern poetry fosters a sense of intimacy and privacy, the widespread manuscript circulation of countless anonymous paramours arguably makes one lovelorn swain the same as any other, their feelings as similar as the lumpen hearts hidden within their breasts. To paraphrase the refrain from “The First Anniversarie,” what we learn from this anatomy is that, once again, the superficial comfort that the speaker retains life after death masks the fundamental loss of the markers that define that self in the first place.

Between the cutting open of dead bodies, the public “sharing” of their interiors, and the dissolution of boundaries between individuals’ flesh, Donne’s representations of anatomy feature more than a whiff of the cannibalism that haunted its reputation. After all, the activities of the anatomy theater and the butcher’s stall are separated by a knife’s edge. While the implication of cannibalism hovers on the edges of Donne’s anatomy tropes, however, the suggestions seem to be attached not to the action of dissection so much as to the decay of the literal and figurative boundaries of the individual body. Indeed, within his poetry, Donne’s scrubbed images of dissection are far less graphic than either “An Epitaph on Himselfe, to the Countesse of Bedford” and “Elegie on M<sup>r</sup>. Bulstrode”: the former explicates how “Our soules become wormeaten carkasses” when beset by sin, and the latter depicts the earth as a table laden with “dishes for

Death to eat,” drawing millions “Into his bloody, or plaguy, or sterv’d jawes” (16; 6, 8). While this juxtaposition may seem to distance anatomy from cannibalism, I will demonstrate how Donne’s fearful fascination with cannibalism animates both the sanitizing instincts of his anatomy poems and the full-fledged horror of his most famous meditation on the grave, *Deaths Duell*. Whereas the anatomy poems attempt to ward off the threat of consumption by keeping their speakers uncannily alive, *Deaths Duell* uses cannibalism as a figure to work through the precise questions of materialism that Donne’s anatomies avoid: how does the utter destruction of the embodied self affect the soul?

### **Cannibalism and the Problem of Resurrection**

As demonstrated at the opening of this chapter, Donne harbored an obsession with the scattering and recollection of human flesh. While this manifests itself in different ways across his corpus, one variant, as several scholars have recognized, is an expressed fascination with idea of eating people. Louise Noble has written extensively about Donne’s fascination with corpse medicine, citing his many references to “mummy”<sup>31</sup> and, particularly, his portrayal of Elizabeth Drury as metaphorical mummy in the *Anniversaries* (131). Richard Sugg similarly notes Donne’s interest in Paracelsian balsam and mummy, but goes a tantalizing step further by arguing, based on Donne’s “XXII. Meditation” and the ailing poet’s consultation of Sir Théodore Turquet de Mayerne<sup>32</sup> during his final illness, that Donne may have consumed corpse medicine himself (34, 35). While, alas, we may never know for sure whether Donne was a literal cannibal, his printed *corpus* preserves a set of complex attitudes toward corpse medicine, all coalescing around the threat of self-loss.

Previous studies of cannibal language in Donne's work has focused on his use for corpse medicine as a trope, but I argue that, just as Donne's engagement with dissection are animated by repressed repulsion, his affinity for mummy becomes more ambivalent when he considers it as literal matter to be swallowed. Donne presents his most direct – and untroubled – statement on cannibalism in his “Obsequies to the Lord Harrington, brother to the Lady Lucy, Countesse of Bedford,” in which he writes that:

And as if man feed on mans flesh, and so  
Part of his body to another owe,  
Yet at the last Two perfect bodies rise,  
Because God knows where every Atome lyes; (53-56).

Mirroring the language of his 1627 wedding sermon, these lines from “Obsequies” suggests that, on a cosmic scale, cannibalism poses little threat: being eaten is just another fatal rearrangement of one's body, equivalent to being burnt or blown to bits, that God will eventually put to right on an atomic level. Nevertheless, in his “XXII. Meditation,” Donne suggests that participating in corpse medicine may be a more complicated affair for the person consuming it. After clarifying that autocannibalism is not a viable option for healing the sick body<sup>33</sup>, he emphatically states that the only matter worth eating must be from a dead man:

if my *body* may have any *Physicke*, any *Medicine* from another *body*, one *Man* from the flesh of another *Man* (as by Mummy, or any such *composition*,) it must bee from a man that is dead, and not, as in other *soiles*, which are never the worse for contributing their *Marle*, or their fat slime to my *ground* (456).

Here, Donne may appear to be reciting orthodox views about corpse medicine. On the mummy market, the most prized remains were those from youths who died suddenly, since it was

assumed that a slow death depleted the flesh's healing force (Noble 3). At first glance, Donne's words could be read as an articulation of patients' best interests. Nevertheless, Donne's refusal to accept cures derived from living bodies actually contradicts common practices and beliefs about corpse medicine from his time period. While far less exotic than mummy, blood was the most common substance used throughout the history of corpse medicine in Europe – and was primarily taken from healthy, living donors<sup>34</sup> (Sugg 12-14).<sup>35</sup> The Paracelsian physician Christopher Irvine, who rose to prominence during the mid-seventeenth century, even argued that living bodies produced by far the most efficacious human medical materials (46).<sup>36</sup> Given Donne's impressive literacy in the scientific discourses of his period, it is unlikely that he would be unaware of physicians' use of blood from those “which are never the worse for contributing” it to benefit other ailing patients (Donne 456). Consequently, his animus against consuming matter from a living man – juxtaposed with his apparent willingness to chow down on corpse parts – seems to be linked to personal reservations not borne out by early modern science. In the following section, I will make a case that Donne resists the idea of eating part of an animate, sentient person because of deeper anxieties about how the material intermixture of bodies<sup>37</sup> corrodes personal identity – concerns implicit to his anatomy tropes, but which animate his writing on death and decay.

### **The Cannibal and the Conqueror Worm: *Deaths Duell* and Predatory Mortality**

On the surface, my assertion that the intermixture of bodies gave Donne pause may seem ludicrous. After all, is this not the poet who wrote “The Extasie” and “The Flea”? As with his attitude toward corpse medicine, however, Donne's comfort with the idea of bodies literally melting into one another is contingent on it being an abstract erotic trope, rather than a grim

material reality. *Deaths Duell*, a Lenten sermon he delivered in 1630 that acquired a mythos as “The Doctors Owne Funerall Sermon,”<sup>38</sup> naturally contains some of Donne’s bleakest reflections on the fate of the body (Redmer). While the printed edition’s frontispiece features the famous portrait of Donne in a winding sheet, his eyes closed and mouth resting in a serene half-smile, the text of *Deaths Duell* contains little of its opening image’s gentleness: indeed, the difference between the frontispiece and text of *Deaths Duell* might be comparable to that between an abstracted anatomy trope and a fetid corpse on a slab. Starting with a comparison of the body to a building, Donne soon forsakes this figure for the more visceral metaphor of us being “brought to the jawes and teeth of death”—a trope that progresses from cliché into a fully-fleshed nightmare as his sermon progresses (2). Defamiliarizing the conventional pairing of birth and death, he identifies both with predatory violence, rather than sleep. In the cosmos of *Deaths Duell*, we begin our lives as fetal vampires in the womb, where “wee are taught cruelty, by being fed with blood, and may be damned, though wee be never borne” (6).<sup>39</sup> The grave is not much sweeter, for there “wee breed and feed, and then kill those wormes which wee our selves produc’d” (5-6).<sup>40</sup> In the latter passage, worms seem to span the roles of the corpse’s lover and offspring throughout its life cycle; as if combining Hamlet’s worst fears, the grave becomes a bed of cannibalistic incest where fecund corpses spawn, devour, and are devoured by their brood.<sup>41</sup> Like Spenser’s scenes of horror in *A View of the Present State of Ireland*, these grotesque interludes in *Deaths Duell* seem to push aside the message of the sermon — “That unto this God the Lord belong the issues of death, that is, it is in his power to give us an issue and deliverance”<sup>42</sup> — to impart one morbid truth: from womb to tomb, to be human is to cannibalize and to be cannibalized (2).<sup>43</sup>

Donne is hardly the only early modern to make this assertion, though his figurative language may be uncommonly potent. Ten years after the publication of *Deaths Duell*, Thomas Browne wrote in *Religio Medici* that

we are what we all abhorre, Anthropophagi and Caniballs, devourers not onely of men, but of ourselves; and that not in an allegory, but a positive truth; for all this masse of flesh that we behold, came in at our mouthes: this frame we look upon, hath been upon our trenchers. In briefe, we have devoured our selves” (71).

Though his tone may be one of playful sophistry, Browne fills in a temporal gap in *Deaths Duell*, suggesting that not just birth and death but the entire human lifespan is sustained by a kind of cannibalistic self-fashioning. Shakespeare’s own *Hamlet* elaborates on the mechanics of how this might work when the Prince tells a tale of a man eating a fish caught with a carrion worm from a royal tomb, showing “how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar” (4.3.31-32). While both Browne and Shakespeare seem to use the figure as social commentary, however, Donne’s tone in *Deaths Duell* is one of aghast sincerity. Compared to the other writers’ metaphorical discussions of universal cannibalism, *Deaths Duell* communicates a sense of disgust that comes from a place of literalism. In his seminal essay “On Disgust,” Aurel Kolnai articulates that “the prototypical object of disgust is. . . the range of phenomena associated with putrefaction. This includes corruption of living bodies, decomposition, dissolution, the odor of corpses, in general the transition of the living into the state of death” (53). I imagine that, for most of us, the vermiculated corpse in *Deaths Duell* qualifies as a disgusting image, in a way that the pristine, animate corpse in “The Dampe” does not. Nevertheless, the decomposition of the body may not be fully responsible for our affective response. In addition to decay, Kolnai cites “exuberant, exaggerated fertility” as a trigger for disgust, so the worms “breed[ing] and

feed[ing]” off of our moral bodies are crucial to the impact of Donne’s imagery (61; 5). While scavengers or vermin may strike us as inherently foul, Kolnai argues that “what is mentally disgusting in the idea of formless, effervescent of life, of interminable directionless sprouting and breeding, which then points so inescapably to the idea of rapid decay on a massive scale” (62). Similarly, in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller memorably refers to teeming rot as “life soup” and theorizes that “[w]hat disgusts, startlingly, is the capacity for life. . . Death thus horrifies and disgusts not just because it smells revoltingly bad, but because it is not an end to the process of living but part of a cycle of eternal recurrence” (40-41). With Kolnai and Miller’s insights in mind, I argue that *Deaths Duell* represents cannibalism and decomposition as two sides of the same revolting coin because both processes force an understanding of the human body as an assemblage, rather than as a bounded unit.<sup>44</sup> Whether through the visceral violence of being dismembered and eaten, or the slow violence of putrefaction, the body ceases to exist, yet elementally persists as part of other organisms – a phenomenon which calls both the epistemic status of individual identity and the logistics of resurrection into question.

Before exploring Donne’s relationship with the body-as-assemblage, let me first clarify what I mean by an assemblage. In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* (1980), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari first expressed the idea of an assemblage<sup>45</sup> as an elaboration upon the connective rhizome<sup>46</sup>; in other words, it is an “increase in the dimensions of a multiplicity that necessarily changes in nature as it expands those connections” (8). Adopting Deleuze and Guattari’s framework for *A New Philosophy of Society: Assemblage Theory and Social Complexity* (2006), Manuel DeLanda economically defines an assemblage as a whole composed of heterogeneous parts that operate by relations of exteriority, so “a component part of an assemblage may be detached from it and plugged into a different assemblage in which its



interactions are different” (11). While assemblage theory is often used to theorize social complexity, scholars like Jane Bennett have begun to apply it to material bodies to consider relationships and flow of agency between human and non-human entities.<sup>47</sup> If we think in a material register, assemblage theory handily shows the ramifications of both cannibalism and decomposition at stake in *Deaths Duell*. As DeLanda discusses, assemblages are defined by relations of exteriority, rather than relations of interiority, in which “the component parts are constituted by the very relations they have to other parts in the whole” (9). The human body gives the immediate impression of being a whole governed by relations of interiority: in other words, even if a body is cut apart in an anatomy, we tend to define the individual members and organs in terms of their functions that sustain the whole frame. Nevertheless, the cannibal disrupts this fiction by literalizing a transition between relations of interiority and exteriority. Reaching into the body’s interior and removing, for example, the heart, the cannibal does not destroy its status as a heart, but shows it can possess other roles than its assigned part within the body: in the hands of the cannibal, the heart ceases to be a cardiovascular laborer and becomes food. Even more distressingly, once digested by the cannibal’s stomach, the heart begins actively upholding a new body by completely different means than before. In a subtler example, the flesh of a decomposing corpse may appear to degrade from existence, but, as shown in *Deaths Duell*, it actually becomes the flesh and activity of worms and the life of the soil. Assemblage theory articulates precisely how the matter of the body disperses and continues to act in the world even after “the body” ceases to be – a reality than Donne both acknowledges and frames as threatening. The vanishing of the (mostly) intact corpse also voids the pretense of the anatomy poems that the corpse could speak poetry: the self is simply no longer there without its material anchor.

While the idea of one's dead body degenerating into raw "life soup," as Miller puts it, seems sufficiently unsettling, throughout *Deaths Duell*, Donne repeatedly emphasizes that the natural consequence of decomposition is the chaotic intermixture of bodies, leaning into the darkest suggestions of the anatomy poems. Echoing his discussion of "splinters" and "Atoms" of the human form in his 1627 wedding sermon, here, Donne portrays each corpse as not simply decomposed, but pulverized through a process akin to a second death:

[W]e must al passe this posthume death, this death after death, nay this death after burial, this dissolution after dissolution, this death of corruption and putrifaction of vermiculation and incineration, of dissolution and dispersion in and from the grave" (20).

The compounded effect of this double "dissolution" produces a result akin to the ashes of cremation, literalizing the famous phrase from the *Book of Common Prayer's* Burial Rites: "ashes to ashes; dust to dust" (485, 501). This is notable because the relative tidiness of ashes or dust<sup>48</sup> – compared to the drippings of a still-moldering corpse – makes them less likely candidates to provoke instinctive disgust, which Kolnai associates with the dampness, viscosity, and softness of rot<sup>49</sup> (51, 54). Contrary to expectation, *Deaths Duell* seems to be at its most revolted (and revolting) when discussing corpse dust because it is at that stage of disintegration that "wee see nothing that wee call that mans" (23). This phrase captures both the lack of recognizable humanity present in the dust and its disruption of any notion of personal bodily property. At the same time, the dust is "not man" as we understand our species and not "that mans" – impossible to identify as belonging to any one person for it could just as easily be "the dust of that mans worm" or "the dust of another man" (23). Dust is as inextricable from dust as the flesh of the victim is from the flesh of the cannibal.<sup>50</sup>

It is at this point of revelation that *Deaths Duell* unfurls its full capacity for disgusting expression. The suggestive, enmeshed relationship between corpse and worms from the beginning of the sermon reaches its foully consummated as “Miserable incest,” in which “the same worm must be my mother, and my sister, and my selfe” under the patriarch “Corruption” (20). At this apex of erotic horror, Donne writes that “my mouth shall be filled with dust, and the worme shall feed, and feed sweetely upon me” (21). The well-established anonymity of the “dust” within the mouth amplifies the cannibalistic and autocannibalistic resonances of the image: as extensions of one another, both the worm and Donne feed upon a diet of self and unknown other. With this in mind, the sermon’s assertions that humans of every condition will “lye down alike in the dust” and that “this whole world is but an universall churchyard, but our common grave” have more sweeping implications than simple social leveling (11). By portraying the world as a mass burial pit of immense scope, *Deaths Duell* emphasizes the sheer volume of human remains that, once degraded into dust, will be “irrevocab[ly]” mixed into non-human assemblages – an absolute expression that contradicts the certainty of resurrection (23). The worms not only act as living extensions of the manifold bodies, like the suggestive tendrils in the anatomy drawings, but they catalyze the assemblages: “the worme covers them” and “thee” alike until the distinctions between all three bodies are lost (21).

In this way, the worm acts as the morbid analogue to Donne’s infamous “Flea” who becomes the “marriage bed, and marriage temple” of the speaker and his mistress by mingling their “two bloods,” holding within it an approximation of sexual intercourse and pregnancy that makes these two into “three”<sup>51</sup> (“The Flea” 13, 4, 18). Although this speaker’s use of the flea is clearly a rhetorical ploy to coax his beloved into bed, in *Deaths Duell*, the worm fulfills and exceeds the capabilities of the flea by making every body part of the universal dust that contains

not just all human and animal remains, but “the dust of every highway, and of every dung-hill. . . puddle and pond”<sup>52</sup> (*Deaths Duell* 22). This remarkable assemblage of the living and dead, flora and fauna, clearly evokes “life soup,” but rather than seeing this mélange as including and surpassing the bounds of humanity, Donne’s sermon glosses it as “the most inglorious and contemptible vilification, the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that we can consider” (22). Here lies the crux of *Deaths Duell*: if the human body can be incorporated by base matter, its humanity is evacuated from the resulting assemblage. For a sermon pledging that God “recompact[s] this dust into the same body, and reanimate[es] the same body with the same soule,” the tone of *Deaths Duell* often conveys startling apprehension about whether the ravages of death can be reversed, even by a divine hand (23-24). (Note how the repetition of “same” here reiterates that of “mine owne” in the 1627 marriage sermon, as if the promise of resurrection must be emphatic to be believed.) Such forceful emphasis on the vanities of flesh may be glossed as a rhetorical effort to elicit wonder from his flock at the idea of a heavenly body, but his sermon does not or cannot display the resurrected body with the same vividness and clarity. As a result, despite its valiant efforts to stay on message, *Deaths Duell* shows us fear in a handful of dust,<sup>53</sup> quietly agonizing over whether any of our humanity is retrievable once it passes through “the jawes and teeth of death” (2).

I fixate on the spiritual struggles in *Deaths Duell* not to denigrate Donne’s faith – even Christ himself approached death with trepidation<sup>54</sup> – but to demonstrate the magnitude of the theological challenge of contemplating the utter destruction of one’s body. Thanks to its notion of the “second death” of decomposition, *Deaths Duell* eliminates any pretense of physical differences between those who die “good” deaths, in their beds surrounded by family, or “bad” deaths by ignominious or traumatic means, like those of the criminals sliced up in the anatomy

theater.<sup>55</sup> Due to the slow trauma of decomposition and “vermiculation,” even those who died with intact bodies are chewed up and spat out by death. Furthermore, Donne’s sermon violently disrupts the fiction of the burial plot – a privately owned and nominally “private” physical space that only the bodies of family or intimates could occupy.<sup>56</sup> As seen in “The Relique,” Donne’s speaker shares Marvell’s suspicions that the grave will not be a “private place”<sup>57</sup> but he still treats the bodies within as intact anchors that will allow lovers to eventually “meet at this grave, and make a little stay”<sup>58</sup> (Marvell 31; “The Relique” 11). Gone is that certainty in *Deaths Duell*. Peeling back the well-ordered surface of the churchyard,<sup>59</sup> the sermon reveals a chaotic, roiling mass of industrious worms and powdered corpses, without their prior distinctions of kinship, individual embodiment, or even identifiable species. While Donne takes pains to recognize that God can still see the contours of our earthly selves within the dust and will restore our bodies in the fullness of time, the temporal lag between death and resurrection – and the knowledge that our dead bodies will even temporarily be as indistinct from other matter as the formless earth at the beginning of Creation<sup>60</sup> – still haunts *Deaths Duell*. By meditating on the cannibalistic annihilation of the body, the sermon enacts an anguished attempt to reconcile the promise of heavenly salvation with the materiality of body experience.

In this way, the text reveals the enduring currency of metaphors of eating, digestion, and cannibalism for talking about death. Donne’s final sermon represents the true horror of the grave as the body simultaneously undergoing decomposition and incorporation: one’s body not only loses all physical definition and becomes indistinguishable from the uniform matter around it, but it is dispersed throughout the bodies of countless others, enduring but invisible. Even the sermon’s basic vocabulary for what happens to the corpse after death evokes digestion. Rather than “decay,” the literal and figurative “falling off” of formerly healthy flesh,<sup>61</sup> Donne repeatedly

describes bodily decomposition as a sequence of “dissolution,” “corruption,” “putrefaction,” “vermiculation,” “incineration,” and “dispersion”— a far more comprehensive process of destruction that resonates with the various definitions of “digest”: “to dissipate,” “to suppurate,” “to dissolve by the aid of heat and moisture,” “to distribute,” and, crucially, “to prepare. . . for assimilation by the system” (“digest, v.”).<sup>62</sup> The indignity of death is not the “melt[ing]” away of the deceased, in a grimly literal echo of “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning,” nor is it the soul’s discarding of the corrupted flesh, but the re-making of that flesh into something else *less* human and *less* refined before resurrection. Unlike the waste products of alchemy,<sup>63</sup> the putrid assemblages of death cannot be discarded: they must be reformed into perfect and complete dwellings for every soul. Resurrection, suggests *Deaths Duell*, is more than reconstructing a corpse after an anatomy or even than completing a puzzle of atom-sized pieces: it is a process as beyond mortal ken as un-eating a banquet – a prospect which seems to fill Donne with wonder and terror beyond endurance.<sup>64</sup>

Although *Deaths Duell* bravely persists in proclaiming its message of resurrection, the sermon clearly indicates that it is not a comfortable area of theology for mortals to consider. This perspective can be viewed as symptomatic of Donne’s struggle to sublimate the pain of his wasting illness into spiritual insight, shifting attitudes toward death in early modern England as a whole, or both. In *Death, Burial, and the Individual in Early Modern England*, Clare Gittings persuasively argues that growing popular investment in individualism during this period – Stephen Greenblatt’s celebrated paradigm of “self-fashioning” readily leaps to mind<sup>65</sup> – also correlated with increasing death anxiety.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, the portrayal of physical decay in *Deaths Duell* as “the most deadly and peremptory nullification of man, that we can consider” provides a sharp rebuke of individualism that no burial monument or memorial service can repair (22).<sup>67</sup>

Furthermore, Gittings expands that “no doubt some people, particularly among the uneducated, held extremely literal interpretations of the resurrection, making the correct burial of dead bodies a matter of vital importance in their eschatological scheme” (60). Making “correct” burial futile, the emphatic destruction and dispersal of the corpse in *Deaths Duell* taps into early modern debates about the fate of the soul, raising troubling questions for literalists and others who did not conform to church orthodoxy.

The majority of Protestant theologians of Donne’s era believed that the soul departed for its next destination, be it heaven or hell, at the moment of death (Houlbrooke 40). Nevertheless, a significant contingent of Protestants, including Martin Luther, John Frith, and William Tyndale<sup>68</sup>, believed that the soul “slept” with the body between death and resurrection, a creed sometimes called psychopannychism (40). A more radical version of this belief, mortalism, held that the soul could not be separated from the body, so both functionally “died” until the time of resurrection (41). Though often associated with the English General Baptists and radicals like Edward Wightman in the early seventeenth century, mortalism later counted Samuel Richardson, John Milton, Thomas Browne, Thomas Hobbes, and John Locke among its adherents (Houlbrooke 41; Richardson; Milton 280; Brandon 66; Jolley 383; Locke 6-11). While Donne explicitly repudiates mortalism in Easter sermon from 1624,<sup>69</sup> Ramie Targoff argues in *John Donne, Body and Soul* that “mortalism seems to have held out a strong appeal for Donne,” based on his works’ general investment in the connection between body and soul, and several suggestive lines about the soul rising or sleeping in his poetry (9).<sup>70</sup> Regardless of Donne’s private beliefs, *Deaths Duell* presents even more pressing existential problems than debates over anatomy for early modern believers, particularly if they subscribed to psychopannychism. Whereas the anatomy forced early moderns to ponder what it means to cut into semi-animate

bodies, *Deaths Duell* demands to know how that animacy relates to the dust of former flesh. If the soul “sleeps” with the body until the resurrection, then what, in the cosmos of the sermon, is the body? The intermixed, dispersed dust of *Death Duell* offers no conventional resting place for the waiting soul, demanding that it either cling to mere particles, forsaking the rest, or be shattered and scattered along with the corpse. The trauma of death and decomposition expressed in the text suggests that mortalism can be the only alternative to the soul’s immediate departure from the body. In this way, even if Donne himself does not endorse mortalism, *Death Duell* would seem to have the divergent effects of affirming the orthodox soul theory of mainstream Protestants, but pushing the sizeable minority of unconventional Protestants toward more radical heresies.

Even mortalism, however, does not represent the upper limit of heresies which haunt the margins of *Deaths Duell*. Nothing in Donne’s work may dispute the immortality of the soul, but his language of scattered atoms flirts dangerously with Lucretian atomism, which held that the soul was also a collection of atoms that dispersed at death (Palmer 9). In *De Rerum Natura*, Lucretius repudiates the possibility of resurrection thus:

Even if time should gather together our matter after death and bring it back again  
as it is now placed, and if once more the light of life should be given to us, yet it  
would not matter one bit to us that even this had been done, when the recollection  
of ourselves has once been broken asunder<sup>71</sup> (3.884-87).

In other words, even if Lucretius acknowledges physical resurrection as a possibility, he claims that the links to our prior conscious experience would be severed by the departure of the soul. Though our “lives” would be restored, our old memories and experiences would be lost to us, leaving us without the self-recognition to preserve our individuality. For Lucretius, the death of



the individual is inevitable; even immortality would entail a figurative death of earthly consciousness. Though temporally removed from Donne, Lucretius and his works grew to occupy an important space in intellectual history during the early modern period. Following the recovery of *De Rerum Natura* in 1417,<sup>72</sup> the text gradually regained wide circulation, appearing in thirty print editions and fifty-four known manuscripts by 1600 (Palmer 4). Despite the heretical status of many of Lucretius's beliefs, *De Rerum Natura* was "already stably available in every collector's library" by the time that Donne was crafting *Deaths Duell* (Palmer 238). Lucretianism can be understood to be a significant, unvoiced presence in early modern debates over the soul – a position that everyone was permitted to know, but not to endorse.<sup>73</sup> By trafficking in the language of "atoms," *Deaths Duell* cracks open the door between itself and a philosophical framework that takes for granted the destruction of individual personhood at the moment of death, without hope of recuperation. Hence, when Donne's sermon portrays death or the grave as a mouth, it takes very little extrapolation to imagine the open maw as the void of non-being – a Nietzschean abyss that reveals itself upon inward reflection.<sup>74</sup>

In sum, *Deaths Duell* expresses and invites a complex, troubled response to the specter of one's own mortality. While the spectacle of the vermiculated corpse sparks instinctive recoil, prolonged meditation on the image's implications in the sermon transforms disgust into a more intellectual and spiritual form of horror, all routed through the idea of cannibalism. In previous writing, the figure of "the cannibal," often imagined as a distant, exotic other, functioned as a theoretical test case to complicate debates over concepts like resurrection.<sup>75</sup> When Donne ponders what happens "if man feed on man's flesh" or Henry More asks if the cannibal possesses any flesh of his "own" to be resurrected, their queries destabilize the general concept of resurrection, but the cannibal serves as a comfortably remote vehicle for critique ("Obsequies"

53; Avramescu 143).<sup>76</sup> By contrast, *Deaths Duell* personalizes and generalizes the idea of cannibalism in relation to death and resurrection, implicating all humans as both victims and perpetrators. Just as we all begin life as fetal vampires in the womb, so shall we end it in the earth, producing ravenous worms which devour and blend our bodies with those of our neighbors: kings with peasants, criminals with anatomists (*Deaths Duell* 6, 20-21). Whether this condition is temporary or permanent, *Deaths Duell* indelibly portrays the disappearance of the individual into a mass – the same horror of collectivity expressed by many early modern narratives of cannibalism in which foreign others treat “flesh as the property of the entire group” (Avramescu 216).<sup>77</sup> Essentially, *Deaths Duell* amplifies the conventional *memento mori* by deconstructing it: in the place of a recognizably human skeleton, the universal dust of the dead forces a society increasingly invested in individualism to confront the negation of the self and of self-ownership – possibly for all time.

### **Of Meat and Metaphor: Re-Thinking Figurative Language and Textuality**

As with Spenser’s works in the previous chapter, cannibal tropes in *Deaths Duell* prove themselves to be too visceral and challenging to prevailing understandings of personhood to be subdued by doctrine. Rather than pressing on fears of barbarity and bodily trauma that permeate the former, however, the predatory language of the sermon speaks to metaphysical threats. Instead of the *Faerie Queene*’s scenes of biting and gnawing teeth, *Deaths Duell* portrays the grave as a metaphorical stomach where the integrity of physical forms melts away along with the illusion of a continuous, autonomous self. With this in mind, it is perhaps unsurprising that Donne’s poetry tidies up its visions of the grave, offering instead the conventional images of skeletons that can clearly be linked to the identities of Donne’s speakers (and their many

mistresses).<sup>78</sup> As shown through Donne's anatomy poems, however, the sanitized representations of death do not erase the attached anxieties, but express them in different forms. Regardless of the mode of expression, bodily tropes are infested with materialism – or, to adapt Samuel Johnson's pejorative definition of the metaphysical conceit, they are “yoked”<sup>79</sup> to one another. Each of Donne's figures from this chapter has been shackled to a corpse, whether rotting in the open or wrapped in the rhetorical equivalent of perfumed cerecloth. The cannibalistic quality of Donne's tropes for both anatomy and decay expresses the mutual permeability of both categories, as taboo sites of the intermixture of flesh.

Through their emphasis on bodily enmeshment and reciprocity, Donne's cannibal tropes also demand a deeper engagement with his take on the early modern “body-as-book” metaphor. Donne's corpus testifies to the easy slippage between concepts of embodiment and textuality, with varied degrees of abstraction and realism. The corpse read by the anatomists in “The Dampe” has been described by Elaine Scarry as opening “*as though it were the layers of a book*” (84); furthermore, in his “Sermon CXVII,” Donne urges his congregation to “[t]urn over all the folds and plaits of thine own heart, and find there the infirmities and waverings of thine owne faith,” as if they can make themselves into a legible text (66). A specific variant of Donne's sanitized autopsies, this fantasy not only overwrites the bloody, speechless chaos of the human interior, but eliminates the realist's need for “punctuality”<sup>80</sup>: these “folds and plaits” can be flipped back and forth with the ease of the “anatomy flaps” which gave sixteenth-century medical illustrations the impression of time lapse without urgency (Rifkin 25).<sup>81</sup> By transforming a gross, unstable body – which can be physically and semiotically eaten away – into textual flesh to be “read upon,” Donne's work initially seems to idealize a book as an anatomized body freed from decay (*Devotions* 48).

If the boundary between flesh and text is made porous, however, then materiality also infects the realm of text. Consider Donne's comparison of excerpts from Coryat's *Crudities* to criminal bodies "cut in anatomies," which praises both sources of knowledge as doing "public good" but positions the book as a semi-animate, violated corpse<sup>82</sup> ("Upon Mr. Thomas Coryat's *Crudities*" 54). In a similar vein, "Satyre II" makes a bold, if profane, claim for authorial property, but transforms the book into an extension of the author's own "meate"<sup>83</sup>, vulnerable to being chewed apart by poachers and philistines (29-30).<sup>84</sup> Rather than treating written works as a stable, sublimated version of authorial flesh, Donne's verses reveal the precariousness and liminality of text. If bodies are indeed books, and vice versa, then books occupy the same grey area as the corpse: imbued with humanity, but not a part of it, neither alive nor definitively dead.<sup>85</sup> The corpse lives insofar that it expresses agency through the bodies of others: though no longer alive, the speaker of "The Dampe" subjects his anatomists to a fatal, erotic miasma, just as real early modern corpses were given the power to accuse and condemn the living through practices like cruentation, which held that a dead body would bleed afresh in the presence of its murderer.<sup>86</sup> Similarly, in "Concerning a printed book which, when it was borrowed, was torn to pieces by the children in the house, and was later returned in manuscript"<sup>87</sup>, Donne alludes to a volume that was obviously the object of physical violence, but clarifies that a book "dies" only when it ceases to interact with human readers: "Any book abandoned on bookshelves to moths and dust, / if it be dyed with blood of the press, dies" (5-6). Though the limits of materiality may seem to jeopardize the stories we tell ourselves, as in "The First Anniversary," the enmeshment of contingent bodies – flesh and text – allows them to express life and animacy through one another, even as they are also touched with death.<sup>88</sup> My next chapter, by contrast, will shift the

conversation away from anxieties about enmeshment and contingency and toward its radical acceptance, using the work of Richard Crashaw.

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<sup>1</sup> From “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning” (5).

<sup>2</sup> Donne uses a similar image in his 1623 Easter Sermon, describing “when our bodies are dissolved and liquefied in the sea, putrified in the earth, resolved to ashes in the fire, macerated in the air” (“Sermon XVI” 322).

<sup>3</sup> In *City of God*, Augustine rules that, if a staving man eats of another man’s corpse, the “borrowed” flesh should be restored to the original owner during the resurrection (Avramescu 129, 134; Augustine 22.20). By contrast, Boyle argues that human remains could pass through a digestive tract with their “material corpuscles” intact, based on the amount of flux a normal human body undergoes on a regular basis (138-39; Boyle 198, 202-3).

<sup>4</sup> It is fitting that the world’s “consuming wound” results from the loss of Drury as its “preservative,” since this metaphor, as convincingly argued by Louise Noble, treats Elizabeth Drury as ingestible mummy (31).

<sup>5</sup> Along these lines, Crooke himself offered three principles to guide dissection that can also be construed as narrative options: one can proceed in order of “dignitie” (beginning with the noble brain), in order of “situation” (in which one works from the outside to the inside of the corpse), and, finally, in order of “diurtunity” (in which one starts with the parts which rot the fastest). Just as Donne suggests, the third principle was the course most often followed; decay literally offered no time for dignity (Tarlow 77).

<sup>6</sup> Philbert Guibert’s elaborate instructions for embalming from 1629 states that the drained, de-organged, and cotton-packed corpse should be washed with turpentine, bound with cerecloth, and sprinkled with aromatic herbs (146).

<sup>7</sup> I will be using the words “anatomy,” “dissection,” and “autopsy” to denote cutting open a dead body for exploratory purposes. In certain contexts, however, I will differentiate “anatomy” and “dissection” (focused on internal structures and general knowledge) from “autopsy” (focused on the narrative of an individual body).

<sup>8</sup> Anatomical studies were practically abandoned during the medieval period after Pope Boniface VIII issued a bull excommunicating anyone who dissected or otherwise cut up a human body (Quigley 293).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Sugg used May’s turn of phrase for the title of his book *Murder After Death: Literature and Anatomy in Early Modern England*. For my in-text references, I will differentiate the books as *MAD* and *MCV*.

<sup>10</sup> Ruth Richardson’s *Death, Dissection, and the Destitute* offers an extensive account of how this academically-minded grave robbing continued into the early nineteenth century.

<sup>11</sup> Consider Sir Toby Belch’s black comic promise from *Twelfth Night*: “For Sir Andrew, if he were open’d / and you find so much blood in his liver, as will clog the / foot of a flea, I’ll eat the rest of th’anatomy!” (3.2.60-62). Similarly, in Shirley’s *The Wedding*, Cameliion cries “let me beg his body for an anatomy; I have a great / mind to eat a piece on him” (3.2.298-99).

<sup>12</sup> See Thomas Rogers’s *The Anatomie of the Mind* (1576), John Lyly’s *The Anatomie of Wit* (1579), Philip Stubbes’s *The Anatomie of Abuse* (1583), Robert Greene’s *The Anatomie of Fortune* (1584), Thomas Nashe’s *The Anatomie of Absurditie* (1590), Thomas Bell’s *The Anatomie of Popish Tyrannie* (1603), James Mason’s *The Anatomie of Sorcerie* (1612), Strode’s *The Anatomie of Mortalitie* (1618), Henry Hutton’s *Follie’s Anatomie* (1619), Richard Brathwait’s *The Anatomie of Vanitie*, Richard Burton’s *The Anatomie of Melancholie* (1621), Immanuel Bourne’s *The Anatomie of Conscience* (1623), O.A.’s *The Anatomie of Protestancie* (1623), and George Lauder’s *The Anatomie of the Roman Clergy* (Tarlow 60). This titling convention persisted well into the seventeenth century.

<sup>13</sup> Indeed, modern medical students from our age of refrigeration and formaldehyde still complain that even observing an autopsy causes the smell of death to permeate one’s skin, hair, and clothing (Quigley 119).

<sup>14</sup> Of course, there are also many who are pointedly not interested in sanitizing anatomy and instead invoke its punitive or horrifying potential. See Ferdinand’s rants in *The Duchess of Malfi*, for example.

<sup>15</sup> Here, I am drawing from Judith Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which states that “[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance” and that relationship between reiterated behaviors is not “as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy” (33, 31).

<sup>16</sup> Compare to these similar lines from Old Carter in Rowley, Dekker, and Ford’s *The Witch of Edmonton*: “Should I diet three days at one of / the slender city suppers, you might send me to Barber-Surgeons’ / Hall the fourth day to hang up for an anatomy” (1.2.30-33).

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<sup>17</sup> Donne's "Sermon CXVII: Preached at St. Paul's Upon Christmas-Day, 1621" also used this figure, but directed it outward toward his congregation: "Turn over all the folds and plaits of thine own heart, and find there the infirmities and waverings of thine owne faith. . ." (66).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, in the *Discoverie of Guiana*, Raleigh alludes several times to the "Canibals" (Caribs) as traffickers in women and children (83, 85, 111).

<sup>19</sup> Donne further undermines the ultimate authority of anatomists in Expostulation 22, writing that "'no Anatomist can say, in dissecting a *body*, here lay the *coale*, the *fuell*, the *occasion* of all *bodily diseases*" (138). While he uses this metaphor to express that one can never completely know one's own soul, this turn of phrase levels the ground between anatomist and subject by placing them both in a position of relative ignorance. If materiality does not equal legibility, then the body is guaranteed to keep some of its own secrets. On secret interiors and dissection, see Park's *The Secrets of Women*.

<sup>20</sup> The words "agent" and "agency" actually entered general English usage during the late sixteenth century, sourced from legal and medical texts (Rowe 26).

<sup>21</sup> While Park focuses on the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries, she argues that her claims hold true for later eras of the early modern period (114). Ruth Richardson offers evidence of these anxieties and beliefs persisting well into the nineteenth century (15-17).

<sup>22</sup> Nunn's point evokes the famous image of Hogarth's *The Reward of Cruelty* from *The Four Stages of Cruelty* (1751), depicting an agonized corpse protesting its dissection in progress while a dog eats the fallen scraps of organs under the table.

<sup>23</sup> Elaborating on this point, Sarah Tarlow writes "in this period, the potency of the anatomy metaphor, and the real terror many people had of anatomists, came in large measure from the tension between a kind of self that was located in an individualized and unique body and that body's dismemberment or even annihilation" (61).

<sup>24</sup> This image evokes a legend of Chiara di Montefalco; after the saint's death, the image of a crucifix was found within Chiara's heart because God "delighted it" (Park 42).

<sup>25</sup> Compare to Ninth Meditation and Expostulation.

<sup>26</sup> The assemblage will be discussed in greater detail in the subsequent section on *Deaths Duell*.

<sup>27</sup> While the speaker of "The Legacie" sweetly claims that "I die / As often as from thee I go," the anatomy trope in the second stanza imbues this old chestnut with a greater deal of visceral seriousness (1-2).

<sup>28</sup> Comparatively, Donne's poems about bodies in graves tend to be narrated in future tense as the speaker ponders his eventual fate. Furthermore, these poems focus on the activities or emotions of outside observers, since the speaker's body is no longer inhabited and survivors may do with it what they will.

<sup>29</sup> As memorably stated by William Ian Miller, "[s]kin not only covers our polluting and oozing innards but also allows us the illusion that the heart can be a seat of love and courage rather than just a pulsing slithery organ" (52).

<sup>30</sup> Nunn connects the withholding of the corpse's name in public dissections with this process of depersonalization and objectification (36).

<sup>31</sup> Most infamously, the "mummy possesst" of "Love's Alchymie" (24).

<sup>32</sup> Mayerne was a Swiss-born physician and Paracelsian who treated royalty in both France and England. Due to the title of Donne's 8<sup>th</sup> Meditation, "The king sends his own physician," it is generally agreed that Donne was treated by Mayerne (Sugg 49). Mayerne's documented use of corpse medicine leads Sugg to argue that he may have given the poet mummy or powdered skull to treat his typhus (50-51).

<sup>33</sup> "[N]o part of my *body*, if it were cut off, would *cure* another part; in some cases it might *preserve* a sound part, but in no case *recover* an infected" ("Meditation XXII" 456).

<sup>34</sup> In addition to the ingestion of blood or its use in poultices, transfusions were being pioneered in Europe during this period. See Holly Tucker's *Blood Work: A Tale of Murder and Medicine in the Scientific Revolution*, surrounding a notorious case in France.

<sup>35</sup> Due to the equal prominence of blood-letting as a cure, patients would take advantage of the leftovers – sometimes consuming the blood from others, sometimes the blood recently tapped from their own veins (Sugg 14).

<sup>36</sup> Irvine's conclusion hinged on his belief that human blood contained curative "vital spirits" (46). His contemporary physician Daniel Border also refined fresh blood for this reason (43).

<sup>37</sup> I say "literal intermixture" in part to differentiate Donne's love of the trope of intermixture versus his hesitancy about the thing itself. Sex is a notable exception, but sex also does not result in the disruption of one's bodily integration (unless one acquires syphilis).

<sup>38</sup> In his preface to the printed edition, Redmer attributes this turn of phrase to those in "his Majesties household" and presents the title as well-earned, writing "It was preached not many dayes before his death; as if, having done this, there remained nothing for him to doe, but to die."

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<sup>39</sup> According to early modern medical discourse, babies could technically be considered vampires after birth as well, because breast milk was thought to be a purified form of blood. See Isidore of Seville's *Etymologiarum*, 11.1.77; Hippocrates's *Aphorisms*, 5.37, 52; and Galen's *On the Usefulness of the Parts of the Body*, 2.639.

<sup>40</sup> Donne expands upon on this image in *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, writing "And then as the other world produces Serpents, and Vipers, malignant and venomous creatures, and Wormes, and Caterpillars, that endeavor to devoure that world which produces them, and Monsters compiled and complicated of divers parents, and kinds, so this world, our selves, produces all these in us, in producing diseases, and sicknesses, of all those sorts; venomous and infectious diseases, feeding and consuming diseases, and manifold and entangled diseases, made up of many several ones. And can the other world name so many venomous, so many consuming, so many monstrous creatures, as we can diseases of all these kindes?" (16-17). Note his emphasis on consumption, whether by disease or vermin.

<sup>41</sup> Compare to Andrew Marvell's "To His Coy Mistress": "then worms shall try / That long preserved virginity" (27-28). Christopher Ricks also identifies a crude association between sex and death at the end of Donne's "Farewell to Love"—"if all fail, / 'Tis but applying worm-seed to the tail"—in which he glosses the phallic "tail" as "food for worms and limp as a worm" (Donne 39-40; Ricks 35). See also Lord Hamlet's disgust at the thought of his mother and Claudius between their "incestuous sheets" (Shakespeare 1.2.58), and the ghost's repetition of the image at 1.5.73 ("A couch for luxury and damnèd incest"); see also Hamlet's speech about the "convocation of politic worms" devouring Polonius: "Your worm is your only emperor for diet. We fat all creatures else to fat us, and we fat ourselves for maggots" (4.3.22-25). Donne later refers in *Deaths Duell* to the grave's "Miserable incest" (20), which this chapter will soon discuss in greater detail. Lévi-Strauss also notably referred to cannibalism as "an alimentary form of incest" (141).

<sup>42</sup> *Deaths Duell* is a meditation on Psalm 68:20: "He that is our God is the God of salvation; and unto God the Lord belong the issues from death" (*The Holy Bible, KJV*).

<sup>43</sup> Early modern natural philosophers believed that worms could come from "snow, humidity, fowl water, slime of wells, vinegar, wine, old wax, dried sweat of animals and humans, fire, paper, dust, books, and even stones," in addition to flesh (Bailey 222). In other words, all matter was "enwormed," but those described in *Deaths Duell* came specifically from the corpse, making their digestion of the corpse either cannibalism or autocannibalism, depending on the degree to which one sees them as enduring extensions of the corpse or as separate entities (222).

<sup>44</sup> Donne acknowledges that the human body is made up of tiny atoms, but they "belong" to said body and will be restored in the fullness of time. In the context of an assemblage, however, this sense of belonging is contingent on context: the atoms belong to the body as long as they are part of the bodily assemblage, but they may break off and be absorbed into a completely different assemblage.

<sup>45</sup> From the French "*agencement*."

<sup>46</sup> For the sake of the present argument, I do not wish to become too deeply mired in Deleuze and Guattari's rich, metaphoric vocabulary. For more on their iterations of the rhizome and assemblage, see the introductory chapter to *A Thousand Plateaus* (3-25).

<sup>47</sup> See Bennett's *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (2009).

<sup>48</sup> Ronald Blythe's *Akenfield: Portrait of an English Village* drives this point home when it quotes sixty-one-year old gravedigger William "Tender" Russ speaking to the particulars of burial in an English climate: "Dust to dust they say. It makes me laugh. Mud to mud, more like. Half the graves round here are water-logged" (qtd. in Quigley 229).

<sup>49</sup> Again, while one would suspect to see more disgusting content in the innards of Donne's anatomy poems, it is precisely those triggers for disgust which his tropes sanitize.

<sup>50</sup> Emily King confronts this issue of inextricable, hybridized flesh in Marston's *Antonio's Revenge* in "Spirited flesh: The animation and hybridization of flesh in the early modern imaginary."

<sup>51</sup> Followers of Aristotle in the early modern period believed pregnancy to be the result of mixing menstrual blood and semen, held to be a form of purified blood (Laqueur 145).

<sup>52</sup> In this way, argues Amanda Bailey, "[w]orm activities demonstrated that putrefaction often was associated not with mortality so much as with materiality" (222).

<sup>53</sup> Thanks to T.S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* (30).

<sup>54</sup> "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as thou wilt." (*KJV* Matthew 26:39)

<sup>55</sup> Here, I, of course, refer to any distinctions between the conditions of the remains. Early modern notions of what defined a "good" or "bad" death also took into account the dying person's somatic experience and their spiritual condition at the hour of death (Becker 69).

<sup>56</sup> See, for instance, Donne's metaphor from his "Epithalamion Made at Lincolns Inn" in which he describes how the bodies of the newlyweds in bed "print / Like to a grave"—a metaphor that portrays the grave as a place of secret

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intimacy (4-5). The introduction to Jeffrey Masten's *Textual Intercourse* also focuses on the clandestine erotics of co-burials, using Fletcher and Massinger as a case study (1-2).

<sup>57</sup> Like Donne, Marvell predicts the unwanted company of "worms," in this case "try[ing]" the "long preserved virginity" of his beloved (27, 28).

<sup>58</sup> Indeed, in "The Anniversary," Donne's speaker angles to share a single grave with his beloved to ensure that "death were no divorce," reinforcing the importance of an anchor location if the resurrected lovers mean to reunite (12).

<sup>59</sup> The effect is comparable to that of a famous early sequence in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, in which a shot of a well-manicured suburban lawn zooms in to reveal a nest of writhing carrion insects beneath the grass.

<sup>60</sup> "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep" (John 1:1-2, *KJV*).

<sup>61</sup> See literal and figurative importance of "falling off" to decay in its *OED* entry: "1a. to fall off (in quality or condition). . .2a. to fall off or decrease. . .3a. to fall into physical ruin. . .4. to fall off in vital energy" ("decay," v.)

<sup>62</sup> Indeed, the most substantial difference between cannibalism and decomposition here seems to be whether the chewing takes place at the beginning or in the middle of the process, in the form of "vermiculation."

<sup>63</sup> James R. Keller argues that Donne uses alchemical language in *Deaths Duell* to portray the spiritual perfection of the soul through the decay of the body, but I counter that Donne's obsession with physical resurrection adds a problematic complication to this metaphor.

<sup>64</sup> After all, even the death of a God could not fully undo the eating of two simple apples. In terms of how early modern theologians tackled this question, Ralph Houlbrooke summarizes in *Death, Religion, and the Family in England, 1480-1750* that "[i]t was, they often concluded, difficult for human intellects to comprehend how corporeal elements thoroughly dispersed and seemingly transformed might be reassembled into a living body" (42).

<sup>65</sup> See Stephen Greenblatt's *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (1980).

<sup>66</sup> Gittings uses renewed efforts to physically separate the living from the dead, intellectual emphasis on the discontinuity between body and soul, the spread of coffining and embalming, and the proliferation of monuments and remembrances for the dead as evidence of this anxiety (13-14). She also acknowledges her a debt to Philippe Ariès's foundational work on the interplay between death and individualism in French history (11).

<sup>67</sup> Cannibalism itself can also be seen as an affront to individualism.

<sup>68</sup> Tyndale and Frith's faith in this regard may not have been completely clear cut, but Houlbrooke maintains that they "inclined toward this notion" (40).

<sup>69</sup> "Now a Resurrection of the soule, seemes an improper, an impertinent, an improbable, an impossible forme of speech; for, Resurrection implies death, and the soule does not dye in her passage to Heaven" (6:74).

<sup>70</sup> Targoff cites verse epistle "The Storme," in which Donne's speaker refers to "sin-burd'ned soules [that] from graves will creepe, / At the last day," and alludes loosely to several Holy Sonnets (9; Donne 47-48).

<sup>71</sup> "Hinc indignatur se mortuum esse creatum, / nec videt in vera nullum fore morte allium se / qui possit vivus sibi se lugere peremptum / stansque iacentum se lacerari urive dolere" (Lucretius 3.884-87).

<sup>72</sup> The text reappeared in Europe due to Poggio Bracciolini (Palmer 4).

<sup>73</sup> The Fifth Lateran Council of 1513 made it mandatory for all Christians to believe in the immortality of the soul, an act which Ada Palmer judges to be "necessitated by concerns that the soul's immortality was being freshly thrown into doubt" (29). For more on the reading and reception of Lucretius during the early modern period, see Palmer's instructive book *Reading Lucretius in the Renaissance*. See Gerard Passanante's chapter "The Philologist and the Epicurean" for his reflections on how Lucretius's fixation on the death of everything – even his own work – posed challenges to his editors and interpreters during this period.

<sup>74</sup> "And if thou gaze long into an abyss, the abyss will also gaze into thee" (Nietzsche 41).

<sup>75</sup> As Peggy Reeves Sanday observes, in literal and metaphorical capacities, "[c]annibalism is never just about eating but is primarily a medium for non-gustatory messages – messages having to do with the maintenance, regeneration, and, in some cases, the foundation of the cultural order" (3).

<sup>76</sup> Cătălin Avramescu identifies the cannibal as a vehicle used for the critique of Christianity, particularly in service of the "growing hostility" toward the idea of literal resurrection of flesh in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries (152, 140).

<sup>77</sup> Avramescu identifies cannibalism as part of larger stock narratives about "savage communism" abroad, in which indigenous peoples share also share property and wives (216).

<sup>78</sup> See, for example, "The Relique" or the pacific reference to "Rest of their bones" in "Holy Sonnet X" (8).

<sup>79</sup> Johnson described the metaphysical conceit as "most heterogeneous ideas yoked by violence together" (in Shawcross xvii).



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<sup>80</sup> For this point, I am indebted to Deann Armstong of Vanderbilt University.

<sup>81</sup> Rifkin writes that “these flaps serve as a pragmatic instruction, aping on paper the process of dissection. It is science with a twist, as the user becomes an agent of time, meting out a sequence of disintegration to these figures” (25).

<sup>82</sup> “The bravest heroes, for public good, / Scattered in divers lands their limbs and blood; / Worst malefactors, to whom men are prize, / Do public good, cut in anatomies; / So will thy book in pieces. . .” (50, 51-55).

<sup>83</sup> Donne’s other satires persist in this cannibal idiom: the speaker of “Satyre IV” vomits when force-fed a courtier’s “home-meats” and “Satyre V” colorfully describes “officers” as “Are the devouring stomacke, and Suiters / The excrements, which they voyd” (109; 17-19).

<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the Humanist digestive trope for reading and imitation makes even reverent consumption into a potential liability. For more on “Satyre II,” see Trevor Cook’s “‘The meat was mine’: Donne’s ‘Satyre II’ and the Prehistory of Proprietary Authorship.”

<sup>85</sup> Donne identifies books with corpses on numerous other occasions; see his reference to his “carcase verses” in “A Funerall Elegie,” or to bodies “print[ing] / like to a grave” in his “Epithalamion Made at Lincolns Inn” (14; 4-5).

<sup>86</sup> For more on the specifics of this practice and its status in law, see Malcolm Gaskill’s *Crime and Mentalities in Early Modern England*, p. 216-34.

<sup>87</sup> Though the title is given in English, the poem was originally written in Latin around 1612 and is thought to have been addressed to Dr. Richard Andrews, Donne’s doctor who attended him during a stomach illness (Hurley 115).

<sup>88</sup> This project leaves much room for re-thinking the implications of the body-book metaphor through assemblages.

## CHAPTER 3

### To Serve Man<sup>1</sup>: Cannibal Translation and the Crashavian Eucharist

“It has become almost obligatory,” writes Eugene R. Cunnar, “to begin an essay on Crashaw by explaining his disparaging treatment at the hands of critics over the years”<sup>2</sup> (99). Indeed, Richard Crashaw’s reputation as canonical whipping boy is hardly a secret: despite a relatively recent scholarly appraisal, owing much to the labors of Richard Rambuss<sup>3</sup>, Crashaw’s work has been characterized by a hail of unsavory adjectives including (but not limited to) “distressing,” “humiliating,” “revolting,” “grotesque,” “repulsive,” “disturbing,” “perverse,” and “psychotic.”<sup>4</sup> Be this as it may, and though some unflattering evaluations of Crashaw may be referenced in the course of argument, this chapter is largely unconcerned with legitimating or defending Crashaw’s poetic worth. (Indeed, this project as a whole can hardly claim the high ground of good taste.) Rather than attempting to soften harsh edges or sponge away effluvia from his corpus, I will be unapologetically engaging with some of Crashaw’s most graphic and least loved verses. By treating Richard Crashaw as a poet, rather than a charity case or eccentric relation whose behavior must be excused in hushed tones, I aim to clarify some of the misunderstood mechanics of Crashaw’s poetry that are too often lost in discussions over his essential vision.

Among seventeenth-century poets, Richard Crashaw is frequently treated as a man apart in style, as well as in spiritual kink. Alexander Pope seemed only to have been able to perceive Crashaw’s poetics in terms of lack, writing that “all that regards Design, Form, Fable (which is the Soul of Poetry), all that concerns exactness, or consent of parts, (which is the Body) will probably be wanting” (140). Critics focusing on what Crashaw’s work *was*, as opposed to what it

was not, however, largely identified his image-dense devotional poetry as throwbacks to early modern emblem books. Depicting Crashaw as isolated from other Christian writers of his time<sup>5</sup>, Barbara Lewalski claims that the poet drew his inspiration from Jesuit sources of the Renaissance that were inspired in turn by non-Biblical religious texts (12). Paul T. Graham decisively identifies Crashaw as “a counter-Reformation figure” and “a medievalist” (20). In his celebrated study of Crashaw from 1925, Mario Praz painted a more varied picture of Crashaw’s influences, including emblem books, the devotional poetry of Italy and Spain, writings of the church fathers, St. Teresa, Jesuit Latin epigrammists, Marino, Laudianism, Little Gidding, and Herbert (19). While this may appear to introduce more texture to the poet’s reference palette, scholars of Crashaw typically read his work through a teleological lens focused on his conversion: in other words, Crashaw’s Laudian sources are interpreted as the gateway drugs to hardcore Catholicism. Both Sarah Covington and Alison Shell have introduced welcome complexity to this axiom by pointing out that the lines between Catholic and Protestant modes of poetic expression are not always clearly defined<sup>6</sup> – ambiguities which retrospective readings of Crashaw tend to erase. Despite these wisps of grey, however, discussions of Crashaw’s style still largely take the form of black-and-white comparisons of Catholic and Protestant poetics, positioning Crashaw as a figure of sensual, imagistic excess against the dense, cerebral devotional verse of Donne or Herbert. This flattening of Crashaw into an avatar of popery, however, means that scholars often limit our critical engagement with his work by assuming that his craft could not keep up with his spiritual ambition.

The framing of Crashaw’s relationship to the Catholic emblem book tradition<sup>7</sup> is an example par excellence of this interpretive tendency. I am hardly disputing that Crashaw’s work owes a significant debt to emblem books, as numerous critics have thoughtfully observed<sup>8</sup>.

Nevertheless, the intense imagery of his work – treated implicitly or explicitly as a synonym for Catholicism – is used to portray his poetry as the static or dysfunctional offspring of a spiritual orientation that repelled his readers. Among the more sympathetic interpreters of Crashaw, Marc Bertonasco observes that “[t]he emblematic pattern of most of Crashaw’s imagery is the key to its most disturbing features”– a relatable sentiment for anyone who has encountered the wound-mouths in “On the Wounds of Our Crucified Lord” or the notorious bloody “teat” of “Luke 11: Blessed Be the Paps Which Thou Hast Sucked” (28). The unsettling quality of Crashaw’s imagery, however, has often been portrayed as the result of a failure of communication between poet and readers. Bertonasco lays fault firmly at the feet of unfit readers, writing that

Some readers visualize the images too vividly; they dwell too long on concrete elaborations. Where the poet expects them to meditate or at least grasp a concept, they remain immersed in sensuous particulars. Mario Praz complains that far too often the Baroque poets ended up by materializing the spiritual rather than spiritualizing the temporal, but perhaps modern readers rather than Baroque poets are guilty (16).

By contrast, Robert Adams famously criticized Crashaw for rendering “basically intellectual paradox[es]” in the “highly concrete form” that Bertonasco attributes to readerly sensuality. Kimberly Johnson entertains a similar conclusion when she proposes that “[p]erhaps the documented failure of most of Crashaw’s readers to spiritualize the physical is a consequence not of their ritual unpreparedness but rather of the poem’s insistence on language that refuses to give way to the spiritual” (38). If these complaints sound familiar, then it is because they mirror this project’s approach to cannibal metaphor: the attractive, but overly visceral figures of flesh-eating divert attention from the abstract meanings that they are meant to signal. Given his work’s

penchant for scenes of ecstatic, Eucharistic gore, could these critiques of Crashaw's verse – as static, overly concrete, or just plain gross – be reducible to a problem of representing cannibalism?

It is tempting to receive Crashaw as a poet who foundered upon the treacherous ground of cannibal metaphors, given his Baroque portrayals of human consumption as well as the number of critics who evaluate his work in terms of “taste.”<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, I counter that Crashaw's cannibal tropes function differently, and more coherently, than those of Spenser or Donne. Whereas, in Spenser and Donne, the vivid materiality of their metaphors refuses to yield to the conceptual, Crashaw's reliance on emblematic imagery makes his verse an uncommonly hospitable haven for the cannibal: the potency of the image is allowed and even encouraged to take precedence. It would be imprecise, however, to reduce Crashaw's poetics to an enmeshed trinity of the “emblematic,” “Catholic,” and “cannibalistic,” an oversimplification that also reifies conflated stereotypes of popery from his time period. More to the point, the simple intensity of Crashaw's images does not make imagery the sum total of his poetics. From critical charges of expressive failure discussed above to Ruth Wallerstein's progress narrative of Crashaw's images finally maturing into symbol, prevailing readings of Crashaw assume that the meaning of his poetry resides exclusively in the images (Wallerstein 11). By contrast, though the spectacularity of Crashaw's images of the Eucharist may monopolize our attention, he embeds much of his commentary about the sacrament not in, but *around* the images. While the harmonious relationship between cannibal image and its framing gives the illusion of transparency – in contrast to the more obvious moments of fracture explored within the preceding chapters on Spenser and Donne – I argue that Crashaw creates a cannibal mode of expression that is subtly articulate: by treating cannibalism as one part of a semiotically rich

ritual, he communicates his spiritual truth through the circumstances of the act, avoiding the silencing effect of the moment of taboo consumption.

In this way, Crashavian criticism may profit from taking some cues from the field of anthropology. In *Divine Hunger: Cannibalism as a Cultural System*, Peggy Reeves Sanday opens her study with the observation that “cannibalism is clearly not a unitary phenomenon but varies with respect to both cultural content and meaning” (x). In other words, it is not the fact of ingesting human flesh that has inherent significance, but the ritual enclosing it that imbues it with symbolic weight. Ceremony is what gives structure, particularity, and coherence to cannibalism, differentiating the Christian rite of the Eucharist from the custom of funerary cannibalism among the Wari’ in Brazil.<sup>10</sup> A cultural outsider, however, must be willing to intellectually or emotionally engage with the ceremony in order to access the contextual significance of the cannibal practice. Numerous medieval and early modern writers illustrate some awareness of the particularity of cannibalism; Richard Sugg claims that literate Elizabethans would have learned about funerary cannibalism from the Classics, and authors like Montaigne, Mandeville, and de Léry draw distinctions between different forms of cannibalism abroad by describing their particular rituals and rationales,<sup>11</sup> creating precedents for understanding anthropophagy as a situated act (Sugg 118).

Reactions of disgust or contempt toward cannibalism, however, tend to erase these nuances by fixating on meat instead of method. While one could offer countless examples of condescending early modern accounts of “cannibal”<sup>12</sup> tribes in the new World, these attitudes were also directed toward Catholics – even those who did not articulate their faith in as visceral terms as Crashaw – in debates over transubstantiation. Citing examples like Reginald Scot’s claim that Catholics “teare Christ’s humane substance [. . .], eate him up raw, and swallow down

into their guts every member and parcel of him,”<sup>13</sup> Marjorie Owens observes that “Protestant polemicists could not write about Transubstantiation without fantasizing about the Eucharist as an emphatically fleshy body which is ground between the teeth, digested in the entrails, and excreted as stool,” using concreteness as a bludgeon against their opponents (208). While effectively shocking, this reductive rhetorical technique erases any sense of the Eucharist as a situated or spiritual act. Even if one believes that transubstantiation is cannibalism, this does not mean that it is evacuated of intent, purpose, or ritual. To elaborate on Georges Bataille’s observation that “[t]ransgression is itself organized,” different forms of a general transgression – in this case, cannibalism – are embedded within equally distinct systems of meaning, which become invisible if all variations on a behavior are collapsed into one category of taboo (108). In this vein, I argue that many critics of Crashaw are so focused on reviling the fact or the aesthetics of his representations of cannibalism that they foreclose the interpretive opportunities of studying *how* he situates the act. While Crashaw’s work may not be broadly representative of Catholic or recusant communities of his time, his specific version of the Eucharist is tailored to communicate his spiritual values through the implied ceremony structuring his poetry’s spectacles of consumption.

My claim, however, invites the question of how to define Crashaw’s individual vision of the Eucharist. How are we to distinguish Crashaw’s perspective from that of his poetic and liturgical influences? I contend that we have unusually direct access to the poet’s reshaping of his source material because of his affinity for translation, paired with his tendency toward invention. Much of Crashaw’s English corpus is composed of translations of works in Greek, Latin, and Italian: *Steps to the Temple* alone features nearly fifty translations from his own Latin epigrams, fifteen longer poems, and his English re-working of the first book of Giambattista

Marino's epic *La strage degli innocenti* ("The Massacre of the Innocents") (Williams xx-xxi). While I call these works "translations," the poetic license of Crashaw's English versions violates some common expectations of what a translation should do. In "The Task of the Translator," Walter Benjamin voices an ideal of "transparency" that guides much of Western translation practice<sup>14</sup>:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully (260).

Benjamin's "pure," "transparent" translation may be the stuff of fantasy, but his dictum does speak to a modern value system of translation that demands that the translator makes his interventions inconspicuously. Although some English translators of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries also advocated for a praxis centered on fidelity to the original text,<sup>15</sup> this approach was not yet hegemonic. The early modern period's love affair with rhetoric and "exornation" inspired many of its translators to transform objects of their craft, in addition to simply translating them.<sup>16</sup> As Claes Schaar observes in his commentary on Marino and Crashaw, "at the beginning of the seventeenth century, there seems to have been a common urge to demonstrate what the English language could do when released from the fetters of foreign originals," so "hostility toward literal translation was widespread" (12). As a result, while his works may be loosely classified as "translations," Richard Crashaw embellished many of his adapted texts to an extent that critics have described examples as "a new and provocative creation" and "an interpretive expansion"<sup>17</sup> (Sabine 433; Scott 429). For his Eucharistic poetry, Crashaw's embellishments and emendations prove to be a boon to his interpreters by providing insight into which dimensions of the sacrament are most integral to the poet's faith. In addition



to defamiliarizing the Eucharist by making it as visceral as possible, he exposes the spiritual stakes of these cannibal encounters through the physical and emotional conditions of the participants. Through visions of sacred cannibalism that engage body and soul, Crashaw's poetry suggests both a devotional orientation based in vulnerability and a model for poetic reception, in which the contemplation of images serves as a catalyst for inward transfiguration. In this way, Crashaw's process as a translator-poet might be compared to transubstantiation: a transformation of both product and consumer through the addition of sacred substance.<sup>18</sup>

### **The Barren Banquet: Crashaw Reads Marino**

Before turning to Crashaw's explicitly Eucharistic poetry, I would like to direct our attention to Crashaw's most famous reinterpretation of another poet's work, his "Sospetto d'Herode." "Sospetto" is not only Crashaw's most extensive translation project, as well as his most praised, but it provides a desacralized spectacle of cannibalism against which to read his religious epigrams, which occupy the bulk of this chapter. "Sospetto d'Herode" is not a translation of a self-contained work, but the first canto of four-book epic poem, *La strage della innocenti*, or "The Massacre of the Innocents," by the Italian poet Giambattista Marino. While *La strage della innocenti* was finished around 1605, the poem went unpublished in its author's lifetime, not hitting the presses until 1632.<sup>19</sup> By the late 1630s, however, the epic had spread beyond Italy, and Richard Crashaw had translated its first book, "The Suspicion of Herod," into English.<sup>20</sup> Whatever one thinks of Crashaw, it is easy to see what drew him to Marino's epic. Inventive and bizarre, *The Massacre of the Innocents* balances an overflow of Baroque verbiage with an equally hearty dose of bloodshed.<sup>21</sup> For all the stylistic and thematic overlap between the two poets, however, Crashaw's "Sospetto d'Herode" differs from Marino's original to an extent

that sustains a scholarly debate over whether it should properly be considered a “translation,” an “interpretation,” or, in a few cases, a poem “inspired by Marino.”<sup>22</sup> (From my perspective, all three assessments convey part of the truth.) While all of Crashaw’s flourishes let us see his aesthetic taste and interpretive sense at work, the most crucial concern of this chapter is his remediation of Marino’s cannibal horde. The literally hellish gathering of anthropophagi is perhaps Crashaw’s only engagement with cannibalism severed from Christian worship, so the singularity of its tone throws the spiritual backbone of his bloody Eucharistic works into sharper relief.

To give a sense of the source text, Marino’s *Sospetto d’Herode* opens not in Herod’s kingdom, but in the depths of Tartarus. The first canto explains the earthly king’s inhumane actions by portraying Satan upon his throne, dispatching one of his furies to seed Herod’s heart with toxic paranoia. Beyond its narrative utility, however, the epic’s opening in Hell gives Marino the opportunity to attempt to rival Dante in his nightmarish depiction of the underworld. As opposed to Dante’s organized city-space, or even Milton’s later “darkness visible,” Marino’s vision of hell resembles a vast torture chamber, where Vengeance, Rage, and Death preside over a wall of scythes, manacles, and instruments of pain “caked in blood [*nel sangue orribilmente intrisi*]” (Milton 1.63; Marino 41).<sup>23</sup> If the array of individualized punishments perpetrated by figures of wrath evokes the Greek and Roman underworld, Marino solidifies that resonance when he depicts a macabre banquet attended by the most notorious cannibals of Ovid’s

*Metamorphoses*:

In mensa detestabile e funesta  
L’ingorde Arpie con la vorace Fame  
E l’inumano Erisitton, di questa  
Cibano ad or ad or l’avide brame;  
E con Tantolo e Progne i cibi appresta  
Atreo feroce e Licaone infame;

Medusa entro 'l suo teschio a la crudele  
Porta, in sangue stemprato, a bere il fele (1.337-45).

[At a baleful and detestable table are  
The greedy Harpies, with ravenous Hunger  
And inhuman Erysichthon, who from it  
Feed their avid cravings;  
Food is ready for Tantalus and Procne,  
Fierce Atreus and infamous Lycaon;  
Within Medusa's skull do these cruel ones  
Carry the wine, which they drink with gall.<sup>24</sup>]

While the scene itself is undeniably grotesque, Marino's rogues' gallery appears to be having an enjoyable meal for those with such appetites. The attendees may be "greedy," "ravenous," and beset with "avid cravings," but they appear to be able to eat their fill. Erysichthon, who was cursed with unending hunger and finally devoured himself in anguish, has had his body restored to him<sup>25</sup>. Even Tantalus, who was infamously condemned to stand in a river under a fruit tree without being able to eat or drink, seems to have had his sentence suspended for long enough for him to join the table with the others<sup>26</sup>. Although blood and gall may not be our beverage of choice, this assembly of mythological figures — all of whom were condemned for eating or serving human flesh — seem to have finally found a dinner table at which they are welcome.<sup>27</sup>

Turning now to Crashaw's version, the poet replicates the basic events of Marino's stanza, but changes the tenor of the gathering:

The tables furnished with a cursed feast,  
Which Harpies, with lean Famine feed upon,  
Unfilled forever. Here among the rest,  
Inhuman Erysichthon too makes one;  
Tantalus, Atreus, Progne, here are guests:  
Wolfish Lycaon here a place hath won.  
The cup they drink in is Medusa's skull,  
Which mixed with gall and blood they quaff brim full (337-45).

In addition to being foul, the dark bacchanal has now become “cursed,” marked by supernatural divine disfavor. Of greatest importance, however, Crashaw reframes Marino’s scene by specifying that the cannibal gourmets will remain “Unfilled forever.” While the mythological Erysichthon and Tantalus were already cursed with eternal hunger for their culinary transgressions, Crashaw extends their fate to the rest of the Ovidian horde. Whereas Marino’s banquet of munching cannibals feels steeped in irony that borders on black humor, in Crashaw’s hands, the feast becomes less of an ironic device than a karmic punishment.

Notably, Crashaw does not embellish Marino’s additional references to cannibalism in “Sospetto d’Herode”: when Marino alludes to Satan biting his own tail in anger, indignation gnawing away at Herod’s insides, and Lestrygonians keeping company with man-eating animals of myth, Crashaw’s translation adds no comment on their psychology or moral standing, suggesting that something made the banquet a particular case for him (Marino 1.151-52, 493, 352-53, 357; Crashaw 1.152, 494, 352-53, 356).<sup>28</sup> I argue that Crashaw’s emphasis on the eternal hunger of the participants in the banquet reflects how the scene resembles a dark parody of the Last Supper, which provides the scriptural basis for the Eucharist. Even though *The Massacre of the Innocents* nominally documents a Biblical episode, no Christian figures appear at the bloody banquet. Marino’s table is populated by not only cannibals, but godless cannibals — figures of the Other who consume human blood as an act of hedonistic aggression.<sup>29</sup> The profane sharing of bread and wine at Hell’s table parallels tales of black masses, including host desecration and infanticidal cannibalism, that became stock narratives during early modern witch trials (Price 45; Sidky 33; Kramer and Sprenger 281). In addition, the act of drinking from Medusa’s skull evokes the depraved use of skulls in revenge tragedies, Mandeville’s tale of the kingdom of Rybothe, where sons feed their dead fathers to predatory birds and then convert the

stripped skull into a drinking goblet, and Pliny's account of tribes that drink from skulls and use scalps as napkins (Mandeville 204; Pliny 515).<sup>30</sup> All in all, the intertextual associations of Marino's scene create a vision of cannibalism that is distinctly Other and opposed to Christian faith. Crashaw shows us something distinct about his attitude toward anthropophagy, however, when he departs from the source text to specify that Hell's cannibals are "Unfilled forever" ("Sospetto" 339). The gory drinking implement aside, Crashaw's addition implies that the main factor differentiating the infernal feast of flesh and blood from the Eucharist is that, in the former case, the participants' hunger cannot be sated. While, in their mythic contexts, these figures earned their place within this rogues' gallery for the unnatural act of eating or serving human flesh, Crashaw's comment on their unslaked appetites transforms Marino's Classical reference into a slant affirmation of the Eucharist: these wretches starve not because they are cannibals, but because they seek nourishment from the wrong flesh. Though his comment may be brief, Crashaw's comment on the cannibal banquet in "Sospetto d'Herode" provides a surprisingly incisive key to interpreting his Eucharistic poetry. As shown by the repulsion of many of his critics, his representations of Holy Communion may be no less bloody or visceral than the vile supper of "Sospetto"; nevertheless, they are shown to be something different than this pagan display through Crashaw's persistent emphasis on nourishment and mutuality.

### **Crashaw's Sacred Translations**

My discussion of Crashaw's Eucharistic poetry involves translation of three different orders. Like his version of "Sospetto d'Herode," many of Crashaw's translations fit the conventional definition: a work by one author which is rendered by a second translator-author into their own native tongue. Crashaw, however, also translated his own work: having written

short verses or epigrams in Greek or Latin, he later converted them into English, taking some notable liberties in the course of this literary self-cannibalism. The final kind of translation performed by Crashaw – and the one which uses the word in its loosest sense – is what I am calling “Biblical translation.” In addition to writing about Biblical episodes, Crashaw titled many of his sacred epigrams after specific verses, identifying them very directly with his King James Bible source text. As I result, I argue that we can engage with these epigrams as “translations” of these verses, even if they focus on the spirit, rather than idiomatic expression, of the original source. In sum, “translation” can signify a variety of different moves with respect to Crashaw’s poetry, which compound over the history of each individual poem.

The unusual density of Crashaw’s interventions as a translator – often starting with a Latin or Biblical source which he then translated into Latin or Greek and thereafter into English – allows us to trace shifts in his spiritual and aesthetic priorities over his career. As this chapter will demonstrate, Crashaw’s most emblematic, visceral Eucharistic poetry emerges after undergoing multiple translations, as if each iteration distills its potency. For this reason, Crashaw’s English epigrams are more explicitly cannibalistic than their source texts and convey the poet’s spiritual commentary with greater intensity, urgency, and novelty. Like transubstantiation itself, Crashaw’s translation of his sacred epigrams tends to bring out their “meat”– both in their bloody imagery and the poetic and intellectual vigor of their exegesis. Rather than allowing the former to compete against the latter, Crashaw creates structured spaces in his work for the reader to contemplate his gory emblems, giving bodily trauma and cannibalism coherence through a doctrinal frame. While many of my texts of concern, including the notorious “Blessed be the paps. . .,” convey Crashaw’s version of Eucharistic “best practices,” I will first engage his handful of epigrams which represent failed or futile

approximations of Holy Communion. These verses extend the thematic resonances of Crashaw's "Sospetto d'Herode" into a straightforward Christian context to demonstrate the perils of attempting to fill the soul's hunger for Christ with unwholesome or tainted food.

### **"Eates himself Dead": Crashaw on the Faux Eucharist**

During Crashaw's undergraduate years at Pembroke, one of the conditions of his Watt scholarship was to craft Latin and Greek epigrams each Sunday pertaining to the day's Scripture readings (Williams 258). As a result of his labors, the poet's first book, *Epigrammatum Sacrorum Liber* (commonly known as the *Epigrammata Sacra*), was published by the university's press in 1634 (Healy 40). Composed four to six years before he translated "Sospetto d'Herode,"<sup>31</sup> Crashaw's epigrams provide the first glimpse of the poetic preoccupations that defined his later career. Although the epigrams show the young Crashaw developing his affinity for cannibal conceits, they are notably less explicit than his eventual English versions – perhaps due to his pre-conversion aesthetics, but more likely because he needed to submit the epigrams essentially as homework.

Among the more piquant examples are two verses Crashaw wrote on Acts 12:22-23, in which King Herod is struck down by an angel for taking credit for the Lord's work and is "eaten of worms" (*KJV*). In his first effort, "In Herodem σκωληκόβρωτον [On Herod, eaten of worms]," the young poet makes the unconventional choice to center the epigram on the worms themselves:

Ille Deus, Deus: hæc populi vox unica: tantùm  
(Vile genus) vermes credere velle negant  
At citò se miseri, citò nunc errâsse fatentur;  
Carnes degustant, *Ambrosiámque* putant.

[He is God, God: this is the shout of the people as one:  
only the worms (base tribe) say they refuse to believe it.  
But quickly the wretches quickly now confess they have erred.

They taste the flesh, they think [it] *ambrosia*.]<sup>32</sup>

By putting “a convocation of politick wormes”<sup>33</sup> in the place of Judea’s body politic, Crashaw shows hints of the darkly ironic sensibility that he shares with Marino. His personification of the *genus* of vermin, however, adds a savor of cannibalism, after the fashion of *Deaths Duell*, to a formerly straightforward depiction of putrefaction. Whereas, in the original verse, the pairing of the phrases “was eaten of wormes and gave up the ghost” adds to the impression of both serving as general euphemisms for death, here, the centerpiece of the story is a “tribe” devouring their former leader (*KJV Acts 12:23*). His personification of the worms, however, also turns the death of Herod into a Eucharistic parable. Despite their initial protestations against recognizing Herod as God – a detail that casts the human populace as less discriminating than vermin – the worms trade their insight for folly once they taste Herod’s flesh and “think [it] ambrosia [*Ambrosiámque putant*]” (4). In Herod’s eagerness to be treated like a God, he does not foresee that the ultimate fate of Christ is to be sacrificed and eaten as a form of worship. The epigram further mocks the King’s hubris by making his death into a grotesque imitation of Holy Communion: mistaken for ambrosia, or the food of pagan gods<sup>34</sup>, his corpse is set upon by crawling, subhuman devotees with the misplaced enthusiasm of the Israelites venerating their golden calf.<sup>35</sup> Despite Christ’s humanity, the epigram suggests, the difference between the Son of God and man is as stark as that between the transubstantiated Host and worms’ meat.<sup>36</sup>

While this epigram provides the most visceral rebuke to Herod’s pretensions to divinity, Crashaw’s second poem on the verse, titled simple “Acts 12:23,” adds another layer of insight to its companion’s empty “Eucharist.” This version personifies the worms less vividly and entirely erases the act of eating from the text. Instead, Crashaw’s speaker ironically appeals to the scavengers, saying “Sed tamen iste Deus qui sit, vos dicite, vermes, / Intima turba illi; vos foveet



ille sinu [But yet what [sort of] god he may be, you tell us worms / you are the crowd intimate with him; he cherishes you in his bosom]" (3-4; Williams 420). Crashaw wonderfully perverts the phrase "cherishes you in his bosom [vos fovet ille sinu]"— a Biblical idiom for care and intimacy often used to portray humankind's relationship with Christ – to again display Herod's inadequacy as a God.<sup>37</sup> The only worshippers sheltering in his bosom are the vermin nesting inside his trunk; rather than holy benevolence, his corpse delivers literal carrion comfort.<sup>38</sup> "Acts 12:23," however, offers us more than a stinging rebuke of King Herod's arrogance. In the service of his mordant pun, Crashaw performs the telling narrative substitution of an act of "cherishing" for eating. While, in context, Crashaw uses both references facetiously, he implicitly demonstrates that the true Eucharist requires supplicants not only to eat divine flesh, but to seek a loving, nurturing relationship with God. It is the mark of a worm, the poet suggests, to recognize and eat one's beloved for His flavor alone – a prospect that practitioners of Holy Communion or of funerary cannibalism would find equally galling.<sup>39</sup>

Though less clearly condemnatory, Crashaw's epigram on John 5:1-16, "Ad Besthesdae piscinam positus [The man placed near the pool of Bethesda]", similarly demonstrates the folly of seeking salvation in all the wrong places through its subtle use of a cannibal intertext. Even more so than Acts 12:23, the text of John 5:1-16 offers no explicit link to anthropophagy: the verses recount the story of a lame man who seeks healing at the pool of Bethesda. When he is unable to enter the healing waters and asks for assistance, Jesus bids him to pick up his mat and walk, curing him instantly (*KJV*). In Crashaw's retelling of the miracle, he focuses entirely on the man's inability to enter the troubled waters by comparing him to Tantalus: "Quis novis hic refugis incumbit Tantalus undis, / Quem fallit toties tam fugitive salus? [What new Tantalus here leans toward the receding waves, / whom health so fleeting fails so many times?]" (1-2; Williams

316). Crashaw's Classical reference elegantly compares the effects of the man's impairment to Tantalus's punishment of being placed in a pool of cool water with a fruit tree overhead, yet both shrink from his touch when he tries to eat or drink. The allusion has the unflattering effect, however, of comparing a disabled person to a filicidal cannibal. While it is easy to dismiss this indelicacy as short-sightedness on Crashaw's part, the poet's other portrayal of Tantalus, "Unfilled forever," at Hell's mock-Eucharist provides insight into another valence to the reference in "Ad Besthesdae" ("Sospetto" 339). Rather than thirsting within a retreating pool, Crashaw's Tantalus of "Sospetto" is doomed to drink from a bloody cup that will never sate him. While his intentions are pure, the suffering man at Bethesda resembles Tantalus not only in his frustrated desire, but because he seeks solace from the wrong source: the waters will no more cure his ailment than any of Tantalus's beverages will relieve his thirst. Though the man is delivered from his distress by the intervention of Jesus, the epigram uses Tantalus to make the miraculous story into a cautionary tale: only Christ can ease our pain, and looking elsewhere will figuratively leave us parched and starving.

Whereas "Ad Besthesdae piscinam positus" engages only implicitly with the Eucharist, Crashaw's English rendering of "Lauda Sion Salvatorem [Praise, O Sion, thy Saviour]" advances the epigram's suggestion that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" by returning to metaphors of devouring (KJV Gal. 6:7). Fittingly, the "Lauda Sion Salvatorem," originally composed in Latin by St. Thomas Aquinas, was written to be the "Hymn for the Blessed Sacrament" of communion (Williams, "De Venerabili" 178). While Crashaw's translation is quite subdued by his standards, his rendering of verses eight and nine creates a stark antithesis between pious and disingenuous participation in the sacrament.<sup>40</sup> In the Latin *Lauda Sion*, this section of the hymn begins by affirming the inviolability of Christ's body during Holy

Communion and then by declaring that consuming his body and blood does not guarantee salvation:

A sumente non concisus  
Non confractus, non divisus,  
Integer accipitur  
Sumit unus, sumunt mille,  
Quantum isti, tantum ille,  
Nec sumptus consumitur.

Sumunt boni, sumunt mali  
Sorte tamen inaequali  
Vitæ vel interitus.  
Mors est malis, vita bonis:  
Vide, paris sumptionis  
Quam sit dispar exitus (In Crashaw, Ed. Williams, 182).

[By the recipient the whole is received;  
He is neither cut, broken, nor divided.  
One receives Him; a thousand receive Him:  
as much as the thousand receive,  
so much does the one receive;  
though eaten He is not diminished.

The good receive Him, the bad receive Him,  
but with what unequal consequences  
of life or death.  
It is death to the unworthy, life to the worthy:  
behold then of a like reception,  
how unlike may be the result!]<sup>41</sup>

By emphasizing the impossibility of damaging Christ's body during the Sacrament, verse eight affirms the Catholic doctrine of concomitance, which holds that Christ is both indivisible and entirely present in each element during the Eucharist (Bridgett 13; Bynum 51).<sup>42</sup> Verse nine then pivots to a paraphrase of 1 Corinthians 11:27-29, which states that he who partakes in Communion "unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body" (*KJV*). Placed adjacently, the verses foreground the miraculous capabilities of Christ's body during the

sacrament: it cannot be destroyed when the “bread” is broken, yet it can condemn the unfaithful to perdition once it touches their tongue.

While Crashaw’s translation of the “Lauda Sion Salvatorem” does not contradict the doctrine of either of these verses, the poet’s visceral mode of expression alters their impact:

The Receiving Mouth here makes  
Nor wound nor breach in what he takes.  
Let one, or one Thousand be  
Here Dividers, single he  
Beares home no lesse, all they no more  
Nor leave they both lesse than before

Though in it self this Soverain Feast  
Be all the same to every Guest,  
Yet on the same (life-meaning) Bread  
The child of Death eates himself Dead.  
Nor is’t love’s fault, but sin’s dire skill  
That thus from Life can Death distill (183).

Crashaw’s newly introduced point that the “Receiving Mouth. . . makes / Nor wound nor breach” may be meant to refute claims by Anglican theologians like Thomas Cranmer that Catholics believe that Christ’s body is “torn with the teeth of the faithful people” during the Eucharist (Cranmer 47). Nevertheless, the addition of the waiting mouth into verse eight changes its spiritual focus. Whereas Aquinas stresses that Christ’s body is not cut broken, or divided [non consisus / Non confractus, non divisus] – actions associated with the celebrant of mass – Crashaw diverts attention from the hands of the priest to the jaws of the congregation. By foregrounding the act of consumption, rather than the clerical performance of Mass, Crashaw establishes the most important part of the Eucharist to be the intimate, spiritually potent interaction between the real presence of Christ and his lay worshippers. Moreover, he changes the tenor of verse eight to focus more on reciprocity. Aquinas’s text creates a one-way transaction between deity and devotees: thousands “receive” the body that Christ gives unto them, and only his divinity ensures that “no

cost is expended [Nec sumptus consumitur]”. The dynamic in Crashaw’s version, however, is more complex. In addition to reaffirming that Christ “[b]eares home no lesse” body than before, his translation elaborates that the congregants leave “with no more,” but that neither Christ or his worshippers leave with “lesse than before.” Rather than making the entire verse about Christ’s miraculous body, Crashaw sets up an exchange in which, to use the source’s financial idiom, Christ loses no bodily investment and his consumers are still paid in full. As opposed to Aquinas’s formulation, Crashaw’s Eucharist is distinct in its structural symmetry: even if consumption is a linear, one-way process, his note that neither leaves with “lesse than before” creates the impression of an equitable trade, in which all parties risk a potential loss that, thanks to their mutual good faith, never materializes. In a gesture that parallels his removal of the clergy from verse eight, Crashaw dispenses with hierarchy by placing Christ and his worshippers on a level field of play.

Verse nine, by contrast, uses a different take on the theme of reciprocity to show what happens if a participant consumes the body and blood in bad faith. Crashaw’s unusual rendition from 1 Corinthians 11 – “the child of Death eates himself Dead”– has the double implication of the unworthy person eating until he reaches the point of death and literally eating his own body in an autocannibalistic spectacle. Coming to the table without faith, the malefactor cannot leave it without enacting his own emptiness, voiding all nutritive content from the Host and sharpening his hunger like the insatiable cannibals from *Sospetto d’Herode*. In this case, the “Receiving Mouth” internalizes the “wound” and “breach” that the holy body is spared, swallowing mortality to match their mortal sin. (The parallel to Adam and Eve cannot be missed.) While Aquinas’s version captures the unequal consequences for “good” [bonis] and “bad” [malis] participants in the Eucharist, Crashaw’s translation changes the passive act of receiving into the active verb “eates,” which he follows with the reflexive pronoun “himself”– two moves which emphasize the

congregant's personal responsibility for the outcome of the ritual. With these revisions, Crashaw illuminates the physicality of his Eucharistic poetry as symbolic shorthand for intentional, individual participation. Demystifying the euphemistic language of reception, Crashaw reminds us that to "receive" Communion necessitates that we eat Christ's body. This sacred performance, however, means nothing without proper intent. Unlike "In Herodem σκοληκόβρωτον," "Acts 12:23," and "Ad Besthesdae piscinam positus"— all of which portray the perils of seeking Eucharistic blessing from the wrong sources — his version of "Lauda Sion Salvatorem" definitively shows that one can consume the blessed elements and still "ea[t] himself Dead" if they perform the act in the wrong spirit. In this way, Crashaw's failed Eucharists convey the complexity of the genuine sacrament: one needs both a genuinely holy body at its center, but also a willing spirit to incorporate it. To put a twist on an old maxim, in Crashaw's poetry, the worthy are what they eat, but the unworthy are doomed to eat what they are, regardless of what passes their lips.

### **To Serve and Be Served: Crashaw's Fleshly Bread**

From these imperfect approximations of Eucharistic piety, I will now turn to Crashaw's varied models for best practice. As suggested in verse eight of his "Lauda Sion," one of the most distinguishing features of the Crashavian Eucharist is its emphasis on reciprocity and reflexivity. While this may not sound particularly outré, Crashaw's investment in Holy Communion as a symbiotic, corporeal exchange between Christ and worshipper means that references to sharing food in his poetry take on a distinct savor of mutual cannibalism. Eating "spiritual food" may be a conventional figure for receiving Christ's wisdom,<sup>43</sup> but it is usually anchored to a literal sharing of bread. Crashaw's cycle of poems about the miracle of the loaves and fishes, however, gradually strips bread — the Bible's material metaphor for spiritual food — of the trappings of metaphor.

Mirroring the miracle of transubstantiation, these poems replace bread as a literary figure with the literal flesh it represents. In order to preserve the mutuality of the exchange, however, this means that Crashaw must convert not only Christ, but all of his worshippers into food.

Crashaw's reflections on the feeding of the five thousand include five Latin verses on John 6, as well as two English epigrams. While neither epigram is a perfect translation of any of his Latin works, they repeat or paraphrase prominent lines from several of them. Through the poet's multi-step translation process – from Biblical episode to Latin verses to English epigrams – Crashaw converts the feeding of the five thousand into an increasingly personal vision of the Eucharistic, in which the operative food is both human and divine flesh. As intermediaries between the language of the King James Bible and of Crashaw's English epigrams, Crashaw's five Latin verses on the miracle feature both telling departures from John 6 and muted inklings of more radical themes from his later epigrams. Of the five, "Joann. 6. Miraculum quinque panum [John 6. The miracle of the five loaves]" offers the most conventional narrative. After describing the feast being set upon by countless teeth [in dentes fertilis innumeros], the poem concludes that the bread feeds the hunger of the people and their faith [Illa famem populi pascit, et illa fidem], drawing a clear parallel between the literal bread and spiritual food (2, 4). Two of the remaining epigrams, however, destabilize the trope by making the divisions between Christ, worshippers, and bread less than clear.

Compared to "Miraculum quinque panum," Crashaw's additional retellings of the feeding of the five thousand are more difficult to parse. In "Joann 6. Quinque panes ad quinque hominum millia [John 6. Five loaves of bread for five thousand men]", Crashaw's speaker refers to "the wounds of a feast restored to life [rediviváque vulnera cœnæ]" (2). While likely referring to the mysterious multiplication which replenished the loaves and fish as they were eaten, Crashaw's

choice of the word “wounds” forcibly disrupts readings of the poem in which bread is simply bread. In addition to making the meal sound like torn flesh, his reference to revivification evokes both Christ’s resurrection and the Eucharistic doctrine of concomitance. The poem’s final line adds a further complication. After describing the bountiful harvest, the speaker rhetorically asks “At last what is left? *Food itself is fed* [Denique quid restat? Pascitur ipse cibus]” (4; Williams 330). The cryptic final phrase offers at least two potential readings.<sup>44</sup> “Food itself is fed” evokes Donne’s famous paradox, “death, thou shalt die,” leaving room for “Food” to be read as a personified abstraction like “Death” (Donne 14).<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, “Food” is not a conventional personified figure, making this interpretation somewhat less plausible. The only sensible alternative is to assume that “Food itself” refers to the crowd of five thousand people fed by Jesus. Inverting the gesture which opened the poem, when the poet changed food into wounded flesh, animate human flesh now becomes food.

Crashaw repeats this strange move with more subtlety in “Joann. 6. Ad hospites cœnæ miraculosæ quinque panum [John 6. To the guests at the miraculous dinner of the five loaves].” The poem partially affirms the dichotomy between literal food and food as symbol from “Miraculum quinque panum”: in the poem’s final two lines, the speaker observes that the crowd will depart “filled with this bread from Christ [Tunc pane hoc Christi rectè satur]” but they will be righteous only if they “hunger more for Christ, himself the bread [Panem ipsum Christum si magis esurias]” (3,4; Williams 330). The first two lines, however, muddle this symbolic economy: “Eat your bread: but also, O guest, eat Christ: / He clearly is the bread of your bread [Vescere pane tuo: sed et (hospes) vescere Christo: / Est panis pani scilicet ille tuo]” (1-2). First, the speaker recognizes “bread” and “Christ” as separate entities, but qualifies both of them as edible. Second, the dense phrase “bread of your bread” invites two strange interpretive possibilities. As “bread of



your bread,” Christ’s spirit may provide the fulfilling substance of the crowd’s meal; in the parlance of “Quinque panes,” he “feeds” food into being. Nevertheless, this reading fits poorly into its surrounding context. Since the last lines differentiate “bread from Christ” (the material meal of the five thousand) from the more desirable “bread” that *is* Christ (his promise of spiritual nourishment), this initial interpretation of “bread of your bread” diminishes the inherent worth of Christ’s divinity by framing it as means of producing a buffet – a clear distortion of Crashaw’s priorities. By contrast, an available counter-reading of “bread of your bread” resonates with Crashaw’s claim that “*Food itself is fed*”: the “bread” of Christ body becomes the “bread” of his congregation’s bodies. While this interpretation may seem to elide the difference between bread and flesh, the entire Eucharist hinges on the fluidity of this boundary: transubstantiation makes bread completely, yet imperceptibly, into Christ’s body.<sup>46</sup>

Furthermore, because the Host was no ordinary “bread,” the rules of incorporation were assumed to work differently than with the digestion of regular food. In *Confessions*, Augustine’s God explains that, when a worshipper takes communion, “you shall not change me into your own substance, as you do with the food of your body. Instead, you shall be changed into me [nec tu me in te mutabis sicut carnis tuae, sed tu mutaberis in me]” (Augustine 7.10; Pine-Coffin 147). By this transitive property, it makes perfect sense that, upon consuming Christ’s body-as-bread, his worshippers are similarly transfigured into “bread” or “Food.”<sup>47</sup> Echoing Adam’s marital recognition of Eve as “bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh,” Crashaw’s phrase “bread of your bread” heralds a new sacrament that makes separate bodies one through mutual consumption (*KJV* Gen. 2:23). Crashaw’s unique vision of the Eucharist inverts Luther’s concept of *fleischbrot* (“fleshbread”) – a hybrid substance formed when Christ’s body becomes present in the Host – to imagine participants in communion as becoming “*brotfleisch*” (“breadflesh”).<sup>48</sup> This step

completes the radical symmetry of the Crashavian Eucharist: all participants are both flesh and bread; they eat and are eaten; they are human and divine; they are cannibals and they are cannibalized.

Crashaw's meditations on John 6:1-15 establish a foundation of nurturing reciprocity for the Eucharist. His remaining two epigrams on John 6, however, reveal another layer to his emphasis on communion as a visceral, embodied experience. Rather than focusing on spiritual bounty, "Joh. 6:14. 26." and "Joann. 6. Dicebant, Verè hic est propheta [They said this is of a truth a prophet]" consider the feeding of the five thousand in terms of proof of faith. In the latter, the speaker relates that "[a]fter so many miracles for them to see, so many to touch / you have the people, Christ, also these for them to taste [Post tot quæ videant, tot quæ miracula tangant, / Hæc & quæ gustent (Christe) dabas populo]" (1-2). The poem not only affirms material miracles as a sign of "truth of a prophet," but treats taste as a superior form of sensory verification. Playing on the discriminatory aspects of "taste," "Joh. 6:14. 26" combines the language of sensory engagement with that of legal judgement<sup>49</sup>:

Jam credunt. Deus es. (Deus est, qui teste palate,  
Quique ipso demum est iudice dente Deus.)

Scilicet hæc sapiunt miracula: de quibus alvus  
Proficere, & possit pingue latus fluere.

Hæc sua fecisti populo miracula. credunt.  
Gens pia! & in ventrum relligiosa suum!

[Now they believe. You are God. (He is God who [can be proved to be God with]  
The palate as witness; in short, and with the very teeth as the judge.)

Of course they understand these miracles:  
By which their belly can profit and their fat body overflow.

You performed these miracles of yours for the people. They believe.  
Pious race! And consecrated to its stomach!] (Williams 332).

In this verse, the teeth, mouth, and belly serve as expert witnesses who authenticate Christ's identity by eating him – a sanctified echo of the worms' faulty taste-test in “In Herodem σκοληκόβρωτον.” While Crashaw's poem is discordant with the New Testament's general turn away from sensory proof,<sup>50</sup> it is a particularly odd response to John 6.14-26, in which Jesus gently chides the people for seeking him out because of the loaves, rather than the fact of his miracle (*KJV*). He then encourages them to “[l]about not for meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life” (*KJV* John 6:27). By authorizing the “stomach” to “consecrate” and the “palate” to “witness,” however, Crashaw undoes Jesus's deliberate turn to metaphor, celebrating the loaves themselves as impetus for belief. Although Crashaw's response is contradictory in its local context, it does resonate with an idiom drawn from the Psalm 34:8: “O taste and see that the Lord is good” (*KJV*).<sup>51</sup> Medieval theologians William of Saint-Thierry (12<sup>th</sup> c.) and Rudolph Biberach (14<sup>th</sup> c.) both identified knowledge (*sapientia*) with tasting (*sapere*); “tasting God” consequently became a popular discourse within Christian mysticism (Bynum 151; Lochrie 67). Picking up this thread, Crashaw's epigrams on John 6 use the idea of tasting God to reappraise the value of tangible experience of divinity for people of faith – a tendency that intensifies to the point of grotesquery in Crashaw's later poetry.

Before exploring Crashaw's more visceral turn, however, it is instructive to see how the poet revisited and revised his juvenilia on John 6 for *Steps to the Temple* (1646). As Crashaw translated his “Divine Epigrams” over twelve years after he originally crafted them, he alters many of them to reflect growth in his beliefs and aesthetics. With respect to his verses on John 6, Crashaw narrows his seven Latin epigrams down to two in English. While neither is a *verbatim* translation of the original Latin, each can clearly be paired with a Latin predecessor. The first, “On the miracle of the multiplied loaves,” corresponds closely with “*Quinque panes*”:

See here an easie Feast that knows no wound,  
That under Hungers Teeth will needs be sound:  
A subtle Harvest of unbounded bread,  
What will ye more? Here food it selfe is fed.

The remaining epigram, “On the Miracle of the Loaves,” distills “Joh. 6:14. 26. (Jam credunt)” into two slight lines: “Now Lord, or never, they’l believe on thee, / Thou to their Teeth hast prov’d thy Deity.” Together, these six lines of verse reduce Crashaw’s perspective on the miracle to bare essentials. While “On the miracle of the multiplied loaves” preserved the language of wounding, it negates the wound acknowledged in “Quinque panes,” showing the vulnerability of Christ’s body yet reinforcing its inviolability through concomitance. Despite the impossibility of inflicting wounds, in both epigrams, the poet also doubles down on the language of “Teeth” that set so many Protestants’ teeth on edge (2; 2). Clearly, visceral contact with Christ is still of greatest importance, even though references to “Teeth” in a Eucharistic context had become a byword for Catholic folly. Finally, the English epigrams emblemize the major themes of his Latin responses to John 6. Preserving the crucial line “Here food it selfe is fed,” “On the miracle of the multiplied loaves” conveys the embodied reciprocity of the Crashavian Eucharist. Its counterpart, “Joh. 6:14.26,” preserves Crashaw’s earlier investment in taste as a gauge of divine authenticity. Together, these two epigrams succinctly express the poet’s sense of “tasting God” as the foundation of an intimate relationship with divinity and a means of seeking truth – a logic that pervades Crashaw’s Eucharistic poetry, including those treated as bloody, perverse aberrations.

### **Blood, Sweat, and Tears: Crashaw’s Transparent Transubstantiation**

In many ways, this chapter on Crashaw’s yen for cannibalistic imagery has been progressing inexorably toward one notorious poem: “Luke 11: Blessed Be the Paps which Thou Hast Sucked.” Perhaps no single work of Crashaw’s has been such a lightning rod for critical

distaste.<sup>52</sup> While “Luke 11” will never be palatable to many readers, I consider attempts to write it off as a “curiosity” or depraved experiment to be misguided. As this section will demonstrate, “Luke 11” shares a common devotional logic with Crashaw’s other works, from the early Latin epigrams to its similarly pulpy companions in *Steps to the Temple*. Although the sheer carnality of “Luke 11” may make it exceptional even within Crashaw’s corpus, it represents the natural extreme of the poet’s Eucharistic vision based on vulnerable, nurturing materiality. In order to portray the tender precarity of these bodies, the poem does its best to enact the ideal of “Word bec[oming] flesh” by letting tableaux of holy gore replace the metaphors which conventionally obscure them (KJV John 1:14).

Lest nurturance be mistaken for softness, however, Crashaw’s bloody Eucharists demonstrate that vulnerability comes at a steep price. The epigrams’ language of “wounding” becomes literal in these later works, with effects on all participants in the ritual: Christ’s body blooms with bloody gashes and his supplicants must accept a psychic wound in sucking them. In these poems, to take communion means to engage directly with Christ’s traumatized body and, in doing so, embrace one’s own dependency, insufficiency, and sinfulness. A fellow theorist of the perverse, Georges Bataille perhaps best articulates Crashaw’s vision of the sacrament in *On Nietzsche* when he imagines the Eucharist as

A night of death wherein Creator and creatures bled together and lacerated each other and on all sides, were challenged at the extreme limits of shame: that is what was required for their communion.

*Thus ‘communication,’ without which nothing exists for us, is guaranteed by crime. ‘Communication’ is love, and love taints those whom it unites (18).*

Bataille's "lacerated" vocabulary exposes a sado-masochistic edge to Holy Communion, making the ritual contingent on physical and emotional pain. These forms of suffering, however, are not the point of Communion, but its entry fee – a necessary sacrifice that makes loving communication possible. While Crashaw seems less interested in shame than Bataille, his version of Communion in his late works seems predicated on rawness: in order to fully accept Christ's body, worshippers must engage with his traumatized flesh, putting their own comfort aside, and expose their own vulnerabilities in turn. By embracing Crashaw's bloody Christ, the faithful embrace their own woundedness and open their raw, empty mouths to receive his grace.

Crashaw's "Luke 11" provides a prototypical example of the painful, loving urgency of this type of Communion. The poem refers specifically to Luke 11:27, in which a "certain woman" tells a passing Jesus "Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked." In a departure from its Biblical context, Crashaw addresses the poem to the Virgin Mary and flirts with a truly dizzying number of taboos in the space of four lines:

Suppose he had been tabled at thy teats,  
Thy hunger feels not what he eats:  
He'll have his teat ere long (a bloody one)  
The mother then must suck the son.

It takes little imagination to extrapolate why the epigram has historically ruffled feathers. Beyond the crass diction of the word "teat," many critics, including William Empson, Robert Adams, and Richard Rambuss, have commented on the simultaneously mammary and phallic qualities of Mary's appendage (Empson 221; Rambuss 38). Consequently, the poem seems to describe an unspecified incestuous act somewhere between breastfeeding and fellatio.<sup>53</sup> While many hostile responses to "Luke 11" focus on its sexual overtones, it is also notable that, among Crashaw's panoply of poems featuring the ingestion of human flesh and blood, "Luke 11" is the text most frequently characterized as being about cannibalism.<sup>54</sup> Given the poem's reputation, the sudden

critical attention to cannibalism here is likely meant to be pejorative: it is but part of a laundry list of perversities to be gestured toward with incredulity and indignation. If considered as one cannibal poem among many, however, “Luke 11”’s particular version of cannibalism reveals the evolution of Crashaw’s perspective on representing the Eucharist. In order to display these mechanisms at work, I will first examine the circumstances of the poem’s production and then contextualize its relationships to other works in *Steps to the Temple*.

To a greater extent than Crashaw’s responses to John 6, “Luke 11” is a poem which was radicalized through translation and revision. While Crashaw’s epigram is most directly concerned with Luke 11:27, the rest of the chapter contains much that resonates with his Eucharistic sensibilities. In addition to introducing “Give us this day our daily bread” to the lexicon of Christian devotion, Luke 11 features Jesus’s parable about a man beseeching his friend in the middle of the night for three loaves with which to feed a surprise guest (*KJV* Luke 11:3, 5-8). In order to reinforce his point that “ask, and it shall be given you,” Jesus rhetorically inquires, “If a son shall ask bread of any of you that is a father, will he give him a stone? or if he ask a fish, will he for a fish give him a serpent?” (11:9, 11). In addition to incorporating themes of nurturance and loving reciprocity, the chapter’s hypothetical questions about the hungry child evokes the feeding of the five thousand by using “bread” and “fish” as examples.<sup>55</sup> Despite all these elements that would seem to appeal to Crashaw, however, his original Latin epigram on Luke 11, “Beatus venter & ubera, & c. [Blessed is the womb and the paps],” is, to quote Maureen Sabine, “about as exciting as Gerber baby food” (433):

Et quid si biberet Jesus vel ab ubere vestro?  
Quid facit ad vestram, quòd bibet ille, sitim?

Ubera mox sua et Hic (ô quàm non lactea!) pandet:  
E nato Mater tum bibet ipsa suo.

[And what if Jesus should indeed drink from your breast?  
what does it do to your thirst because he drinks?

And soon He will lay bare his breast – alas, not milky!–  
From her son then the mother will drink] (Williams 324).

The Latin version is, indeed, less of a shocking tour de force than its English counterpart. The similarities and differences between both iterations, however, illuminate Crashaw's purpose in "Luke 11." "Luke 11" and "Beatus venter" convey the same basic information. The latter, however, feels more conservative because of its softer diction. As Kimberley Johnson and Thomas Healy have noted, the words "drink [bibet]" and "breasts [ubere]" lack the visceral savor of "suck" and "teats" (Johnson 36; Healy 64; "Beatus" 2,1; "Luke 11" 4, 1). Furthermore, "Beatus venter" banishes the sight of blood, affirming its presence through the slant reference that Christ's breast will offer a liquid that's "not milky [non lacteal]" (3). Crashaw's euphemism, however, does not affect the underlying reality that "Beatus venter" shares with "Luke 11": both explicitly involve cannibalistic consumption of blood. The key difference between the texts lies not in the presence or absence of blood-drinking, but in the poet's disparate efforts to conceal gory details. In this way, differences in the aesthetics and critical reactions to "Beatus venter" and "Luke 11" expose a crux of Eucharistic theology: transubstantiation is considered both a holy miracle and a literal obscenity that must be masked for the worshipper's sake.

The medieval and early modern periods offer a wealth of stories of visceral Eucharistic experiences, in which bread and wine reveal themselves as body and blood. These startling encounters with Christ's body, however, were typically reserved for saints and doubters – a reward for the fanatic and rebuke for the apostate. The fifteenth-century saint Claudette de Corbie saw a vision of Christ as a dismembered child in a serving dish; in a more tactile experience, Ida de Louvain reported feeling the Host slide down her throat like a fish (Price 27; Bynum 116). On the



other end of the devotional spectrum, we find tales of sinners, like a woman who tried to hide away her wafer or conjure with it, or unbelievers, like Jonathas the Jew, who experienced the bread turning into raw, blood-spurting human flesh.<sup>56</sup> Sophie Read actually compares the gore of “Luke 11” to anecdotes of the latter genre, remarking that “in these stories it is the faithless who are punished with such disturbing cannibalistic visions; only to believers does the Host appear in its reassuring guise as bread” (134). Crashaw’s contention that Mary must suck her Son’s blood, however, comes across as more teleological than punitive. Similarly, despite Mary’s perfect faith, the epigram also does not fit into the genre of saintly visions, since, within the timeline of the poem, Jesus is still a living, corporeal presence in his mother’s life. Rather than replicating either paradigm, Crashaw creates an alternative one: what if visceral experiences of Christ during the Eucharist were the norm, rather than the exception?

Historically, Christian theologians have argued that Christ cloaks his body with bread during the Eucharist “to avoid the effect that having to swallow His raw and bloody flesh would have on the members of the Church” (Price 30).<sup>57</sup> A razor’s edge, however, separates the idea of bread as a surface-level palliative from bread as material metaphor. While Crashaw’s corpus at large pushes towards more corporeal depictions of the Eucharist, “Luke 11” most clearly demonstrates an attempt to banish metaphor in favor of a direct encounter with Christ’s body and blood. Crashaw’s rhetorical move away from Eucharistic euphemism and symbolism directly parallels his transition from milk-centric to blood-centric imagery when he translated his epigram into English. According to early modern medical texts, milk was a refined form of blood; the color changed as a mercy to humankind, sparing them the disturbing sight of a vampiric infant (Price 30).<sup>58</sup> In this way, the whiteness of milk functions in the same way as the unchanged appearance of the Host and wine: both are cosmetic alterations to spare squeamish sensibilities, yet do not alter

the underlying reality. Crashaw, however, discards all pretense of making the participant comfortable. By starkly portraying Mary as drinking Christ's blood in "Luke 11," the poet rejects even well-intentioned mediation between the worshipper and Christ's sacrificed body. As in "Quinque panes," when an entire public consumed a "wound[ed]" feast, "Luke 11" suggests that followers of Christ can and should be ready to ingest communion with full knowledge of what it is: Christ's body and blood, offered in loving care (2). While Mary may be reduced to a pseudo-infantile state, "suck[ing] the son" like a nursing babe, Crashaw's revelation of the Eucharistic blood that sustains her represents an invitation for believers to leave the kids' table, in order to appreciate the magnitude of Christ's offering with appropriate wonder and horror (4).

Compared to Crashaw's earlier Eucharistic poetry, "Luke 11" maintains key themes, but expresses them with more directness and urgency. While both "Luke 11" and "Beatus venter" thematize reciprocity – a son feeds the mother who once fed him<sup>59</sup> – the final line of the former, in which "[t]he mother then *must suck* the son," conveys a sense of desperation absent in the ending of the latter, "E nato Mater tum bibet ipsa suo [From her son then the mother *will drink*]" [emphasis](4; 4). In addition to showing us flesh and blood for what it is, Crashaw's English works are similarly frank about how following Christ requires relinquishing one's perception of autonomy. If Mary's submission to an infantile state is both terrifying and exhilarating, the imperative "must suck" implies that this state must be ongoing and permanent.<sup>60</sup> To feed from Christ, the worshipper accepts a condition of radical dependency, symbolically reinforced through regular participation in the Eucharist. Consequently, while the feast itself may know no wound, devotees who seek nourishment from Christ's body and blood must do so at the price of realizing their own incompleteness and fundamental need. To borrow another phrase from Bataille, "Luke 11"

demonstrates that “[e]xistence can’t, at one and the same time, be both autonomous and viable” (ON 48).

Beyond “Luke 11,” several other works in *Steps to the Temple* are characterized by a sense of raw desire that Crashaw emphasized in their English translations. Consider, for instance, Crashaw’s twin verses on Jesus’s circumcision, in which he offers God a taste of the flowing blood. In the original Latin version, “Christus circumcises ad Patrem,” he entreats the Lord, “Tunc sitiatur licet et sitiatur, bibet et bibet usque [Then let [your wrath] thirst and thirst, let it drink and drink forever]” (3). This relatively intense line, however, pales before Crashaw’s expansion in “Our Lord in his Circumcision to his Father”: “Then let him drinke, and drinke, and doe his worst, / To drowne the wantonnesse of his wild thirst” (7-8). The English revision turns its predecessor’s repetitive expression into something frenzied and even erotic. Crashaw takes similar liberties with his translation of the “Stabat Mater Dolorosa” hymn, which he renders as “Sancta Maria Dolorum.” Inserting language in which “son and mother / Discourse alternate wounds to one another,” he realizes Bataille’s Eucharistic vision of laceration as communication (3.3-4). Crashaw also adds an ecstatic ending with the speaker begging, “O let me suck the wine / So long of this chast vine / Till drunk of the dear wounds, I be” (11.1-2). While the “chast vine” is euphemistic, the final stanza of “Sancta Maria Dolorum” mirrors the ending of “Luke 11,” in which the devotee must “suck” Christ’s bleeding wounds to sustain themselves. The omnipresence of sucking wounds in *Steps to the Temple* also magnifies the grasping for mutuality in “On the wounds of our crucified Lord.” Beyond its motif of Christ and Mary Magdalene “pay[ing]. . . debt” to one another in the form of blood and tears, Crashaw’s portrayal of Christ’s wounds as “Mouthes” with “full-bloom’d lips” transforms any implied blood-drinking into gory kisses (11, 14, 15, 19, 20, 2, 5).<sup>61</sup> If Crashaw’s English poems recognize the incapacitating incompleteness of the Christian

worshipper, they also re-imagine union with Christ as bacchic euphoria. The supplicants in Crashaw's poetry, however, fuse the blood-fueled fervor of the maenads with a gentleness springing from their own precarity.<sup>62</sup> In this way, parts of *Steps to the Temple* can be conceived as inverting Crashaw's use of cannibalism in "Sospetto d'Herode." Whereas, in "Sospetto, the poet embedded a Christian cautionary tale within a Classical pagan banquet, in his later Eucharistic poetry, he uses a savor of Euripedes to portray the wild passion of sharing in Christ's body and blood.

### **Conclusion: "And the Word was made Flesh"**

In *Eucharist and the Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England*, Sophie Read identifies the most vexing tasks of the Protestant revolution as establishing that seemingly straightforward Biblical passages should be read metaphorically and then explaining why literalism was not simply wrong, but blasphemous (184). While this is a tall order in and of itself, these goals also became imperative at a time when, in the words of Margaret Owens, "the trope of the Eucharist was proving inadequate to resolve the grotesque fragmentations, the anxieties about purity and pollution, and the fantasies of cannibalism that circulated within Eucharistic piety" (83). Though mostly remembered for their shock value, Crashaw's cannibal tropes make a unique intervention in the conflict over literalism versus metaphor in Biblical exegesis. Running the gamut from suggestive fleshiness to outright gore, his portrayals of the Eucharist insist on maintaining the material specificity of Christ's body: cannibalism is an irrefutable presence in Crashaw's communion. While his acknowledgement of cannibalism may be direct, however, Crashaw's framing of the act leaves room for metaphoric intervention. As "Sospetto d'Herode" demonstrates, it takes more than a goblet of blood to make a Eucharist, and not all Crashavian cannibalism is

sanctified. Rather, the poet's differentiated portrayals of cannibalism in his works depict distinct ethical or social systems that can either be unified by faith or fragmented by its lack. The common denominator of profound relationships with God and others in the faith community is rawness. Just as Christ took on the experience of suffering and death in order to live among human beings, those who seek Communion in Crashaw's work must embrace the possibility of pain, discomfort, and risk. By confronting the hunger and brokenness within, however, they can find relief. In this way, the overt cannibalism of Crashaw's Eucharist makes it perhaps the most human version of the sacrament because it embraces two realities of embodiment that defined Christ's life on earth: humans suffer, bleed, and die; but they also share meals in loving fellowship. Whereas Crashaw uses cannibal tropes to explore the most human, intimate aspects of spirituality, the next chapter will demonstrate how John Milton chooses an alternative creative mode of transformative incorporation to make the expansive, but self-devouring cosmos of *Paradise Lost*.

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<sup>1</sup> Bucking the precedents from my preceding chapters, I borrow this chapter's title not from Crashaw, but from the title of a short story by Damon Knight, which was famously adapted into an episode of Rod Serling's *The Twilight Zone*. In the story, a seemingly benevolent alien race visits earth to ostensibly bring peace and harmony. A human translator, however, realizes that the text they brought with them, *How to Serve Man*, is not a humanitarian treatise, but a cookbook. I found that the doubled sense of "serving man" expresses Crashaw's visceral version of the Eucharist, so Knight's wordplay, as well as his foregrounding of translation issues, deserves partial credit for inspiring this chapter.

<sup>2</sup> One step ahead of me, Sophie Read observes in *Eucharist and Poetic Imagination in Early Modern England* that "In recent years, there has emerged a tendency to open discussions of Crashaw by remarking on the propensity of other critics to open such discussions with a defence of his verse against the imputations of 'bad taste' that have dogged it since at least the first half of the nineteenth century. This is to be no exception" (127). Touché.

<sup>3</sup> See Rambuss's *Closet Devotions* (1998) and "Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder; Or, How to Do Things With Tears" (2013).

<sup>4</sup> In order: both from Edmund Gosse's essay, "Richard Crashaw," reprinted in *Seventeenth Century Studies*; both from Robert M. Adams, "Taste and Bad Taste in Metaphysical Poetry: Richard Crashaw and Dylan Thomas" (69, 70). Elisha K. Kane uses the same pair of adjectives in "Meretriculous Verse in Other Literatures" (151). "Grotesque" also in Rev. Thomas Foy's *Richard Crashaw: "Poet and Saint"* (73); Kane described Crashaw's "Luke 11" as "the extreme of the grotesque and repulsive," only fit to "exhibit it as a literary curiosity" (151); Bertanasco (31), though in more of an observational than judgmental register; Alvarez, characterizing Crashaw's "logic of ornamentation" (94). Empson also famously described Crashaw's "Luke 11" as encompassing "a wide variety of sexual perversions" (221). T.S. Eliot characterized Crashaw's use of language as intentional perversity (96); Finally Bertanasco cited as a critical paraphrase and an available reading of "Carmen Deo Nostro" (15, 119).

<sup>5</sup> This claim is not uncommon, as many comparative readings of Crashaw and his contemporaries are framed as a study in contrasts. While Foy asserts that Donne had a profound influence on Crashaw, Eliot and Wallerstein read the poets as foils (101; "Lectures on the Metaphysical Poetry..." (Houghton Library, Harvard), cited in Roberts, 18; 27). Thomas F. Healy juxtaposes Crashaw's unconcern with individual subjectivity against both Donne and Herbert

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(64). Rambuss distinguishes himself with his argument that Donne, Herbert, Crashaw, and Traherne participate in a common project of “more or less self-consciously reassigning in same-sex configurations (male God, male devotee) the erotic postures and blandishing conceits of the Renaissance love lyric” (CD 13).

<sup>6</sup> Covington points out that the Laudian church also practiced Marian veneration and that Crashaw wrote most of his poetry prior to converting to Catholicism (162-63). Shell argues that defining a “Catholic poem” is a complex venture, given that many such poems were written by lifelong Protestants influenced by Ignatius and other meditative Catholic writers (97-99).

<sup>7</sup> Though this is largely remembered as a Catholic mode, Covington points out that emblem books were actually Protestant in origin, further blurring the lines between the traditions (159).

<sup>8</sup> See Paul T. Graham, “The Mystical and Musical Realism of Richard Crashaw,” 6, 20, 21; Linda Van Norden, “Preface” to *Crashaw and the Baroque*, vii; Bertolasco (28, 30); Kimberly Johnson, “Richard Crashaw’s Indigestible Poetics,” 36; Healy (64); Sarah Covington, *Wounds, Flesh, and Metaphor in Seventeenth-Century England*, 159.

<sup>9</sup> See, of course, Adams; Rambuss, “Crashaw and the Metaphysical Shudder,” 256; Austin Warren, *Richard Crashaw: A Study in Baroque Sensibility*, 88; Henry Southern, “Richard Crashaw’s Poems,” 230; Paul G. Stanwood, “Time and Liturgy in Donne, Crashaw, and T.S. Eliot,” 101; R.V. Young, *Doctrine and Devotion in Seventeenth-Century Poetry*, 158; Foy, 75; Bertolasco, 94; Johnson, 50; Wallerstein, 112; Read, 127.

<sup>10</sup> Custom ceased in 1960s. For more see Beth A. Conklin, *Consuming Grief: Compassionate Cannibalism in an Amazonian Society*.

<sup>11</sup> See Montaigne’s “Of cannibals” on the Tupinambá, 157-59; Mandeville’s accounts of varied rituals among the peoples he calls the Nacumera, the Dondun, and the Rybothe (130, 133, 204); de Léry’s *History of a Voyage on the Tupinambá*, 122-27.

<sup>12</sup> I use scare quotes to acknowledge definitional slippage around the word “cannibal” in early modern texts. The word “cannibal” is itself a corruption of *caribes* (“Caribs”), so many supposed “cannibal” tribes were never documented to eat human flesh (Avramescu 10). Avramescu attributes the initial misapprehension to the Spanish, while Santiago Colás holds Columbus responsible (10, 129). In any case, the term is extremely flexible in travel narratives of the era; Sir Walter Raleigh, for instance, conflates “Canibals” with those who trade in women (83, 85, 111).

<sup>13</sup> Excerpted by Owens from *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584).

<sup>14</sup> Benjamin’s particular use of “transparency” (often used in translation theory to refer to capturing the source text’s idiom) also seems to encompass the translator’s goal of fidelity, or accuracy without embellishment. When used by other writers, these terms are not necessarily synonymous, but they are also not mutually exclusive.

<sup>15</sup> In his 1597 translation of *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, Thomas North writes that “the office of a fit translator, consisteth not onely in the faithful expressing of his authors meaning, but also in a certain resembling and shadowing out of the forme of his style and the manner of his speaking”; he then compares departures from his approach to dishonest portraiture (sig. [vijj]’; also qtd. in Demetriou and Tomlinson 1). Similarly, in his preface to *Sylvae*, John Dryden wrote that “a Translator is to make his Author appear as charming as possibly he can, provided he maintains his Character, and makes him not unlike himself” (4).

<sup>16</sup> Consider how the sense of transformation is embedded in Peter Quince’s malapropism to a newly ass-headed Bottom in Shakespeare *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*: “Bless thee, Bottom, bless thee! Thou art translated” (3.1.118-19).

<sup>17</sup> The former applies to Crashaw’s rendering of Marino’s “Sospetto d’Herode”; the latter refers to “Luke 11: Blessed Are the Paps That Thou Hast Sucked.”

<sup>18</sup> Here, I must acknowledge the Brazilian branch of translation theory that uses cannibalism at its central metaphor; this usage, however, is intimately related in context to Brazilian national identity and colonial history (Guldin 110).

<sup>19</sup> The delay in publication should not be interpreted as a comment of the poem’s quality. Marino indicated at several points in his lifetime, beginning as early as 1605, that he soon expected the poem to appear in print, yet it appears to have been sidelined by courtly projects, even as its author included to revise and polish it (Butler x).

<sup>20</sup> While I give the English rendering here, Crashaw chose to retain Marino’s Italian title.

<sup>21</sup> For instance, whereas Crashaw’s “Upon the Infant Martyrs” succinctly describes how “both blended in one flood, /The mothers’ milk, the children’s blood,” his supposed bad taste pales before Marino’s portrayal of a pile of infants’ corpses being trampled into a mire of gore (1-2; 3.305-14).

<sup>22</sup> For those arguing that Marino had minimal influence on Crashaw’s final product, see Louis R. Barbato’s “Marino, Crashaw, and Sospetto d’Herode,” 523, quoting Frank J. Warnke’s “Marino and the English Metaphysicals,” 170-74.

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<sup>23</sup>For arguments that Crashaw's *Sospetto* was a significant influence on Milton, see Foy, 69; Roberts, 3-11, on 18<sup>th</sup> century critics who followed this line of thought, including Henry Maty and Thomas Campbell. Bashaw Stevens, by contrast, thought Milton borrowed directly from Marino (Roberts 6).

<sup>24</sup>My translation, which aims for literal precision over grace. As Erik Butler writes, there is not yet an authoritative translated edition of *La strage degli innocenti* (xiv).

<sup>25</sup>See Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 8.725-884.

<sup>26</sup>See *Met*, 4.458-9; 6.403-11. Tantalus was punished for feeding his son, Pelops, to the gods at a feast, starting an alarming precedent for cannibalism in the house of Atreus.

<sup>27</sup>For the backstories of the remaining dinner guests, see the following referents: Harpies are portrayed as perpetually gaunt with hunger, Virgil, *Aeneid*, 3.216-18; Famine, at the bidding of the dryads, became the tormentor of Erysichthon, Ovid, *Met*, 8.777-842; Atreus tricks his brother, Thyestes, into eating his own sons, Seneca, *Thyestes*, 4.623-779, 885-1112; Procne subjects Tereus to the same revenge for the rape of Philomela, Ovid, *Met*, 7.619-65; Lycaon is turned into a wolf after feeding his son to Zeus, Ovid, *Met*, 1.216-39. While Medusa is not a cannibal, her name became notoriously associated with cannibalism in the early nineteenth century, when the French frigate *Medusa* foundered and the survivors devolved into cannibalistic anarchy (Petrinovich 53-54).

<sup>28</sup>The cannibal Lestrygonians are placed in the same stanza as "Diomed's horses," "Phereus' dogs," and "Therodamas's lions" [*Di Diomede i destrier, di Fero i cani / E di Terodamente havvi i leoni*] (Crashaw, Marino 1.352-53).

<sup>29</sup>The closest anthropological paradigm to this behavior would be exocannibalism, which usually connotes eating enemies or outsiders to one's social group as an act of intimidation (Sugg 114). During the early modern period, explorers and colonists of the Americas were most obsessed with the idea of this type of cannibalism, whether documenting real practices or inventing them as a move to justify their own cultural hegemony.

<sup>30</sup>In addition to Mandeville's tale of Rybothe, Friar Odoric's journal describes an unspecified tribe that practices an identical rite, and Friar William de Rubruquis claims that the people of Teber also make goblets of their parents' skulls (355; 323). While there are no skull handicrafts involved, the act of giving one's dead to vultures is a ritual still practiced by Parsis in India and Tibetans, whose custom has come to be called "sky burial" (Doughty 220-27).

<sup>31</sup>Dated 1637 (Williams 217).

<sup>32</sup>Idiomatic translation courtesy of George Walton Williams (p. 418), in turn, professes the influence of Sister Maris Stella Milhaupt's *The Latin Epigrams of Richard Crashaw*.

<sup>33</sup>So Hamlet calls these devourers of kings (Shakespeare 4.3.22).

<sup>34</sup>While the word "ambrosia" is associated with the classical gods of Greece, it has been argued that the Biblical "water of life" and "living water" are Christian analogues (*KJV* John 4:14; Rev. 21:6; Jer. 2:13; John 7:38). As "ambrosia" in the epigram, however, clearly refers to solid food, rather than drink, a Greek referent is most likely.

<sup>35</sup>See Exodus 32. Note that Moses's solution to the problem is to melt down the calf and force the Israelites to drink their false God in a punitive faux Eucharist (*KJV* 32:20).

<sup>36</sup>Compare Herod's fate to that of *Romeo and Juliet*'s Mercutio (Shakespeare 3.1.69).

<sup>37</sup>For Biblical variants on this phrase, see examples in Luke 6:38, 16:22; Isaiah 40:11; Gen. 16:5; 2 Sam. 12:8; John 1:18, 13:23; Numbers 11:12; Deut. 13:6; and Ruth 4:16 (*KJV*).

<sup>38</sup>Credit and apologies to Gerard Manley Hopkins.

<sup>39</sup>As Conklin relates, drawing on the work of Vilaça (2000), the Wari "reject the idea that anyone wanted to eat the corpse; to treat the corpse like animal meat and eat voraciously would be the ultimate insult" (82). Ingesting the decaying corpse was often a revolting experience, done out of love for the deceased and their survivors.

<sup>40</sup>The verse order may differ slightly in later versions of the *Lauda Sion*.

<sup>41</sup>Translation by Ron Jeffers's *Translations and Annotations of Choral Repertoire*, Vol. 1.

<sup>42</sup>Insisting that he does not want to misrepresent Catholic beliefs, Cranmer uses his interpretations of Berengarius and St. John Chrysostom as precedents for his claim (47-48).

<sup>43</sup>Crashaw's own "Luc. 10:39. Maria verò assidens ad pedes ejus, audiebat eum [But Mary sitting at his feet heard his word]" uses this figure to describe Martha and Mary cooking for Jesus and listening to his teachings, respectively: "She prepares [food] for this mouth; she takes food from this mouth [Huic ori parat; hoc sumit ab ore cibos]" (2).

<sup>44</sup>Sophie Read tries to find a middle way without clear resolution: "This might be paraphrased as 'Here food is fed to itself,' for the substance that is fed is, by definition, food; one reaches a clear cognitive impasse in trying to imagine what, if anything, might be left behind once food has eaten itself" (143).

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<sup>45</sup> Donne's line refers to 1 Corinthians 15:26: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (*KJV*). Since "Sonnet X" is originally dated around 1609 and published in print in 1633, it is possible that young Crashaw was inspired by Donne's turn of phrase.

<sup>46</sup> The mutability of bread and flesh must also be acknowledged in Crashaw's retelling of the feeding of the five thousand, for Crashaw uses "bread" as a metonymy for a meal that also included flesh (fish).

<sup>47</sup> For more on Christ's nurturing body and the body-as-food in medieval devotions, see Carolyn Walker Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast*.

<sup>48</sup> On "fleischbrot," see Martin Luther, *De Captivitate Babylonica ecclesiae*, WA 6.518.10 (LW 36:44); Read, 18; B.A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Philosophy of John Calvin*, 165.

<sup>49</sup> On the development of "taste and "good taste" as culturally significant categories in the seventeenth century, see Luc Ferry's *Homo Aestheticus: The Emergence of Taste in the Democratic Age*.

<sup>50</sup> Just ask the apostle Thomas, doomed to be forever known as "Doubting" due to the events of John 20:24-29 (*KJV*). Contrast with Old Testament's emphasis on "wonders," as in Exodus 3:20.

<sup>51</sup> In a similar vein, Bertolasco observes that "[t]he psalmist was content with 'Taste and see how sweet the Lord is,' but Crashaw develops and enriches as if he were attempting to convey the *infinite extent* of the sweetness and goodness" (23). Sophie Read likewise emphasizes the intimacy of the idiom "taste and see" in her reading of Crashaw (136).

<sup>52</sup> Many of the unsavory adjectives cited on the first page are directed at this verse.

<sup>53</sup> Maureen Sabine adds cunnilingus and sodomy to the mix in her potential glosses of "Luke 11" (439-40).

<sup>54</sup> See Young, 156; Empson, 221; Johnson, 40.

<sup>55</sup> Jesus then extends the items on offer by asking, "Or if he shall ask an egg, will he offer him a scorpion?" (*KJV* Luke 11:12).

<sup>56</sup> For stories of the bleeding Host in reference to sinners misusing wafers, see Blurton's *Cannibalism in High Medieval Literature*, 75; Bynum, 64; McDonald's "Eating people and the alimentary logic of *Richard Coeur de Lion*," 142-43. For the story of Jonathas the Jew, see Akbari's "Incorporation in the *Siege of Melayne*," 33, and Owens, 71-74.

<sup>57</sup> For instance, Bynum relates the story of a fourteenth-century woman named Aude who, after giving birth, could no longer believe in Christ's presence in the Host because she associated it with the "disgusting afterbirth" (266).

<sup>58</sup> Semen was also considered to be a purified form of blood – a thought relevant to the suggestions of "Luke 11." The early church father Tertullian notably characterized fellatio as cannibalistic (Sugg 8).

<sup>59</sup> The thematic resonance between "Luke 11" and "On the miracle of the multiplied loaves" is cemented by the following line from Crashaw's translation of "O Gloriosa Domina," also addressed to Mary: "The Feast of all things feeds on thee" (10).

<sup>60</sup> Here the parallel to vampirism is most clear.

<sup>61</sup> While one of Crashaw's Latin poems, "In vulnera pendentis Domini [On the wounds of the Lord hanging [on the cross]]," contains comparable imagery of Christ's wounds as mouths and eyes, the poem is much shorter than "On the wounds of our crucified Lord" and lacks the same expansive sensuality.

<sup>62</sup> Maenads, or Bacchae, were ecstatic followers of Dionysus. Euripides's *Bacchae* concludes with them tearing apart and presumably cannibalizing Pentheus.



## CHAPTER 4

### “My Viscera Burdened”: Melancholy Hunger and Cannibal Poetics in *Paradise Lost*

*Paradise Lost* can be glibly summarized as the story of not only “Mans First Disobedience,” but of his first bad meal (*PL* 1.1). The poem’s opening frames original sin as a gastronomic event, attributing “all our woe” not simply to Adam and Eve, but to “the Fruit / Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal tast / Brought Death into the World” (*PL* 1.1-3). Milton’s version of the Fall, however, reveals itself to be a multi-stage process that is initiated by fruit-poaching, but consummated by cannibalism. Following the first couple’s alimentary transgression in Book IX, the subsequent arrival of Sin and Death in Book X triggers a feeding frenzy among Earth’s fauna: “Beast now with beast gan war, and fowl with fowl, / and fish with fish; to graze the Herb all leaving, / Devoured each other” (*PL* 10.710-12). Adam’s response to this ghastly spectacle – “is this the end / Of this new glorious World. . .?” – seems entirely appropriate from a being who has never witnessed violence before (*PL* 10.720-21). Nevertheless, even if the poem’s readers are accustomed to both nature’s cruelty and an omnivorous diet, the passage still incites horror by evoking a taboo beyond the boundaries of “natural” predation.<sup>1</sup> When Milton’s narrator describes how “[t]he sun, as from the Thyestean banquet, turned” at the sight of the carnage, he transforms the scene of “beast” eating “beast,” “fowl” eating “fowl,” and “fish” eating “fish” from a description of emerging food webs into the *ur*-crime of a fallen world (10.688-89).<sup>2</sup> His claim that every species ceased “to graze the Herb” abandons any pretense of a zoological “just so” story to suggest a surrealist nightmare in which doves peck one another to feathers and heifers feed upon their own calves (10.711).<sup>3</sup> In Milton’s hands, the wages of sin appear to be not only death, but cannibalism.<sup>4</sup>

The cannibal feast of Book X may appear to sharply divide the postlapsarian and prelapsarian worlds of the poem – and, in many ways, it does. Nevertheless, it also represents just one part of a digestive motif that permeates the entire epic. As Kent R. Lenhof has demonstrated, *Paradise Lost* constantly tropes the digestive tract to insist upon “a connection between disobedience and indigestion,” from Satan’s flatulent invention of gunpowder to the distinct stench of the bowels of Hell to Adam and Eve’s internal warfare after eating the fruit (286, 280, 282, 290). The Fall, in other words, does not introduce digestive chaos into the epic as much as it results in a specific, bloody iteration of this disorder. While cannibalism may appear to be simply a gruesome punishment meant to show fallen abasement,<sup>5</sup> I argue that it enters *Paradise Lost* as a response to the cataclysmic loss at the poem’s center. Rather than wanton predation, cannibalism in Milton’s epic communicates a desperate attempt to correct a void within the self left by losing a connection with God and the ways of knowing accessed through him.<sup>6</sup> Building on Regina Schwartz’s work on cyclical re-enactments of trauma in *Paradise Lost*, I will demonstrate how figures of cannibalism in the epic emerge as symptoms, revealing a symbiotic relationship between abjection and melancholia that drives much of the action. This relationship, furthermore, produces effects in different metaphoric registers: the feedback loop between abjection and cannibalism manifests in both the diegetic world of the narrative and the poetics of the entire text. While Milton’s prose disparagingly identifies cannibalism with the delusions of popery, Milton’s massive assimilation of intertextual references in *Paradise Lost* (including the “Thyestean banquet”) comprises its own humanist version of anthropophagy.<sup>7</sup> The existence of *Paradise Lost* testifies to the creative capacity of cannibal poetics. Its foil, however, is the Satanic temptation toward autocannibalism: in its

ambition to swallow and embody the sum of human knowledge, the poem moves in snaky, intestinal loops, threatening to devour itself.

### **Shit from Heaven: Divine Abjection and the Melancholy Cannibal**

“The anus,” observes William Ian Miller in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, “as endpoint of the reductive digestive process is a democratizer” (99). Or, in the plainspoken terms of Tarō Gomi’s bestselling children’s book, “everyone poops.”<sup>8</sup> In defiance of church doctrine, this precept holds true for the entire chain of being in Milton’s epic. While not all types of excretion are created equal in this cosmos, my present point is that every level of creation in *Paradise Lost* is implicated in some form of abjection.<sup>9</sup> In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, Julia Kristeva writes of the abject as “a threat that seems to emanate from an exorbitant outside or inside, ejected beyond the scope of the possible, the tolerable, the thinkable” (1). The abject is what must be thrust away from the self in order to preserve it – a concept materialized as waste residues like urine, shit, pus, vomit, and the apotheosis of abjection, the corpse. The intuitive ending point of digestion is abjection, even for Milton’s divine beings: consider Raphael’s extended speech on angelic “transubstantiation” of their food and the image of Milton’s God “downward purg[ing] / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs” during his creation of the Earth (7.237-38). While this process may be unproblematic for Milton’s God, who is forever complete unto himself, abjection poses an existential challenge to beings who undergo (or perceive themselves to undergo) this process of distancing disposal (8.415-16). Milton’s Satan in particular emblemizes this crisis of self, as the first creature to fall into solitary embodiment. Waking in Hell’s sulphurous depths after his “expulsion,”<sup>10</sup> he temporarily forgets his own name, which has already been erased from Heaven’s records (1.361-63). Furthermore, though the

War in Heaven acquainted him with physical pain, Satan also wakes to a new experience of lasting physical damage: his face is “chang’d,” “[d]ark’n’d,” and “faded,” marked by “[d]eep scars” and “care” alike (1.84, 599, 601, 602). Kristeva analogizes abjection to stumbling upon a corpse; for an immortal being like Satan, discovering his fallen vulnerability is akin to unearthing his own dead body. Rather than mourning his loss, however, Satan retreats from his own abjection into an all-consuming melancholia.

At first glance, melancholia and abjection may appear to be opposing mechanisms: the former refuses distance by holding the lost object within the body; the latter forces that distance through violent rejection. Nevertheless, the concepts are symptomatically related to one another, which the particular cosmological design and narrative strategy of Milton’s poem makes clear. Whereas, in *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva generally writes from the perspective of the subject attempting to protect the boundaries of their own body through abjection, the beginning of *Paradise Lost* aligns itself with the viewpoint of Satan: the abject, the unclean, the denatured. In this case, the abject is also a subject and, as a result of his own abjection, a sufferer of loss. The intact body does not mourn its excrements or sloughed skin. Milton’s Satan, however, is not intact; he begins the epic “torment[ed]” with “the thought / [b]oth of lost happiness and lasting pain” (1.56, 54-55). His first perception is of a “darkness visible” that is not so much of an environment as a vision of his own privation: a harsh inversion of Heaven’s radiance that mocks the eye with the persistence of an afterimage (1.63). The void left by the withdrawal of God’s light, and its hunger to be refilled, summons melancholia as a coping strategy. Kristeva’s *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* articulates the symptomology of melancholia using an image that strikingly resembles Milton’s “darkness visible.”<sup>11</sup> Injured by the disappearance of the loved object, the figure of the melancholic in *Black Sun* “live[s] a living death,” their flesh “wounded,

bleeding, cadaverized”— in essence, abject (4). (Indeed, early moderns seem to have intuitively understood a connection between melancholy and abjection by attributing the malady to an excess of fetid “black bile”).<sup>12</sup> Rather than claiming wholeness through acceptance of the separation, however, the melancholic attempts to refuse the loss by swallowing and holding the beloved object within the self: from the bereft cannibal’s perspective, “[b]etter fragmented, torn, cut up, swallowed, digested. . . than lost” (*BS* 12).<sup>13</sup> Building on Kristeva’s model, I propose that in cases like that of Milton’s Satan, when the lost object is primarily one’s own pre-fallen self, melancholia manifests as autocannibalism. Faced with fallen enfleshment, Satan refuses further loss, as well as the compounded pain of confronting his pain, by eating his own abject “corpse.”<sup>14</sup> Consequently, in spite of directing his energies into external vengeance, his escalating internal damage is troped in terms of terms of self-devouring and indigestion.

### **Darkness Edible: Satan’s Melancholy Cannibalism in *Paradise Lost***

Even before he leads his crew into “Intestine War,” Satan’s fall in *Paradise Lost* is presented as a digestive event. The Archangel Raphael’s account in Book V attributes Satan’s first flare of inward upset to God announcing the creation of the Son (5.603-5). To celebrate the occasion, the Heavenly Host indulged in their usual harmonious repast without incident:

Tables are set, and on a sudden pil’d  
With Angels Food, and rubied Nectar flows  
In Pearl, in Diamond, and massie Gold,  
Fruit of delicious Vines, the growth of Heav’n.  
On flours repos’d, and with fresh flourets crown’d,  
They eate, they drink, and in communion sweet  
Quaff immortalitie and joy, secure  
Of surfet where full measure onely bounds  
Excess, before th’ all bounteous King, who showr’d  
With copious hand, rejoycing in their joy. (5.632-41).

The next morning, however, Satan “wak’d” inwardly “fraught / With envie against the Son of God” (5.657, 661-2).<sup>15</sup> Raphael’s baffled repetition as he states, “[a]ll seem’d well pleas’d, all seem’d,” shows the incomprehensibility of Satan’s affliction from his perspective: after all, Satan received no food or message that was not also given to the rest of the angels (5.603-5, 618). Though the nature of Satan’s difference remains obscure, it is clear that the ascension of the Son clearly sews discord within Satan, like a piece of grit inside an oyster’s shell. Rather than tending to the irritant, he endeavors to bring his internal chaos outward, plunging Heaven into “Intestine War” (6.259). The price of his rebellion, however, only magnifies the perceived slight against him: whereas the creation of the Son stirred feelings within Satan of being thrust aside, his literal fall from grace materializes his experience of abjection.

From Satan’s perspective, God disposes of him in the manner that he “downward purg’d / The black tartareous cold infernal dregs” during the Earth’s creation: he consigns him to the cosmic chamber pot (7.237-88). Though Raphael may protest that the infernal crew did not fall but “headlong themselves they threw,” his subsequent comment that “Disburdened Heav’n rejoiced” creates the unmistakable impression of the Heavenly Host basking the relief that follows the evacuation of foul matter (6.864, 888). Belial’s speech during the Devils’ Parliament leaves no doubt that the fallen angels see their “expulsion” in scatological terms:

yet our great Enemy  
All incorruptible would on his Throne  
Sit unpolluted, and th' Ethereal mould  
Incapable of stain would soon expel  
Her mischief, and purge off the baser fire  
Victorious (2.137-42).

Satan, however, imagines a worse fate than the bowels of Hell truly being the end of the line. Having witnessed the partial destruction of his divine self, he projects the promise of further dissolution onto his infernal surroundings as “a fiery deluge, fed / With ever-burning sulphur

unconsumed" (1.67-69, 54-55). The "torment" that roils within him is the suspicion that one can be something more base than shit: his punishment will be to be continuously consumed and broken down into lower, more diffuse forms (1.56). Lest he be "swallowed up in endless misery," he adopts a desperate strategy of self-preservation: eat, rather than be eaten (1.142). Like Kristeva's melancholic, Milton's Satan attempts to fill his inner emptiness and nagging fear of becoming nothing by reconstituting himself as one who eats, who holds, and who destroys.<sup>16</sup> He slinks into Eden "bent on his prey," like a vulture set "set "[t]o gorge on the flesh of lambs or yeanling kids," hoarding stolen intelligence as his food (3.441, 434). Nevertheless, while Kristeva conceives of the loss of a loved object as a "fall" of sorts, Satan's melancholic coping strategy cannot produce even the illusion of reunion with God – and, more to the point, with his intact former self (*BS* 15). A Miltonic, capitalized Fall is a break more irrevocable than death, resulting not only in the subject feeling the pain of loss but undergoing a "change" in "[t]heir nature" (3.125-26). As the first fallen creature, Satan is simultaneously severed from the heavenly sense of the raw (the whole, the unmediated, the pure), and becomes the earthly raw, in the sense of damaged and tender. Not only does his melancholy hunger fail to replenish his gaping inner void, his break with divine ways of knowing impairs his ability to digest new information without perverting or warping any potential insight.<sup>17</sup> Echoing the internal rumblings of insubordination that ended with Satan being tossed in Hell's massive stomach, metaphors of autocannibalism and indigestion haunt the fallen angel's movements for the rest of the epic, as he unwittingly constructs a digestive hell within.

The figure of a fallen, dyspeptic Satan stands in stark contrast to the angels' flawless ability to "transubstantiate," accordingly to Raphael's enthusiastic description over refreshments (5.438). While a re-vamping of the digestive tract may seem like an odd consequence of

fallenness, Michael Schoenfeldt observes that numerous early modern texts suggest that the human body “demand[s] the continual intervention of divine grace to accomplish the miracle of digestion” (254).<sup>18</sup> A certain “Homilie Against Gluttony and Drunkenesse” insists that, “except God give strengthe to nature to digest,” our food will “lie stinking in our bodies, as in a loathsome sinke or chanell, and so diversely infect the whole body” (*Certaine Sermons* 2:98; in Schoenfeldt 253). While his present “consumption” is metaphoric in nature, Milton’s Satan begins to display the symptoms of a festering stomach. Hastening toward Chaos, he harbors “thoughts inflamed of highest design”— a symptom that evokes Lemnius’s claims that indigestion would cause the “brayne to be stuffed full of thicke fumes” (2.630; in Healy 160). Upon meeting Sin and Death, however, the pervasive imagery of indigestion gives way to that of grotesque autocannibalism. Though Satan initially avows them both, Sin reveals the grim pair to be his kin via a twisted family tree: Sin sprung from Satan’s head in Heaven; they coupled to produce Death; and Death then ravished his monstrous mother to spawn a pack of hellhounds. While cultural theorists and literary critics have long intuited a connection between incest and cannibalism, *Paradise Lost* makes this kinship explicit through Sin: not only is she an incest victim twice over, but her children are devouring her alive.<sup>19</sup> Death’s rape that “tore through [her] entrails” yielded a pack of matricidal pups who “howl and gnaw / [her] bowels,” and, compounding her misery, her firstborn “would full soon devour” her “[f]or want of other prey” (2.783, 799-800, 805-6).<sup>20</sup> The graphic openness of Sin’s lower body and her predatory offspring epitomizes Kristeva’s understanding of the birth spectacle as “incest turned inside out, flayed identity” (*PoH* 155). The ravaged identity on display, however, is not Sin’s, but Satan’s. Sin and Death embody the parts of himself he fears with horrifying clarity: in addition to being physically and morally abject, Sin suffers the pain of being eternally consumed by her own



creations, and Death harbors a gnawing hunger that can never be sated. They manifest the twin threats of dissolution and the irreparable inner void. By meeting these extensions of himself with antagonism and misrecognition, Satan also descends into a form of autocannibalism: by turning against his uncanny kin, he rejects and tears at the fabric of his own self – a process which only accelerates when he reaches Earth.

Since numerous critics identify the appearance of Sin and Death with the birth of allegory in the epic, Satan's reaction to them can be glossed as a failure of reading.<sup>21</sup> He has seen this passion play before: Sin's rebuke when Satan moves to attack "thy only Son" is almost painfully on the nose in its evocation of Satan's self-injurious assault on the Son in Heaven (2.728). Satan's inability to recognize and claim these self-harming patterns as his own makes it clear that he cannot break down allegory. Incapable of consuming and incorporating knowledge from the world outside himself, Satan becomes locked in a cycle of cognitive indigestion that leads to further autocannibalism. Milton's narrator shows this process taking shape when he describes Satan's "dire attempt" by fusing the same intestinal and martial metaphors that characterized the war in Heaven:

Now rolling, boils in his tumultuous breast  
And like a devilish engine back recoils  
Upon himself; horror and doubt distract  
His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir  
The Hell within him, for within him Hell  
He brings (4.15-21).

With remarkable directness, the passage shows a creature being eaten by his own bad idea.<sup>22</sup> While the narrator's reference to a "devilish engine" has typically been glossed as a gun or cannon – a wholly reasonable assumption, given that the same phrase is used to describe Satan's explosive inventions during the war – we must still consider, given Milton's playful relationship with etymology, that the original sense of the word "engine" referred to "ingenuity" and, when

paired with the modifier “evil” or even “develes,” to “machination” or “ill intent” (“Book VI: The Argument”; *OED*).<sup>23</sup> Given the coincidence of Satan’s first rebellious inklings and the aftermath of a banquet, the queasy motion of Satan’s thoughts – “rolling,” “boils,” “recoils,”<sup>24</sup> and, soon after, “much revolving” – suggests escalating indigestion from his inner turmoil (4.31). Deepening the groove of self-recrimination shown during his confrontation with Sin and Death, he snaps at an argumentative projection of himself in his Niphates soliloquy, continuing the fragmentation of his psyche. Satan’s self-pitying cry, “my self am Hell; /And in the lowest deep a lower deep / Still threatening to devour me opens wide,” teeters on the edge of insight: he has indeed internalized Hell’s “ever-burning Sulphur unconsum’d” and “noxious vapor” (4.75-77, 1.69, 2.216). Satan’s melancholic fixation on his own wretchedness turns him into the unhealthful stomach into which he was cast, so, as C.S. Lewis observes, his “incessant intellectual activity” is coupled “with an incapacity to understand anything” (99). A true narcissist, his body rejects all nourishment that has not first been remade in his own image. Reminders of his old existence, furthermore, cannot serve as a corrective. Upon seeing Adam and Eve, he reels from recognition of God’s image in their own and “[s]till unfulfilled with pain of longing pines,” demonstrating that he has internalized the pain of loss without fully processing its reality, leaving the interstice at the center of his being empty (4.511). Deciding on the spot to “excite their minds / [w]ith more desire to know,” Satan exposes the depth of his pathology (4.522-23). He cannot imagine healing, only spreading his sense of privation to others; assuming that to hunger is to “die,” he chooses to revel in his own pangs and to draw others into his misery (4.527). Like the bestial creature of Crane’s “In the Desert,” Satan gnaws forever upon his own heart, taking solace in the bitterness of its taste.<sup>25</sup> His punitive transformation into a snake that feeds upon “dust and bitter ashes” translates his inner dysfunction into his outer form: like his

fallen mind, Satan's serpent body, now resembling a severed loop of intestine, is a digestive engine with no attachments and that is incapable of self-nourishment ("Book X: The Argument").<sup>26</sup>

### **"A Paradise Within Thee": Human Redemption and the Stirrings of Poetry**

When measured against the extreme of Satan's cycle of decline, the melancholy of *Paradise Lost's* human characters appears less persistent and pathological. Eve's distempered dreams parallel Satan's post-banquet unrest in Heaven, but she and her husband do not fully fall until they literally eat of the forbidden tree (5.10-11).<sup>27</sup> Their digestive transgression temporarily produces the displays of venom and violent melancholy that we've come to expect of Satan, yet Adam and Eve ultimately repent and take responsibility for their actions. Like Satan and the cosmic "dregs" before him, Adam and Eve suffer a scatological evacuation from their native environment; declared by divine decree to be "tainted," they are "purge[d]. . . off / As a distemper, gross to aire as grosse, / And mortal food, as may dispose [them] best" (11.52-54).<sup>28</sup> Unlike him, however, the first couple participate in their own expulsion with dignity and take "wandring steps and slow" out of Eden anticipating that, one day, their line "shall all restore" (12.648, 623). Though ultimately dependent on the Son's grace, the fallen Adam and Eve have not lost their capacity for love, ingenuity, or hard work; less than one book after eating the apple, they already speculate how "[i]n offices of love, how we may light'n / Each other's burden in our share of woe" (10.960-61). Nevertheless, since this promising beginning serves as the end of *Paradise Lost's* narrative, we do not get to witness their adjustment to fallen existence, as we do Satan's maladjustment to his. The first fallen creature succumbed to dyspepsia and autocannibalism. What miracle of digestion affords humanity the ability to turn forbidden fruit

into “[a] paradise within thee, happier far” (12.587)? Beyond the intercession of the Son, the aspirations of Milton’s narrator to “justify the ways of God to men” through “[t]hings unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime” seems to offer another answer: poetry (1.26, 16).<sup>29</sup>

The constant, and occasionally intrusive, presence of Milton’s narrator places the poem within an implicit timeline, beginning with the creation of all things and ending with the creation of *Paradise Lost*. The text’s narrative, however, lets the development of this lineage remain obscure. While Michael grants Adam access to visions of his fallible descendants, these scenes of future humankind focus on calamities, rather than the quotidian labors, emotional struggles, and creative ventures of our species. In other words, Adam’s revelations of his people’s future – otherwise known as our past – provides an overview of the Old Testament’s greatest hits, yet lays little groundwork for the beginnings of literary production, let alone the writing of an epic poem. In different ways, the covenant with God after the Flood and the folly of Babel do serve as indices of the rise of symbolic language, with all of its accompanying limitations (11.12.48-62).<sup>30</sup> The existence of physical writing, however, is neither directly acknowledged nor celebrated.<sup>31</sup> Perhaps due to Milton’s aversion to texts being treated as repositories of absolute meaning, Adam’s premonitions minimize the role of textuality in the fallen world (*Areo.* 955-56, 961-62). In Michael’s account of the story of Exodus, the archangel does refer to Moses keeping “Records of his Cov’nant” and the “Law” in an “Ark” inside his Tabernacle, indicating that these revelations can be handled like physical objects (12.252, 287). Nevertheless, Milton studiously avoids mentioning the word “tablets,” and his description of Moses’s role as to “report” the decrees of “the voice of God / To mortal eare” emphasizes orality over written documentation (12.237, 235-36).<sup>32</sup> The primacy of audition over reading in these visions fits the narrator’s presentation of his own project as an “adventurous song” received from his Muse, following the

Classical and Biblical traditions of prophecy (1.13, 6). By claiming to pursue “[t]hings unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime,” however, he reminds us that we now live in a fallen world of text: like it or not, *Paradise Lost* will be read, not heard, and its readership will have also experienced its influences as volumes of paper, not inspired music (1.16). Caught between its aspirations to originality and dense intertextuality, the poem attempts to occlude the existence of other written works, while constantly referring to them, amending them, and establishing their critical importance. Drawing on the humanism idiom for creation as “digestion,” I argue that the poetics of *Paradise Lost* recapitulate the digestive motifs of its narrative, drawing it into a constant struggle between the mechanism’s productive capacity and its tendency to devolve into self-destruction.

### **Eating Our Words: Milton as Digestive Marvel**

Before developing my argument with respect to *Paradise Lost*, I must first clarify what I mean by “humanist digestion.” In *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, Robert Burton offers a both a definition and a performance of what it means to subsume material from another author and marry it to original content:

The matter is theirs most part, and yet mine, *apparet unde sumptum sit* [it was plain whence it was taken] (which Seneca approves), *aliud tamen quam unde sumptum sit apparet* [yet it becomes something different in its new setting]; which nature doth with the aliment of our bodies incorporate, digest, assimilate, I do *concoquere quod hausi* [assimilate what I have swallowed], dispose of what I take” (25).

In contrast to plagiarism, in which borrowed material is cravenly displayed as one’s own, Burton imagines a kind of craftsmanship in which foreign matter becomes part of the work, not by

deception, but by sheer force of the writer's assimilatory imagination.<sup>33</sup> In the digestive troping of the creative process, this force was commonly figured as "heat," since early modern physiological science held that "natural heat. . . alter[s] and digest[s] the nutritive matter" into usable energy for the body (Burton 156).<sup>34</sup> As Maggie Kilgour has previously noted, many of Milton's early critics praised him for his "amazing ability to digest his material and assimilate it to himself"; William Hazlitt effused that "the fervor of his imagination melts down and renders malleable, as in a furnace, the most contradictory materials" and Samuel Johnson similarly observed that "the heat of Milton's mind might be said to sublimate his learning" (in Kilgour 133). While these metaphors appeal to smelting and alchemy, respectively, the digestive heat they share presents Milton as a poet who figuratively eats his predecessors for lunch.<sup>35</sup> (His contention in *Areopagitica* that "a good book is the precious lifeblood of a master spirit" adds more than a savor of cannibalism to the whole affair (930).) The "digestive" Milton, furthermore, is not confined to his own era's criticism. In *Delirious Milton* (2006), Gordon Teskey explicitly refers to the poet's "creative processes by which he aggressively appropriates, digests, and transforms those materials into the 'proper substance' (PL 5.493) of his song" (7). In lieu of melting heat, however, his idiom for Milton's relationship with his source texts evokes a monstrous mass of intestines that "thoroughly crushes whatever it takes into itself, its smoothness [. . .] the result of an efficient violence that we can still feel in the serpentine rhythm of its motion" (120).<sup>36</sup> Though the method may vary from "natural heat" to ruthless peristalsis, critics of Milton's work have created an enduring image of the poet as one who consumes all things.<sup>37</sup>

Despite the stunning artistry of Milton's assimilatory poetics, however, humanist digestion is a fundamentally fallen mechanism for learning and creativity. After all, Adam and

Eve are the first beings to take in knowledge by consuming it: prior to the Fall, they had direct access to the divine word, without the need for mediation or interpretation.<sup>38</sup> As Danielle A. St. Hilaire argues in *Satan's Poetry*, the concept of fallenness in *Paradise Lost* “entails a creature’s permanent loss of a connection with God, a loss that substantially reorients fallen creatures’ language and epistemology” (1).<sup>39</sup> Within a humanist framework, however, this “reorientation” may be more precisely described as a transition from received truth – pure, unadulterated, and unchanging – to digested knowledge, which is somehow transformed through the process of transmission. While, compared to prelapsarian understanding, this change may be cynically glossed as degradation, it also serves as the font of human creativity. Just as Lucretius defined one of the purposes of digestion as to “prop up the frame and recreate the strength by filling interstices,” knowledge production – and, hand in hand, textual production – aims to fill gaps, contributing to the collective production of a *corpus* (4.866-69).

In some obvious and merciful ways, humanist digestion spares some of the ravages of its material referent: texts cannot be “used up” upon repeated readings, and papers do not suffer the destructive indignity of mastication (except by bookworms).<sup>40</sup> The varied relationships between intertexts from different periods “evade the problem of time” and sequence in a way that natural digestion cannot (Greene 92). This circumvention of time, however, only applies to the postlapsarian world, since the substance of knowledge, learning, and communication before the Fall has never been part of the digestive economy. It has never intersected with our reality of loss and abjection. Even the narrator’s Muse cannot provide a remedy, since he is completely dependent on her for intelligence and cannot definitely confirm her identity, intentions, or even her existence (*PL* 1.12-13, 19-20; 9.20-24, 46-47). The “mortal taste” that introduced epistemological instability and the related need to digest information into the world means that

all the poet's raw material for his epic has been tainted by mediation, human interference, or doubt (1.2). As James Kearney observes, "[b]ooks, paper, ink. . . are signs of the Fall, signs of the failure of human signification to be other than bodily, carnal" (24).<sup>41</sup> *Paradise Lost*, then, finds itself in the difficult spot of trying to explain a phenomenon of which it is a symptom, with all of the accompanying limitations of fallenness. While the question of whether Milton's epic succeeds as theodicy has been debated extensively,<sup>42</sup> I am most interested in identifying the symptomatic effects and artistic implications of its attempt to try. (After all, "success" in a fallen world must always be accompanied by an asterisk, a qualification, an adjustment of criteria.) I contend that the cannibalistic tendencies used to trope fallenness in *Paradise Lost* also express themselves in Milton's poetics. Like Satan, the poem mourns a loss – in this case, of pre-fallen knowledge – and tries to consume its way to wholeness. Nevertheless, *Paradise Lost* ultimately eschews Satan's path for that of Adam and Eve: it revels in the beauty of human endeavor and labors in service of securing a creative lineage and nurturing a community of readers.

### **Cannibal Canon: The Currency of Allusion in *Paradise Lost***

*Paradise Lost* frequently portrays the wonder of God in terms of the ineffable and inexpressible. The angels praise the Lord following the Creation by singing "what thought can measure thee or tongue / Relate thee [?]" (7.603-4). As "affable" liaison between Heaven and Earth, Raphael gently protests against some of Adam's requests for higher knowledge by reminding him, "to recount almighty works / What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice, / Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?" (7.113-15). These prelapsarian expressions of reverence, however, may also be read in terms of fallen melancholy: if certain forms of knowledge remained inaccessible or unspeakable even before the Fall, then how can an epic poem hope to



give them voice, to fill the void left by the speech of God? While the narrator's Muse serves as one possible means of elevating the work above mere "middle flight," her status and motives remain uncertain (1.14). As a result, the poem seems to resort to a more quotidian method of coping with its separation from the "Author of all being": its encyclopedic consumption and incorporation of other texts (3.374). As C.S. Lewis observes, "A great deal of what is mistaken for pedantry in Milton (we hear too often of his 'immense learning') is in reality evocation" (45). Rather than interpreting this tendency as attempts to "guide our imaginations," I read the host of allusions in *Paradise Lost* as grappling with the limits of fallen imagination: just as the names of the fallen angels were stricken from Heaven's record after their expulsion, Eden has been obscured from our mind's eye (45). Fallen humanity shares the position of the poem's blind narrator, who laments that "the Book of knowledge fair / Presented with a Universal blanc / Of Nature's works to mee expung'd and ras'd" (3.47-49). *Paradise Lost* seems to respond to the terror of this "blanc" in a similar manner to Satan: by attempting to stuff itself. This solution, however, is a palliative, rather than a remedy. Furthermore, *Paradise Lost*'s mimetic or symptomatic efforts to incorporate all fallen knowledge into its story of Eden has destabilizing effects on the body of the narrative, showing the rifts in time, thought, and flesh which divide it from the pre-fallen world.

The disruptive effects of cannibalism in *Paradise Lost* occur on two levels: the narrative and the poetic. Although the humanistic cannibalism inherent to the poem's form is related to its depictions of cannibalism in the text, the mechanisms behind these registers are not identical. Within the text, cannibalism acts as a symptomatic response to fallenness, based on a gutting feeling of loss and desire for self-preservation. The humanistic cannibalism, or "textophagy," that builds the body of the poem, however, has a more complex social function.<sup>43</sup> In addition to

responding to the sense of loss or bereavement resulting from the epistemological changes of the Fall, *Paradise Lost*'s incorporation of other texts can be understood as a ritual of consolidation, akin to rituals of funerary cannibalism among certain human societies. Peter Hulme characterizes these cannibal practices both as a nostalgic act of mourning and a search for social wholeness – motivations which are hardly selfish or pathological (10). Anthropologist Peggy Reeves Sanday similarly observes that “[a]s a life-giving symbol or a symbol of order, ritual cannibalism physically regenerates social categories by transmitting vital essences through the dead and the living or between the human and the divine”– functions not unlike that of the Western literary Canon (214).<sup>44</sup> In spite of these positive or pro-social functions of humanistic cannibalism, however, the poem's incorporation of other literary texts is not untroubled: temporalities loop back on one another; details snag, creating blockages or moments of rupture. Despite differences in their mechanisms, explicit representations of cannibalism within the text provides insight into the problems of its cannibal poetics by reminding us that the act of “consuming knowledge” is in fact a re-enactment of a primeval violence and of a change in the very meaning of corporeality. The graphic portrayals of cannibalism and autocannibalism within *Paradise Lost* bind the creative methods of humanism to rent flesh, figuring it as a symptom of our embodied fallenness, rather than its abstracted, purified cure.

### **Sights Unseen: Milton's Cosmos and the Limits of Accommodation**

Performing a symptomatic reading of *Paradise Lost*'s poetics requires us to recognize our own status in Milton's cosmos as symptoms: in other words, we have been molded and shaped by a postlapsarian world, inhabiting bodies bound by the rules of fallen corporeality. Though spread across time and space, as human beings, readers of *Paradise Lost* can be expected to

share a certain understanding of how it feels to possess a fallible digestive tract. For instance, whatever one thinks about his literary oeuvre, John Milton is perhaps never more accessible to any given reader as when he writes of his intestinal troubles. In a letter to Leonard Philaris, the great poet emerges as an embodied being who laments that

It is ten years, I think more or less, since I noticed my sight becoming weak and growing dim, and at the same time my spleen and all my viscera burdened and shaken with flatulence. . . Certain permanent vapors seem to have settled upon my entire forehead and temples, which press and oppress my eyes (256).<sup>45</sup>

While we cannot experience the particularity of Milton's pain just by reading about it, as fellow owners of postlapsarian guts, we fallen creatures can imagine the scourges of indigestion and abdominal pain with a kind of clarity that exceeds our theoretical speculations about angelic bodies, free of "membrane, joynt, or limb" (8.625). Since we are accustomed to the realities of poor digestion, however, we risk normalizing the disruptive strangeness of Milton inserting fallen corporeality into the language of Eden. Consider, for example, Raphael's well-known speech to Adam, cautioning him about seeking knowledge above his station:

But Knowledge is as food, and needs no less  
Her Temperance over Appetite, to know  
In measure what the mind may well contain,  
Oppresses else with Surfet, and soon turns  
Wisdom to Folly, as Nourishment to Winde (7.126-30).

To a fallen audience, Raphael's metaphor makes perfect sense: just as overindulgence creates dyspepsia, cognitive over-reaching results in a troubled interior. It makes little to no sense, however, for this metaphor of indigestion to appear in a conversation between an angel and a prelapsarian human – for, at this point, what could either know of "Winde"? The first humans have yet to experience bodily frailty of any kind and, as Raphael's lengthy explanation of angelic digestion makes clear, he flawlessly "transubstantiate[es]" the "grosser" matter he ingests into "purer" nourishment for his spiritual body (5.438, 416). If properly defamiliarized, the exchange

positions Raphael and Adam as speaking of the unknowable through a trope that would be incomprehensible to both of them. This lapse into a digestive metaphoric register can be understood as an act of accommodation for its fallen audience, just as Raphael attempts to adapt his discourse for Adam's creaturely understanding.<sup>46</sup> As Paul Cefalu observes, however, accommodation in *Paradise Lost* inevitably incites desire for more knowledge: "Each time Raphael translates one of God's mysteries to Adam, Adam chomps at the bit for more" (218). The language of appetite is more than coincidental: the accommodating narrative of *Paradise Lost* both attempts to slake and unwittingly perpetuates its readers' insatiable hunger for knowledge left behind by the Fall. The poem's extensive elaborations on theodicy, often expressed through intertextual references, constantly open more questions as it attempts to resolve others, so its encyclopedic textophagy testifies to its own incompleteness.

My characterization of *Paradise Lost* as wounding itself in its quest for wholeness may suggest that it will inevitably be classified as one of Stanley Fish's "self-consuming artifacts," which "signifies most successfully when it fails, when it points *away* from itself to something its forms cannot capture" (13). Though I share Fish's investment in the poem's internal dissonance, I argue that the digestive mode of its creation and its revision of literary history complicate Fish's paradigm by blurring the distinction between self and other – a characteristic dilemma of the cannibal. When *Paradise Lost* gestures away from itself, it does so by citing its intertexts and influences, defining itself in relation to the works that came before it. . By positioning itself as both the beginning and summation of the Western canon, however, the poem attempts to negate the existence of anything before or outside itself: it folds its literary reference points into its own substance, so gestures "away" are always routed back around toward it again. When examined as a product of humanist digestion and imaginative heat, the

poem's language is not "twice made," to quote Teskey, as much as it is well-chewed and stewing in its gullet (127). This digestive process, however, can never be complete: in order to recognize the epic's grand catalogue of allusions, the reader must recognize these referents as somehow external to the poem, as separate. Hence, *Paradise Lost's* particular relationship to humanistic cannibalism means that it adopts indigestion as its aesthetic model: the fallen reader is starving; the poem is stuffed; the references are never fully incorporated. *Paradise Lost* performs the gesture of consuming the canon without ever completing its assimilation – which would, ironically, negate the significance of the feat by rendering it unrecognizable. Consequently, images of indigestive cannibalism in the poem simultaneously communicate the predicament of fallenness and materialize the epic's troubled poetics, making *Paradise Lost's* constant, uncompleted work of assimilation visible as form of creative self-violence.

Satan's initial meeting with Sin provides a perfect example of the poem's use of indigestion and autocannibalism to convey both the revelatory and limiting capacities of the humanist model of literary production. When Satan encounters Sin at the gates of Hell, the former angel declares that "I know thee not, nor ever saw till now / Sight more detestable then him and thee" (2.745). Her appearance to Milton's readers, however, is immediately "familiar grown," for she is an amalgamation of numerous figures already ensconced within the Canon (2.761). Her canine brood, which also appears in Bacon's version of the character, is "Cerberian"; their endless gnawing of her bowels evokes the eagle devouring Prometheus's liver; her ugliness exceeds that of "Scylla" and devotees of "Night-Hag," Hecate; her emergence from Satan's head mirrors the birth of Athena in Hesiod's *Theogony*; and her brutal rape has countless Classical precedents (2.655, 660, 662, 758; Hesiod 901). Though the epic has not yet reached the story of Genesis, Sin's snaky body also works as a forerunner for the

pivotal serpent of Book IX; furthermore, her hybrid appearance evokes the many depictions of the serpent with a woman's head in medieval and early modern Christian iconography.<sup>47</sup> Turning to English literature, Milton's Sin owes an obvious debt to Spenser's Error, from her scaly form to her cannibalistic young to her allegorical function.<sup>48</sup> Both Error and Sin, in turn, derive their grotesque life cycles from early modern lore about the viper. The preface of James Mabbe's *The Spanish Bawd* (1631) describes the viper's mating ritual in grim detail: "the Male puts his head into the mouth of the Female," who kills him during the act. The young revenge their father, however, when the "first of her brood, breakes the barres of his mothers belly, eates out his way thorow her bowels, at which place all the rest issue forth; whereof she dies" (sig. A6<sup>v</sup>-A7).<sup>49</sup> Beyond this probable influence on Milton's Sin, the poet may have borrowed from his own depictions of Chronos's incestuous cannibalism in "On Time" ("And glut thyself with what thy womb devours/ . . . thy greedy self-consum'd" (4, 10)) and "*Naturam Non Pati Senium* [That Nature Does Not Suffer from Old Age]."<sup>50</sup> While this catalogue is by no means exhaustive, it is clear that, while Satan perceives Sin as "double-formed," she has in fact been formed many more times than that, likely within the reader's own experience (2.714). Milton's self-cannibalizing figure Sin is herself a product of literary cannibalism.

In an epic poem stuffed with a *copia* of allusions, what are we then to make of this emblem of referentiality turning against itself with such violence?<sup>51</sup> In his comments on excess as a form of "evocation" in *Paradise Lost*, Lewis characterizes such allusions as exerting "unobtrusive pressure" onto the reader's mind in order to guide their imaginations "into the channels where the poet wishes them to flow" (45). Milton's allusive displays, however, can hardly be described as "unobtrusive," given the wealth of critical attention that has been devoted to recognizing, sourcing, and glossing his references. By contrast, the figure of Sin makes an

excellent case for the *obtrusiveness* of Milton's allusions being both contextually appropriate and crucial to their function. Formed from the tissue of countless literary forebears, Sin attracts fascination in part because the graft marks are still visible: her developmental history is hardly obscure. In terms of humanist invention, she is vividly animated by "the heat of Milton's mind," to use Johnson's phrase, yet it would be wrong to describe her as sublimated, assimilated, or digested (Kilgour 133). At a moment meant to signal total newness in the world of the narrative, *Paradise Lost* follows the example of Sin and opens its bowels before the reader, displaying the half-incorporated literary materials within. Like Spenser's Error before it and Swift's Criticism after it, it positively spews text and discourse.<sup>52</sup> Rather than a gross-out effect, however, the visceral self-revelation amounts to the poem "showing its work," after the fashion of a mathematician. The self-conscious literariness of the description of Sin breaks the fourth wall, reminding us that we are not witnessing the creation of Sin – an event we glimpse only through an embedded narrative after the fact – but of Milton's Sin.<sup>53</sup> The wealth of allusions draws attention to the poet's artifice and, most crucially, to the necessity of artifice. As Lewis suggests with his remarks on "evocation," by piling on reference after poetic reference, Milton demonstrates that all have fallen short of capturing the enormity of something like the birth of Sin. As creatures of a postlapsarian world, our sin has never been original. Furthermore, though she gives credit to Satan as her "Author" in the text, to a readership of fallen human beings, authorship of sin has always been corporate – a condition reflected in the form Milton gives to her (2.864). Despite humankind's collective responsibility for Sin, however, we cannot reconstruct her creation, because we cannot recreate a world without her.<sup>54</sup> The digestive engine of Milton's poem may be stuffed with raw material yet, like Sin's snappish brood, its narrative of Sin can never be whole or complete.

As with the ornamented presentation of Sin, insertions like the reference to the “Thyestean banquet” during the animals’ massacre or the catalogue of Classical beauties compared to errant Eve remind us at crucial narrative moments that we are not watching the primal scene, but a simulacrum (10.688; 9.386-396). While making the narrative seem more comprehensive, Milton’s literary allusions ultimately inform us that we are not seeing the thing itself. At these moments of rupture, *Paradise Lost* appears to take the form of a literary ouroboros: simultaneously signaling both wholeness and loss, its voracious incorporation reifies its incompleteness. Instead of simply narrating the Fall, Milton’s epic takes a show-and-tell approach, symptomatically re-enacting its aftereffects even as it attempts to explain how it came to be. To say that *Paradise Lost*’s poetics are symptomatic, however, is not to say that they are unproductive. The children of Adam and Eve may never experience the gentle labors of Eden or know the taste of its fruit, but can they not still grow fruit that nourishes the body and delights the tongue? The Son makes it clear that the price of fallen creation is violence: Eve must be wracked with pain in childbirth, and Adam must bloody his hands for a more meager harvest than what he once gathered with ease (10.193-206). The pain inherent to the creative process and the imperfection of the result, however, do not negate the worth of their works. In spite of these impediments, Adam provides for his family and gifts future generations with the knowledge to do the same; Eve, furthermore, gives birth to the beginning of the line which culminates in a “second Eve” delivering Jesus, who will defeat Satan and deliver all (10.183). Having been cast out and deprived, the first couple comes to terms with their own abjection and realizes its creative potential. In Kristeva’s terms, they “give birth to [themselves] amid the violence of sobs, of vomit,” creating a precedent for mankind’s turbulent processes of making and unmaking (*PoH* 3).<sup>55</sup> A similar perspective can be applied to the cannibalistic and autocannibalistic mechanisms



that drive *Paradise Lost*: we can simultaneously acknowledge their violence and celebrate what they produce. The following section considers the generative effects of *Paradise Lost*'s fallen symptomology, examining how its hunger and self-rent flesh offers a positive, if not fully redemptive, model for human inquiry.

### **“My labour will sustain me”: Cannibal Arts and the *Felix Culpa***

While nothing made by human hands or minds can ever be perfect, *Paradise Lost* elucidates the ways of God by justifying man's impulse to create art. Though the act of making can be motivated by “pleasure,” as when God creates the Earth, Adam and Eve's response to the Fall reveals a more urgent purpose: to justify existence (Arg. Bk. VII). Perhaps one of Milton's greatest contributions of his re-telling of Genesis is *Paradise Lost*'s recognition of the Fall as a trauma. While the Adam and Eve of the Bible confess their transgressions with childish simplicity and accept their sentence in silence, Milton's version of the first couple is not primarily worried about how to make amends, but about whether they even deserve to live after what they did (*KJV* Gen. 3:12-24; PL 10.988-1006). Loathe to subject their descendents to the unknown ravages of Death, Eve proposes, “Let us seek Death, or he not found, supply / With our own hands his Office on our selves,” pre-emptively destroying “[d]estruction with destruction” (10.1001-2, 1006). Adam, however, rejects any plan which “cuts us off from hope” and chooses the toil thrust upon him as salvation: “What harm? Idleness has bin worse; / My labour will sustain me” (10.1043, 1055-56). To an extent, Adam speaks literally about the task before him: if he plans to eat, he must work. Beyond his surface meaning, his pronouncement that “My labour will sustain me” doubles as a credo of postlapsarian survival. Whether physical or spiritual, hunger is singularly motivating, and melancholic longing for Eden can drive humankind to

strive, achieve, and improve itself. Intratextually, the sense of yearning and incompleteness embedded in *Paradise Lost* also produces effects that can be understood as generative, nurturing, and sustaining.

Considering the monumental traumatic impact of the Fall, the symptomatic substitution of intertextual scenes of cannibalism for “the thing itself” can also be seen as a form of accommodation: not just for the intellect, but for the psyche. While the digestive violence of *Paradise Lost* is grim, it stands in the place of something far worse.<sup>56</sup> Loss of a direct connection with God encompasses a kind of soul-pain beyond comprehension, not only driving Adam and Eve toward suicide, but destroying the fallen angel who came before them. With this in mind, *Paradise Lost*’s inability or refusal to capture these primal moments of loss can be read both as a symptom and a protective function of poetry. When Adam and Eve each receive Raphael’s story of the War, both struggle to comprehend anything “[s]o unimaginable as hate in Heav’n,” even with the accommodations made by their “Divine interpreter” (7.54, 72). It is simply too awful, too strange. In having to describe Satan’s unprecedented, “unimaginable” fall, Raphael’s exclamation about speaking of the works of God – “What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice, / Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?” – can also reflect upon the challenge of trying to communicate a pain that “shatters language” to his human audience.<sup>57</sup> What tongue can suffice to express the enormity of a Fall?

As a storyteller, Raphael’s task – and, by proxy, Milton’s task – can be compared to that of Carolyn Forché’s narrator in “The Colonel,” as she attempts to describe an El Salvadorian military officer pouring out a bag of human ears on the table in front of her: “He spilled many human ears on the table. They were like dried peach halves. There is no other way to say this” (16). Forché’s phrase “There is no other way to say this” expresses both a lie and a truth. On a

literal level, there are manifold other ways to describe this scene: not every witness would have arrived at her precise English phrase. As an expression of trauma, however, “There is no other way to say this” communicates that there is *no* adequate way to say this, but her words will have to do. In his reading of the poem, Kenneth Lincoln writes of this moment that “[l]anguage cannot bear this violence”:

This cannot be said right. . . no way except by way of a horribly failed speech, a terribly wrong image. . . What is too horrible to say reduces her to simile, sacked ears ‘like dried peach halves,’ a device that admits its own failure to name things directly. In so failing, the simile breaks a frustrated silence beyond itself (385-86).

A literary device takes the place of the unspeakable image, simultaneously facilitating and foreclosing communication. Forché’s simile provides an anchor for thought, but no more. Picturing severed ears as “peach halves” is both possible and suitably unpleasant for the reader, yet it pales before the inarticulate horror of the narrator’s experience. While the failure of language to capture that experience is evidence of the Fall, it can also be regarded as supreme mercy. Tropes hold a distance between the reader and unimaginable real. Like holy intercessors, the “peach halves” in Forché and the scenes of cannibalism in Milton stand in front of a far worse material reality, willing to partially interpret for the reader’s understanding, but not to convey “too much” (11.531). This insulating gap between real and imaginary can be understood as a loss, but also a necessary loss that makes it possible to transmit meaning. In Milton’s cosmos, the audience of *Paradise Lost* may know what a fallen world looks like from their daily existence, yet no one alive (the poet included) knows how it feels to fall from prelapsarian grace. While Milton’s poem cannot recover this experience for us, by likening the effects of the Fall to

cannibalism and autocannibalism, it successfully conveys a sense of the magnitude and violence of the resulting change, making pain beyond comprehension slightly more comprehensible.

In addition to the accommodating effects of cannibal metaphors in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's aversive spectacles serve another literary function: inciting wonder, fascination, and even pleasure. After Raphael's initial reservations about the limits of seraphs' tongues and men's hearts, he ultimately decides to continue his story by stating "Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve / To glorify the Maker and infer / Thee also happier, shall not be withheld" (7.115-17). The archangel's logic essentially concludes that, even if his audience's understanding is incomplete, sharing further information is justified if it makes them more effective worshippers but also "happier," justifying his narrative's worth as a source of pleasure (7.117). Raphael's reasoning can also be applied to the ethos of *Paradise Lost* as a whole: it is meant to instruct, but also to delight. The epic's scenes of cannibalism may not seem to offer the same pleasures as the lush passages on Eden's "delights," yet their graphic excess suggests otherwise. As Aurel Kolnai writes, disgust "carries within it the echo of a negated 'gusto,'" which may not be negated as much as recast (101). Considering her brief appearance in the text, Milton's Sin – *Paradise Lost*'s cannibalized Queen of the Abject – remains a towering presence, with the transfixing power of an inverted Medusa. All action stops to give way to her luxuriously foul description, and Satan's mild responses, calling her and her fell firstborn "Dear Daughter" and "fair Son," show Milton at play, blending disgust with glee and black humor (2.649-80, 817-18). In addition to being edifying, Sin is clearly meant to be kind of fun. Similarly, Satan's scenery-chewing zest for performing his role as fallen angel is a crucial part of what makes him beguiling. It's no wonder that Blake concluded that Milton must be "of the Devil's party" considering that he allows the Adversary to be the life of it, spewing forth brio and quotable lines

like confetti.<sup>58</sup> Fallenness, particularly when it is represented in terms of spectacular violence, is undeniably arresting. In addition to serving as an accommodating substitute for events surpassing human understanding, tropes of cannibalism – both in terms of fleshy gore and of cosmic self-cannibalism as the Earth gives birth to and devours herself – in *Paradise Lost* enable the poem to transform its limited representation of fallenness into something engaging and perversely wonderful. These figures act as symptoms of fallen abjection, yet also show the way toward salvaging an abject aesthetics that recognizes the beauty in the midst of disgrace.<sup>59</sup>

Beyond the poem's representations of cannibalism, *Paradise Lost*'s cannibal poetics also fit within the schema of an artistic *felix culpa*. Humanism's predatory trope for literary creation – consumption and digestion of the works of others – imagines violence as an inherent product of creation, yet creative violence provides a necessary alternative to pure destruction. In “On the Melancholic Imaginary,” Kristeva characterizes the “painful and perennial struggle to compose a work of art” as a balm to melancholy and productive counterbalance to the “innumerable pleasures offered by destruction and chaos.” By harnessing these violent human impulses in service of making, rather than unmaking, “works of art thus enable us to establish less destructive, more pleasurable relations with ourselves and with others” (17). Adam's instinct that “[m]y labour will sustain me” recognizes the salvific quality of art in human history: it cannot reverse the Fall, yet it can channel the violence it inscribed within human existence into labor that sustains the artist and nourishes the community at large (10.1056). If considered as a product of this process, *Paradise Lost* models an ethics of creation after the Fall. It both edifies and delights. It incorporates material from a wide range of texts without erasing its sources in the digestive process. (After all, in *Paradise Lost*, the only being who digests everything perfectly in a fallen world is Death, who makes seamless incorporation synonymous with annihilation.) Just

as Kristeva asserts that “the triumph over melancholy consists as much in the constitution of a symbolic family (ancestor, mythical personage, esoteric community) as in the construction of a symbolic object,” Milton’s poem interpolates a community of readers and affirms its place within a literary Canon that serves as a partial history of postlapsarian invention (“OtMI” 11). The connection between these two “symbolic families” helps to expose a nutritive dimension to the epic’s consumptive methods of creation. While *Paradise Lost* acknowledges the Canon by consuming its intertexts, it does so to feed its readers: to offer a concentrated dose of corporate human insight “which best may serve / To glorify the Maker and infer / The[m] also happier” (7.115-17). Its audience’s assimilatory abilities may be imperfect, yet, like Raphael, the epic defends the humanitarian enterprise of trying. Adam and Eve’s resolutions after the Fall make this ethical imperative clear: if we are to seek “a Paradise within,” we must use our labor to sustain ourselves and its fruits to nourish others, sharing “the summe / Of wisdom” out of “offices of love” (12.587, 575-76; 10.960).<sup>60</sup>

The postlapsarian world affords more possibilities, however, than simply sharing, digesting, and re-digesting what has come before. While the “mortal change” wrought by the Fall has the most dramatic and damaging effects, the very existence of change can be construed as a consequence of fallenness (10.273).<sup>61</sup> In Eden, everything is supposed to have a single, essential function: on seeing Adam and Eve, Satan immediately perceives that “He [is] for God only, she for God in him” (4.299). In a similar vein, Adam recounts how, when presented with the globe’s fauna, “I nam’d them, as they pass’d, and understood / Their nature, with such knowledge God endu’d / My sudden apprehension” (8.352-54). Prelapsarian creatures can be read in terms of surfaces, without doubt or the potential for deviance.<sup>62</sup> After the first couple’s fatal act of eating, all living beings lose this former stability and must adjust to a new world that expresses change

in terms of digestive violence. While the process is violent, however, the space for change created by the Fall is extraordinarily fecund. Adam discovers the salvific potential of his daily labors, and Eve embraces her new role as the beginning of mankind's deliverance.<sup>63</sup> Earth's climate, terrain, and biodiversity develop stunning variance. When life incorporates loss in *Paradise Lost*, transformation becomes possible.<sup>64</sup>

If we apply the same principle to postlapsarian literary creation, Milton's epic demonstrates reveals intertextuality to be a gift of the Fall. *Paradise Lost's* incorporation of other texts enacts the digestive violence that marks fallen creation. While this digestion does not denature the fragments the epic incorporates, it does alter their functions. Leviathan is not simply Leviathan, but Satan's massive body prone on Hell's burning lake (1.200-208). Galileo is not himself, but the eye viewing the moon that Satan's "ponderous shield" so resembles (1.284). Psellus's writings on spirit physiology inspires the first (and most endearing) angelic blush on record (43; 8.618-19).<sup>65</sup> The evolution of Milton's source material when incorporated into the body of the poem shows the generative effects of literary cannibalism. In her anthropological work on cannibalism's symbolic functions, Peggy Reeves Sanday claims that "[t]he body in cannibalism can be likened to the alchemist's *vas* in which certain ingredients were mixed to achieve desired states in the experimenter" (50).<sup>66</sup> While Sanday speaks specifically of the effects of mingling flesh, her insight can be adapted into a model for the mechanics of fallen poetry: it appropriates pieces of other texts not to destroy them, but to blend with them and adapt them to create something new, its growth flexible and rhizomatic (50). Since Milton's *Areopagitica* envisions individual books as "the precious lifeblood of a master spirit, embalmed and treasured up on purpose to a life beyond life," this process can be construed to be a form of cannibalism (930).<sup>67</sup> Nevertheless, the difference between the literal carnage following the Fall

and the creative cannibalism that produces new literary texts is comparable to that between earthly food and the “Intelligential substances” extracted from it by angels: the “grosser” mechanism of fallen cannibalistic violence “feeds the purer” aim of crafting new, insightful works of art (5.408, 416). “Whatever was created,” explains Raphael, “needs / To be sustain’d and fed” (5.414-15). The price of living, suggests the Archangel, is the necessity of consumption – a process that, in a fallen world, is irrevocably bound to melancholy, violence, and loss. This very proximity to destruction, however, makes creation possible. “It is on this marginal potential of spoken sin, as happy sin,” writes Kristeva, “that art grounds itself,” treating abjection as fertile soil for a *felix culpa* (131). *Paradise Lost*, however, offers an even more radical vision of a “paradise within” that depends upon *felix* cannibals, redeeming consumption as a process that does not simply destroy, but binds, distills, and makes the world new (12.587).

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<sup>1</sup> While it is often considered to be “unnatural,” plenty of species do in fact practice cannibalism. See biologist Bill Schutt’s *Cannibalism: A Perfectly Natural History*.

<sup>2</sup> Thyestes was tricked into eating his own children by his brother, Atreus, as an act of revenge. The most popular version of the myth can be found in Seneca’s *Thyestes*. Beyond the “Thyestean banquet,” the House of Atreus was notoriously plagued by cannibalism, beginning with Tantalus cooking his son, Pelops.

<sup>3</sup> Phrase taken from Rudyard Kipling’s *Just So Stories for Little Children*.

<sup>4</sup> From Romans 6:23: “For the wages of sin is death” (KJV).

<sup>5</sup> Compare to the Dante’s display of Count Ugolino gnawing upon his rival’s head at the end of the *Inferno*’s Canto 32.

<sup>6</sup> In *Satan’s Poetry*, Danielle St. Hilaire makes a thorough and convincing case that “fallenness in the poem entails a creature’s permanent loss of a connection with God, a loss that substantially reorients fallen creatures’ language and epistemology and thereby transforms their understanding of themselves and their ability to act in the world” (1).

<sup>7</sup> In *De Doctrina Christiana*, Milton writes that “Consubstantiation and particularly transubstantiation and papal anthropophagy or cannibalism are utterly alien to reason, common sense and human behavior. What is more, they are irreconcilable. . . with the normal use of words” (*CPW* 6:554). To avoid anachronism, Milton’s Latin uses the word “cyclops” in lieu of cannibal, but it is commonly translated as such (Gigante, “note 37” 216). For more on Milton’s thoughts on the Eucharist, see Regina Schwartz’s “Real Hunger: Milton’s Version of the Eucharist.”

<sup>8</sup> In the United States, Gomi’s title is frequently colloquialized as “Everybody Poops,” but translator Amanda Mayer Stinchecum’s renders *Minna Unchi* in the U.S. edition as *Everyone Poops*. (The British edition, by contrast, is *Everybody Poos*.)

<sup>9</sup> Following Raphael’s neo-Platonic lecture about his digestive tract, the narrator clarifies that angelic wastes “transpires / Through Spirits with ease” (5.438-39). The process is framed as superior to human elimination, but I contend that it is just differently abject.

<sup>10</sup> Satan claims to have been cast out; Raphael reports of Satan’s horde that “headlong themselves they threw” (6.864)

<sup>11</sup> Kristeva, in turn, borrows her image of the black sun (“le soleil noir”) from line 4 of Nerval’s “El Desdichado” (140). Of “darkness visible” as an expression of melancholy, William Styron’s *Darkness Visible: A Memoir of Madness* is also a necessary touchstone.



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<sup>12</sup> “Melancholy” even comes from the Greek words for “black” and “bile”; doctors and philosophers conventionally cited this etymology in their discussions of the affliction (Gowland 222).

<sup>13</sup> Nicholas Abraham and Maria Torok similarly describe fantasies of incorporation as aiming to fill “a gap within the psyche”: “[I]n order not to have to ‘swallow’ a loss, we fantasize swallowing (or having swallowed) that which has been lost, as if it were some kind of thing” (127, 126). For a more thorough examination of how Abraham and Torok’s insights articulate dynamics of loss in Milton’s poetry, see Lynn Enterline’s “‘Myself/ Before Me’: Gender and Prohibition in Milton’s Italian Sonnets.”

<sup>14</sup> In his discussion of bodily excreta and remnants in *The Anatomy of Disgust*, William Ian Miller observes that “[s]ome perverse reflex gives people the urge to sneak these things as a kind of food: cannibalism and auto-cannibalism?” (97). While Satan’s self-devouring habits seem intimately tied to his tortured feelings, if we read his symptomology as continuous with quotidian human impulses, like fingernail biting, we may also be able to recover a connection between consuming one’s body and pleasure – whether born of cleaning the surface of the body, preserving potentially lost parts, or the comforts of compulsion as a pressure release.

<sup>15</sup><sup>15</sup> While Satan had a heavenly name at this point, for clarity’s sake, I refer to him by his fallen moniker.

<sup>16</sup> Kristeva describes how the melancholic “manifests the anguish of losing the other through the survival of the self,” creating a fierce zero-sum game of endurance at any cost (12).

<sup>17</sup> While Regina Schwartz argues that Satan’s fall is depicted not as a wound, but a change, I contend that his fall comprises a complex intermixture of both (94).

<sup>18</sup> See Schoenfeldt for specific examples culled from homilies and sermons.

<sup>19</sup> A non-exhaustive list of examples includes: Claude Levi-Strauss, 141; Rene Girard, 276-77; Julia Kristeva, *PoH*, 78; Kelly Watson, 30,118; Richard Sugg, 124; Minaz Jooma, 58. See also my discussion of John Donne’s *Deaths Duell* in chapter two.

<sup>20</sup> Later, Sin voices her misery again by referring to “‘mine own brood that on my bowels feed” (2.863).

<sup>21</sup> See Teskey, 30-31; Schwartz, 99.

<sup>22</sup> For this phrase, I am indebted to Pervear and Volokhonsky’s translation of Dostoevsky’s *Demons*; see “Forward,” xviii.

<sup>23</sup> The *OED*’s first recorded use of the word “engine,” in Middle English circa 1300, is prefixed as an “vuel enginne [evil engine]” (“engine, n. I.1.a”).

<sup>24</sup> In its most literal sense, “recoils” (i.e. to coil again) suggests the shape of snakes or intestines.

<sup>25</sup> “In the desert / I saw a creature, naked, bestial, / Who, squatting upon the ground, / Held his heart in his hands, / And ate of it. / I said, ‘Is it good, friend?’ / ‘It is bitter—bitter,’ he answered; / ‘But I like it / Because it is bitter, / And because it is my heart.’” (Crane). Compared to the Satan of *Paradise Lost*, the diminished, desert nomad of *Paradise Regained* bears more than a passing resemblance to this abject creature.

<sup>26</sup> Note the resemblance between the punished Satan and Othniel’s apostate. The literal indigestion inherent to this punishment relates not only to the eating of the apple, but Satan’s initial entry of the serpent through its mouth (9.187).

<sup>27</sup> The pose of “unwak’nd *Eve* / With Tresses discompos’d, and glowing Cheek, / As through unquiet rest” suggests an uneasy, distempered sleep akin to that of Satan (5.9-11).

<sup>28</sup> Lenhof similarly observes that “Adam and Eve have become waste matter that must be purged in order to keep Eden unpolluted” (295).

<sup>29</sup> St. Hilaire argues that “[t]he existence of poetry at all in a Miltonic universe gives evidence of Satan’s influence on the earth” (50); while I agree with this assertion, I attribute the birth of poetry less to the influence of Satanic “creation” than to his role in causing the Fall. My reading is closer to that of Regina Schwartz, who writes that “Satan’s fall is a myth of loss leading only to continual renunciation and relapse; Adam’s fall is a myth of loss leading to repentance and recovery. The conflict between chaos and creation is also articulated in terms of these separate falls” (92).

<sup>30</sup> Milton speaks of the former in terms of the “signe” and, in the latter, naturally acknowledges the existence of multiple “Native Language[s]” (11.860, 12.54).

<sup>31</sup> In *Paradise Regained*, Satan even uses “sage Philosophy” and the wisdom of Greece as last-ditch temptations for Christ, who renounces them at length (PR 4.272-330).

<sup>32</sup> The detail that God will ordain his laws with “Thunder, Lightning, and loud Trumpets sound” further frames this event as largely auditory (12.229).

<sup>33</sup> Donne’s “Satyre II” uses a more scatological version of this trope to differentiate genuine creative output from mere copying, casting them as “meate” and “excrement” respectively (30).

<sup>34</sup> To borrow from Lévi-Strauss, plagiarism and humanist assimilation may be paired in opposition as the intellectually “raw” and “cooked” (1).

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- <sup>35</sup> Hampton's reading of *Areopagitica* argues that Milton also identifies alchemy with digestion, as the reader has "the alchemical capacity to convert bad books into a holy repast for the soul" (180).
- <sup>36</sup> In a similar vein of digestive violence, Teskey later describes Milton's classical referents being "torn free of their original contexts and reincorporated in another system" (125).
- <sup>37</sup> Though one can argue chronology, this construction of the "all-encompassing" Milton likely contributes to scholars' tendencies to put him last in volumes about multiple early modern poets. This study is to be no exception.
- <sup>38</sup> Admittedly, Eve decides that she would rather hear it from Adam (8.50-57).
- <sup>39</sup> Debates over the nature of Adamic language during this period shows the degree of consciousness of this feeling of loss among early modern intellectuals. For more on the pursuit of Adamic language in early modern Europe, see Considine's *Dictionaries in Early Modern Europe*, p. 306-13, and Bono's *The Word of God and the Languages of Man*, Vol. 1, 53-78, 199-244.
- <sup>40</sup> Biblical prophets eating scrolls represent a notable exception. See Ezekiel 3:3, Jeremiah 15:16, and Revelation 10:10 (KJV).
- <sup>41</sup> While Kearney speaks here of the Lutheran attitude toward textuality, the sentiment also seems to fit the iconoclastic Milton.
- <sup>42</sup> While there is not space to cite all significant positions on Milton's theodicy, let Empson's *Milton's God* and Danielson's *Milton's Good God* represent the two extremes between which most other arguments fall.
- <sup>43</sup> Though I use the word for my own purposes, Michaela Wolf uses "texto-phagy" in a different sense for her work on translation theory.
- <sup>44</sup> Not all ritual cannibalism adheres to Sanday's paradigm. See Beth Conklin's work on the funerary cannibalism of the Wari, who represent their own practices as "a way to eradicate the corpse and sever ties between the living and the dead, not to preserve the corpse in the body of the eater" (104). Cannibalism's facility as a tool for erasure may be reflected in *Paradise Lost's* effacement of literacy in the world of the text, save for the "Book of God" that is Heaven and the "Book of Life" holding creations' names (8.67, 1.363).
- <sup>45</sup> Martin Luther took this kind of bodily reasoning a step further, developing "a theory that his own strained and tortuous bowel movements were a way of forcing Satan and all that was bad out of his body, an unusual form of personal exorcism" (Stanford 155).
- <sup>46</sup> For varied perspectives on Milton's theory of accommodation, see Leland Ryken's *The Apocalyptic Vision in Paradise Lost*, 7-24; Neil D. Graves's "Milton and the Theory of Accommodation"; and C.A. Patrides's "Paradise Lost and the Theory of Accommodation." Milton himself explicitly addresses accommodation in *Of Christian Doctrine*, I.ii.
- <sup>47</sup> For examples in both literature and visual art, see John K. Bonnell's "The Serpent with a Human Head in Art and in Mystery Play."
- <sup>48</sup> Kilgour, 238; regarding allegory, see note xx.
- <sup>49</sup> Also cited in Mark Albert Johnston's *Beard Fetish in Early Modern England*. Spenser and Milton also add the same grotesque final step to the life cycle: the full bellies of the young rupturing and killing them. See *The Faerie Queene*, 1.26; Sin predicts this outcome will eventually occur, when her hellhounds eat "till crammed and gorged, nigh burst / With sucked and glutted offal" (10.632-33)
- <sup>50</sup> "And glut thyself with what thy womb devours/ . . . thy greedy self-consum'd" (4, 10); "*an & insatiabile Tempus / Esuriet Cælum, rapietque in viscera Patrem?* [And will insatiable Time devour Heaven, and thrust his father into his bowels?]"(14-15), trans. Kerrigan, Rumrich, and Fallom (214).
- <sup>51</sup> In *Sinister Aesthetics*, Joel Slotkin considers the cascade of allusions in this passage as a vortex of attractive power, the simile "getting carried away, in every sense, by evil" (203). I am interested, however, in the significance of this attractiveness clustering around an image of not just evil, but self-annihilation.
- <sup>52</sup> Kilgour characterizes Swift's Criticism as "cannibalized" from Milton's Sin and Spenser's Error (238).
- <sup>53</sup> For Sin's narrative of her own creation, see *PL* 2.752-87.
- <sup>54</sup> Humankind experiences an inversion of Satan's amnesia: he can't remember her, and we can't forget her.
- <sup>55</sup> Consider the violence of Book I's image of Men "[r]ifl[ing] the bowels of their mother Earth" to build anew (1.687).
- <sup>56</sup> Drawing on Bataille's assertion that "[t]he main function of all taboos is to combat violence," the story of the Fall can be framed in terms of the first taboo being broken and resulting in the first, and most cataclysmic, violence (41).
- <sup>57</sup> Elaine Scarry's *The Body in Pain* depicts pain as producing a "shattering of language" that makes it impossible to fully communicate to other people (5).

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<sup>58</sup> In “Dancing at the Devil’s Party: Some Notes on Politics and Poetry,” Alicia Ostriker minces few words on the subject, stating that “the poetry qua poetry is better, more exciting, more energetic in the sections dominated by Satan, worse, duller, less poetic in the sections dominated by God” (580).

<sup>59</sup> For a more comprehensive examination of the aesthetics of evil and ugliness, see Joel Slotkin’s *Sinister Aesthetics*.

<sup>60</sup> Adam commits himself and Eve to “strive / In offices of love, how we light’n each others burden in our share of woe”—a goal which can be broadened as an ideal for humanity at large (10.959-61). St. Hilaire also imagines creaturely creativity as a form of service to God, as well as of emulation of him (7); I broaden this assertion to imagine this creativity as serving God and one another.

<sup>61</sup> Schwartz points out that Satan himself perceives his Fall as a “change” that initiates further change (94; 1.84-87, 94-97).

<sup>62</sup> The narrator declares Satan to be “Artificer of fraud” after the fallen angel deceives Uriel by disguising himself as a cherub, showing how dissembling is also unknown in Heaven (4.121).

<sup>63</sup> “This further consolation yet secure / I carry hence, though all by mee is lost / Such favor I unworthie am vouchsaf’d / By mee the Promis’d Seed shall all restore” (12.620-23). This redemption is notably framed as digestive, since the Son swears to “ruin all my foes / Death last, and with his carcass glut the grave” (3.259-60).

<sup>64</sup> In this way, *Paradise Lost* embraces the unstable materialism that so terrified Donne.

<sup>65</sup> For more on Milton’s use of angelology, see Robert Hunter West’s *Milton and the Angels*; Raphael’s blush is addressed on p. 145.

<sup>66</sup> Again, see note xlii.

<sup>67</sup> *Areopagitica*’s subsequent statement that destroying books amounts to a “homicide,” “martyrdom,” or “massacre” which “slays an immortality” furthers the impression that Milton held assaults on books to be tantamount to material violence against the authors’ bodies (930, 931). Furthermore, his characterization of the censorial Spanish Inquisition as “rak[ing] through the entrails of many an old good author” and condemning “any subject that was not to their palate” is highly suggestive of discriminatory cannibalism (934).

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