

**‘To dream to eat Books’:
Bibliophagy, Bees, and Literary Taste in Early Modern Commonplace Culture**

I.

In her 1664 *Sociable Letters*, Margaret Cavendish responds to a correspondent’s request ‘to send... word how the Poets were Feasted,’ with the following description:

Nature sent the Muses to Invite all the Poets to a Banquet of Wit, and Invited also me a Poetess, or rather Poetastress; I went, and entred into a Large Room of Imagination... the Table we were set to, was a strange Table... it was made of all the Famous Old Poets Sculs, and the Table-cloth or Covering was made of their Brains, which Brains were Spun by the Muses... into Cobweb Threads, as Soft and Thin as Air, and then Woven into a Piece, or Web... the Napkins for the Hands was Pure Fine White Paper, all over-wrought with Black Letters, and the Edges round about were Gilded... the Plates were made of the Films or Drums of Sensible Ears, and the Knives that were to cut the Meat laid thereon, were Orators Tongues, the Trencher Salt-sellers, which were set by every Plate, were made of the Chrystalline part of Observing Eyes, and the Salt that was put therein, was made of Sea-water, or Salt-tears, which usually Flow from a Tragick Vein, the Forks that were to bear up the Meat to the Tast of the Understanding, were Writing pens... [The Muses] brought in many several Dishes of Poetical Meats, Placing them on the Table; the first was a Great dish of Poems, Excellently well Dress’d, and Curious Sawce made of Metaphors, Similitudes, and Fancies, and round the Sides or Verges of the Dish, were laid Numbers and Rimes, like as we use on Corporeal Dishes and Meats, to lay Dates, or Flowers, or Slices of Limmons, or the like; then was there a Dish of Songs, brought by the Lyricks, it was very Delicious Meat, and had a most Sweet Relish, it was Dress’d with a Compounded Sawce of many several Airs, Notes, and Strains; then were there two Dishes of Epigrams, I think one of them was *Martial’s*, for they were Powdered, or Brined Highly with Satirical Salt, the other Dish was so Luscious with Flattery, as I could not Feed much thereon... there was a Dish of Comedies, Excellently well Drest, with Scenes, the Sawce was Compounded, but very Savoury, being Compounded of divers Humors, and the Dish Graced or Garnished with Smiles and Laughter...¹

¹ Margaret Cavendish, *CCXI sociable letters* (London: William Wilson, 1664), Gggr1-r3.

This is Cavendish in full imaginative flow, blending the grotesque and the gorgeous, the bizarre and the banal, with characteristic exuberance. The passage, however, is more than a fantastical curiosity piece: like the muses spinning table-coverings from poets' brains, Cavendish's multi-stranded depiction of the 'Banquet of Wit' intertwines the culinary and the textual, physicality and phantasy, sensation and intellection, in ways that will be pertinent to this essay. Whilst the thoroughness of Cavendish's commitment to the alimentary analogy is unusual, her linking of literary styles and genres with particular dishes and flavours reflects a pervasive early modern interest, with roots in the classical tradition, in imbrications of the literary and the edible. Her description of the 'most Sweet Relish' of the 'Dish of Songs,' for instance, derives ultimately from Horace, whilst her assertion that Martial's epigrams are 'Brined Highly with Satirical Salt,' reflects an ancient and enduring characterisation of comedic satire as salty.²

Less orthodox is Cavendish's account of the paraphernalia of the table, which she describes in strikingly sensory terms. What Cavendish's muses make of the brain matter with which they work is not only a fabric but a form of skin: the 'Cobweb Threads' they weave into a 'web' recalls the iconographic association between spiders and the sense of touch, a connotation strengthened by Cavendish's delicately haptic description of the threads 'as Soft and Thin as Air.'³ This tactile tablecloth has counterparts in the plates, knives, and salt cellars constituted respectively of 'Sensible Ears,' 'Orators Tongues,' and 'Observing Eyes.' In the simultaneously mental and material 'Room of Imagination,' the poets consume the feast of language with all their senses, employing perceptual organs and writing implements simultaneously, perhaps interchangeably; for whilst the knives are tongues, 'the Forks... were Writing pens,' and the napkins are written-on paper.⁴ The multiplicity of

² Horace influentially expressed poetry's capacity to both delight and instruct via the formula 'dulce et utile': sweetness and usefulness. Horace, 'Ars Poetica,' trans. A. S. Kline, Poetry in Translation, accessed 26 March 2013, www.poetryintranslation.com/PITBR/Latin/HoraceArsPoetica.htm. Eric Byville similarly comments that, historically, 'satire is neither sprinkled with sugar nor smeared with honey, but rather doused in salt, vinegar, and gall. (The satire closer to comedy tastes of sal, whereas that closer to tragedy tastes of fel.)' Byville also notes that 'the gustatory trope is pervasive in Renaissance literary theory, which used the terms sweet and bitter to classify works according to their effect on readers.' Eric Byville, 'Aesthetic Uncommon Sense: Early Modern Taste and the Satirical Sublime,' *Criticism* 54/4 (2012): 592.

³ For the spider as an iconographical image of touch, Gino Casagrande and Christopher Kleinhenz, 'Literary and Philosophical Perspectives on the Wheel of the Five Senses in Longthorpe Tower,' *Traditio* 41 (1985): 311-27; and Sharon Assaf, 'The Ambivalence of the Sense of Touch in Early Modern Prints,' *Renaissance and Reformation* 29/1 (2005): 85 and 88; Carla Mazzio, *The Inarticulate Renaissance: Language Trouble in an Age of Eloquence* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 194-95; Joseph Moshenska, "'Feeling Pleasures": The Sense of Touch in Renaissance England' (PhD diss., Princeton University, 2011), 3-4; and Helen Smith, *Grossly Material Things: Women and Book Production in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 11.

⁴ Cavendish's rhetoric reflects historical practice. As Wendy Wall has shown, writing implements were often used as culinary tools in the early modern period: 'the kitchen was filled with the materials of writing.' Wendy Wall, 'Literacy and the Domestic Arts,' *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73/3 (2010): 401.

these ambiguous implements, moreover, corresponds to the duality of the sense they serve, namely ‘the Tast of the Understanding,’ which – as the faculty of both gustation and intellectual comprehension – is capable of appreciating a banquet where the sauces are ‘Similitudes,’ and the dishes are garnished with ‘rimes’ rather than dates and lemons. At this point, it becomes possible to hear the pun in Cavendish’s designation of herself as a ‘Poetastress’ (my emphasis). Cavendish is not simply making a joke about the unskillfulness of female poets (as a poetess, she is also a poetaster, an inferior versifier). Rather, she is asserting the conceptual and, indeed, syllabic centrality of taste, understood as both a sensory and a discriminative faculty, to her literary identity.

Focusing largely although not exclusively on late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century commonplace books and related forms such as anthologies and miscellanies, I propose that early modern authors developed traditional pairings of literary modes and particular flavours into a substantial and subtle poetics of taste.⁵ Commonplace books and their generic brethren frequently and self-referentially describe the processes of readerly and editorial discrimination, extraction, collation, and composition which undergird them by making use of the widespread humanist trope of the reader as a bee, using his or her sense of taste to distinguish between and recombine the flowers of rhetoric. This trope, I argue, is an important precursor of what we usually think of as the abstracted, eighteenth-century definition of ‘taste’ as aesthetic discernment. Early seventeenth-century uses of ‘taste’ in this context, however, are not disconnected from, but rather repeatedly invoke, physical sensation. Understood in relation to humoral models of human physiology and material practices of writing, the bee trope possessed a literal dimension: for early modern men and women, literary discrimination really is experienced as gustatory preference and aversion.

II.

⁵ For an account of the history of ‘alimentary metaphors,’ see Ernst Robert Curtius, *European Literature and the Latin Middle Ages*, trans. Willard R. Task (New York: Pantheon, 1953), 134-37. For ‘metaphors of bibliophagy’ in the renaissance, see Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words: Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), especially 130-31. For a discussion of ‘the figurative physiology of reading as eating’ in relation to women’s reading in the early modern period, see Helen Smith, “‘More swete vnto the eare / than holsome for ye mynde’: Embodying Early Modern Women’s Reading,’ *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73/3 (2010): 423-26.

‘If anything be set to a wrong taste,’ announces Jonson in the prologue to his 1629 *The New Inn*, ‘’Tis not the meat there, but the mouth’s displac’d, / Remove but that sick palat, all is well.’⁶ Jonson’s use of bibliophagic imagery to anticipate and negotiate the audience’s response to his work, as he preemptively attributes critical distaste for his play to the distempered palates of his audience, is a characteristic strategy: his prologues and epilogues abound with images of playwriting as cookery and play-going as feasting. My focus here, however, is not on these theatrical sources but rather on Jonson’s participation in commonplace culture. In his commonplace book, posthumously published in 1641 as *Timber; or, discoveries made on men and matter*, Ben Jonson lists the skills which a poet must possess. Amongst them, he numbers ‘*Imitation*,’ which he defines as the poet’s ability:

to convert the substance, or Riches of an other *Poet*, to his owne use... Not, as a Creature, that swallowes, what it takes in, crude, raw, or indigested; but, that feedes with an Appetite, and hath a Stomacke to concoct, devide, and turne all into nourishment. Not, to imitate serviley, as *Horace* saith... but, to draw forth out the best, and choisest flowers, with the Bee, and turne all into Honey, worke it into one relish, and savour: make our *Imitation* sweet...⁷

Jonson describes a form of active, selective reading that scholars agree was integral to early modern literate English culture, and which was facilitated by the practice of keeping a commonplace book.⁸ Strictly a collection of classical and patristic quotations, transcribed or ‘digested’ under a series of thematic heads, the commonplace book was a repository of material intended for future deployment in contexts ranging from political oratory to personal conversation or – as Jonson suggests – in literary

⁶ Ben Jonson, *The New Inn*, ed. Michael Hattaway (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

⁷ Ben Jonson, *Timber; or, Discoveries; Made upon Men and Matter* in *The workes of Benjamin Jonson*, vol. 3 (London: James Dawson for Thomas Walkley, 1640), R2r. On the convoluted publication history of this volume, see William P. Williams, ‘Chetwin, Crooke, and the Jonson Folios,’ *Studies in Bibliography* 30 (1997): 75-95.

⁸ Scholarship addressing early modern reading as a dynamic, goal-oriented process is now extensive. Key works include Lisa Jardine’s and A. T. Grafton’s seminal “‘Studied for Action’”: How Gabriel Harvey read his Livy,’ *Past and Present* 129 (1990): 30-78; Peter Beale, ‘Notes in Garrison: The Seventeenth Century Commonplace Book’ in *New Ways of Looking at Old Texts: Papers of the Renaissance English Text Society, 1985-1991*, ed. W. Speed Hill (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1993), 131-47; Mary Thomas Crane, *Framing Authority: Sayings, Self, and Society in Sixteenth-Century England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993); Anne Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996); Kevin Sharpe and Steven N. Zwicker, eds., *Reading, Society and Politics in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Adam Smyth, ‘*Profit and Delight*’: *Printed Miscellanies in England, 1640-1682* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2004); William Sherman, *Used Books: Marking Readers in Renaissance England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). For a response to this body of work which emphasises that ‘some manuscript commonplace books do in fact reflect a careful reading of whole literary texts and reveal a respect for the intentions of the author,’ see Jennifer Richards and Fred Schurink, ‘The Textuality and Materiality of Reading in Early Modern England,’ *Huntington Library Quarterly* 73/3 (2010): 352.

composition. By the seventeenth century, however, the doxographical emphasis had begun to diminish, and commonplace books had begun to incorporate vernacular and ephemeral material such as original poems, recipes, witticisms, and inventories. A new market of printed commonplace books also emerged.⁹ The metaphor that Jonson uses to describe the mode of discriminative reading and appropriative composition that he recommends is equally conventional. Usually attributed to Seneca, rather than to Horace, the bee trope was itself something of a commonplace, regularly reproduced (as in the case of *Timber*) in the very miscellanies that were products of the form of reading that it describes.¹⁰ The 1598 printed commonplace book *Palladis tamia* is typical in this respect, directly quoting Seneca's admonition that just as 'bees out of divers flowers draw divers juices, but... temper and digest them by their owne vertue, otherwise they would make no honny,' so too 'what thou readest is to bee transposed to thine owne use.'¹¹ Despite Jonson's atypical invocation of Horace, his insistence on the conversion or transformation of other poets' 'Riches' clearly reflects the Senecan emphasis on the importance of authorial recombination of reading materials. A number of scholars have addressed early modern apian imagery from this perspective. Anne Moss, for instance, comments on its value for writers negotiating the relation between rhetorical *imitatio* and authorial originality.¹² Similarly, Richard Peterson comments on Jonson's use of 'digestive and apian metaphors' as a strategy for discriminating between properly transformative and slavishly derivative models of *imitatio*.¹³ Peter Stallybrass, Roger Chartier, J. Franklin Mowery, and Heather Wolfe focus on a different aspect of the bee trope, noting its significance as an analogy for the workings of memory.¹⁴ All these scholars, however, concentrate on one specific stage in the alimentary process: digestion. Jonson, however, accentuates not only the physiological process of digestion, but also gustatory sensation: the poet turns his multifarious materials into a single, distinct 'savour' or flavour, and the success of his 'imitation' is

⁹ See Earle Havens, *Commonplace Books: A History of Manuscripts and Printed Books from Antiquity to the Twentieth Century* (Vermont: Stinehour Press, 2001), especially 13-33, for the comprehensive overview to which my brief summary here is indebted.

¹⁰ Other classical sources reinforced the association between bees, readerly discrimination, and rhetorical facility. As Felicity Hughes notes, 'the legend that Pindar was fed honey by bees in his infancy as an augury of supreme eloquence' circulated widely in this period. Felicity Hughes, 'Milton, Shakespeare, Pindar and the Bees,' *Review of English Studies* New Series 44 (1993): 220.

¹¹ Francis Meres (compiled by), *Palladis tamia*, ed. Nicholas Ling (London: P. Short for Cuthbert Burbie, 1598), Mm4v. For the original of this quote, see Lucius Annaeus Seneca, *Ad Lucilium Epistulae Morales*, trans. R. Gummere, Loeb Classical Library series 76, 3 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), II, 278.

¹² Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books*, 105.

¹³ Richard Peterson, *Imitation and Praise in the Poems of Ben Jonson* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), 16-17.

¹⁴ Peter Stallybrass *et al.*, 'Hamlet's Tables and Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England,' *Shakespeare Quarterly* 55/4 (2004): 379-419.

attested by its sweetness. In order to digest a meal, a person must taste it, and the same goes for literary feasts. Jonson is not alone in this regard. Take Francis Bacon's famous exhortation in *Of Studies*:

Some bookes are to bee tasted, others to bee swallowed, and some few to bee chewed and digested: That is, some bookes are to be read only in partes; others to be read, but cursorily, and some few to be read wholly and with diligence and attention.¹⁵

For Bacon, digestion is a form of incorporation equivalent to reading thoroughly which, crucially, follows on from an initial, probative tasting. The creative assimilation of one's reading materials may take place in the stomach, but it is preceded by a form of literary discrimination that takes place in the mouth.

For pompous Nathaniel in Shakespeare's 1598 *Love's Labour's Lost*, the exercise of taste involved in the consumption of reading materials emerges as an aspect of his self-identity. Nathaniel compares himself and Holofernes to the aptly-named Constable Dull. 'Sir,' he says to Holofernes:

...[Dull] hath never fed of the dainties that are bred in a booke.

He hath not eate paper as it were

He hath not drunke inke.

His intellect is not replenished, hee is onely an animall, only sensible in the duller parts: and such barren plants are set before us, that we thankfull should be: which we [of] taste and feeling, are for those parts that doe fructifie in us more then he.¹⁶

For Nathaniel, to proclaim oneself a person 'of taste' is to assert oneself as learned and witty. This self-identification derives from a bibliophagic consumption of the materials of reading and writing. In comparison to Dull, who 'hath not eat paper... [or] drunk ink,' Nathaniel implies that he and Holofernes are made intellectually fertile by their consumption of 'the dainties that are bred in a book.' On the one hand, Nathaniel's posturing here is meant to be funny, and we are laughing at, not with, him. Because the audience is already well-acquainted with Nathaniel's pedantry and self-importance, his words are bathetic: in calling himself a man of 'taste and feeling [i.e. touch],' Nathaniel inadvertently

¹⁵ Francis Bacon, 'Of Studies,' in *Essayes, Religious meditations* (London: John Windet for Humfrey Hooper, 1597), B1v.

¹⁶ William Shakespeare, *Loves Labour's Lost* in *William Shakespeares comedies, histories, & tragedies* (London: Isaac Jaggard and Edward Bount, 1623), L6r (131). I follow the Arden edition in adding '[of].'

reveals his own immersion in the lower senses he claims to disdain. Like the target of his derision, he too is ‘an animal, only sensible in the duller parts.’ His use of bibliophagic images is an aspect of this involuntary self-revelation. On the other hand, problematic as they may be, Nathaniel’s words nonetheless indicate a wider cultural sense – also apparent in Margaret Cavendish’s reference to ‘the Taste of the Understanding’ cited above – that ‘taste’ is a marker of aesthetic judgement and literary erudition, and as such something to aspire to.

Nathaniel’s words hint at an alternative to the widespread scholarly presumption that the association between ‘taste’ and a capacity to appreciate beauty and excellence first emerged in the late seventeenth century, and achieved prominence only in the eighteenth century.¹⁷ This presumption is buttressed by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, which identifies Milton’s 1671 *Paradise Regained* as containing the earliest known instance of ‘taste’ in what we today think of the aesthetic sense, defined as ‘the sense of what is appropriate, harmonious, or beautiful... the faculty of perceiving and enjoying what is excellent in art, literature, and the like.’¹⁸ The *OED* quotes Book IV, in which Christ argues with Satan about the correct route to and use of knowledge. In the passage in question, Christ acclaims the Hebraic tradition, describing ‘Sion’s songs,’ as ‘to all true tastes excelling, / Where God is prais’d aright.’¹⁹ In contrast, Greek and Roman literature putatively celebrates ‘the vices of their deities... Their gods ridiculous’ (IV.340-342). Significantly, Milton has Christ define the superiority – the tastefulness – of Hebraic literature not only in terms of its more dignified and devout subject matter, but also against the specific modes of reading encouraged by the Greco-Roman tradition. Whoever ‘reads / Incessantly, and to his reading brings not... spirit and judgement,’ proclaims Christ, is:

Deep verst in books and shallow in himself,
Crude or intoxicate, collecting toys,
And trifles for choice matters, worth a sponge;

¹⁷ In the introduction to their *Gender, Taste and Material Culture*, for example, John Styles and Amanda Vickery assert that ‘systematic use of the word “taste” – *goût* – to signify aesthetic discernment emerged in later seventeenth-century France.’ Styles and Vickery, introduction to *Gender, Taste and Material Culture in Britain and North America, 1700-1830*, ed. John Styles and Amanda Vickery (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 15. *Contra* to this conflation of discriminative taste and modernity is Raymond Williams’ observation that “‘Good taast” in the sense of good understanding is recorded from 1425.’ Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 264. Dabney Townsend comments that Leon Battista Alberti (1404-72) was ‘amongst the first to use the metaphor of taste in connection with judgment.’ Townsend, ‘Taste: Early History,’ in Michael Kelly, ed., *Oxford Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, vol. 4 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 356.

¹⁸ ‘Taste, n.1.’ *OED Online*, accessed 18 August 2012, www.oed.com/view/Entry/198050.

¹⁹ John Milton, *Paradise regain’d a poem in IV books* (London: J.M. for John Starkey, 1671), G8v, l.344-45. Further in-text references to *Paradise regain’d* are also to this edition.

As Children gathering p/bles on the shore. (IV.319-327)

The image is of a dilettantish commonplacer: in contrast to the readers of ‘Sion’s songs,’ who possess ‘true tastes,’ this reader merely accumulates ‘trifles’ which, being ‘crude’ or bilious, he or she is unable properly to digest. In defining literary taste precisely against the classical preferences of the incompetent commonplacer, Milton implicitly attests to a long association between literary ‘tastes’ (whether good or bad) and the bee-like selective reader. Extracted from its wider context within *Paradise Regained*, the quotation ‘Sion’s songs / To all true tastes excelling’ might be seen to describe, as the *OED* intends it to, an originary moment in a semantic shift from gustatory to aesthetic taste. Read in the context of Book IV as a whole, however, the words point backwards to the long – and long-neglected – history of taste as literary discrimination in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century commonplace culture.

Use of the language of taste to describe processes of readerly and editorial discrimination, extraction, and collation abounds in early modern commonplace culture; a few examples here may stand as representative. Often – and despite the ocularcentric emphasis of much work in the history of reading – readerly taste is favourably compared to readerly vision. A prefatory poem annexed to the 1598 printed commonplace book *Politeuphuia*, for instance, advises ‘the curious eye that over-rashly lookes, / And gives no tast nor feeling to the mind’ that it ‘robs it own selfe’ of the ‘comfort’ that can be found in books.²⁰ ‘Curious,’ in this context, is an example of what Christopher Ricks has called an anti-pun.²¹ The modern meaning, ‘desirous of seeing or knowing; eager to learn; inquisitive’ is present, whilst the older meaning of ‘careful; studious, attentive’ is simultaneously suggested, and pointedly excluded. The commercially-motivated subtext is that a person who skim-reads on the bookseller’s premises, without subsequently purchasing the book in question, is decidedly not a conscientious scholar of the text.²² To ‘tast,’ on the other hand, is to more fully appreciate the book’s virtues: the word is used in a now largely obsolete sense, to indicate experiential knowledge in general.²³ That the sensory meaning of ‘tast’ is also present, however – making the image strangely synaesthetic – becomes evident as the poem continues:

²⁰ M. D. [possibly Michael Drayton?], untitled prefatory poem in *Politeuphuia*, ed. Nicholas Ling (London: J. Roberts for Nicholas Ling, 1598), A4r.

²¹ See Christopher Ricks, *The Force of Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 266.

²² ‘Curious, adj.’ *OED Online*, accessed 18 August 2012, www.oed.com/view/Entry/46040.

²³ ‘Taste, v.’ *OED Online*, accessed 06 September 2011, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/198052>.

But when that sence doth play the busie Bee,
And for the honny, not the poison reeds,
Then for the labour it receaves the fee,
When as the minde on heavenly sweetnes feeds...²⁴

When the eye works like the industrious bee, it receives its reward in the form of ‘honny’: the reader’s appreciation of the book is indicated by his or her capacity to taste its ‘sweetnes.’ Here, the language of taste is used to describe two alternative reading practices (hasty looking versus bee-like tasting) and to endorse the second as more likely to inculcate appreciation of the book’s virtues. Properly, reading is a matter of tasting, not seeing.

In contrast to this anxiety that *Politeuphuia* will receive no more than a desultory ocular perusal, Richard Younge’s 1638 *The drunkard’s character... which may serve also for a common-place-booke of the most usuall sinnes* anticipates a more appreciative response. In a dedicatory letter addressed to the satirist, devotional writer, and bishop of Exeter, Joseph Hall, Younge predicts that his book will ‘answer’ its dedicatee’s ‘sent and tast’ because:

Many of these [extracts] are Flowers from your Garden... as the Bee gathers from one Flower, Wax; from another, Honey; from a third, Bee-Glew, and bringeth to her Hive that which is profitable from all: so have I... filch’t from your Lordships worthy Workes, and other Authors... what soever elegant Phrases, pithy Sentences, curious Metaphors, witty Apothegmes, sweet Similitudes, or Rhetoricall expressions I could meet withal, pertinent, whole some, and delectable...²⁵

Younge’s confidence that his miscellany will prove congenial to Hall’s literary taste stems from the fact that – following the example of the industrious bee – he has drawn heavily on the bishop’s own ‘sweet’ and ‘delectable’ works. Younge’s use of the vocabulary of taste – which manages to combine sycophancy with self-congratulation – can be usefully juxtaposed with Gabriel Harvey’s vitriolic *Pierce’s Supererogation* (1593), the third sally in his notorious feud with Thomas Nashe. Harvey repeatedly attributes what he presents as the bad taste of Nashe’s literary output with his bad practice as a commonplacing reader. Whereas Harvey describes his beloved Homer as ‘the hoony-bee of the

²⁴ M. D., untitled prefatory poem in *Politeuphuia*, A4r.

²⁵ Richard Younge, *The drunkard’s character* (London: R. Badger for George Latham, 1638), A2v-A3r.

daintiest flowers of Witt, and Arte,’ Nashe is not ‘A Bee’ but ‘a drone, a dorre, a dor-bettle, a dormouse...’²⁶ Nashe, fulminates Harvey, has no taste for the classical authorities that Harvey himself reveres: ‘neither curious Hermogenes, nor trim Isocrates... are for his tooth.’²⁷ Instead, what Harvey ironically calls Nashe’s ‘Imperiall tast’ inclines towards vernacular levity: Nashe supposedly fills ‘the Common-places of his paperbooke’ with ‘the pickpocket of foolery... and knaveries in Print.’²⁸ And it is Nashe’s lack of good taste in his selection of reading matter that leads to the tastelessness of his own literary output: ‘I have seldome,’ alleges Harvey, ‘tasted a more unsavory slaumpaump of wordes, and sentences in any sluttish Pamfletter.’²⁹

Late sixteenth- and early seventeenth- century commonplace culture thus emerges as one site of a pervasive association between taste and readerly discrimination. Literary judgement is frequently articulated via the trope of the commonplacing reader as a discriminative bee, and taste is allied with a mode of reading that is appreciative, but also a carefully selective, painstaking, and probative. The importance of taste as a term for aesthetic judgement in early modern culture has not gone entirely unremarked by scholars. Notably, Alison Deutermann has argued that whilst ‘the concept of “taste” as aesthetic discernment has been assumed to be anachronistic to sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England... this abstracted sense of taste was already forming at the start of the seventeenth century.’³⁰ The association between taste and discrimination has a much longer ancestry than even Deutermann suggests: as Mary Carruthers has shown, medieval aesthetic judgements also make extensive use of gustatory terminology.³¹ More immediately interesting here, however, is Deutermann’s description of aesthetic taste as the ‘abstracted sense of taste.’ This is characteristic of a scholarly narrative – also exemplified by Robert Matz – according to which aesthetic taste emerges when the metaphorical comparison that underlies it is forgotten or discarded, and aesthetic taste loses its association with gustation.³² In his *Defending Literature in Early Modern England*, Matz links the emergence of ‘taste’ as a term to describe readerly discrimination to a contest between feudal culture, rooted in aristocratic displays of wealth, leisure, and military prowess, and humanist culture, rooted in intellectual merit,

²⁶ Gabriel Harvey, *Pierces supererogation* (London: John Wolfe, 1593), G4r and Z2r.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, Z4r.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, Z2r-Z3r.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, Z4r.

³⁰ Allison K. Deutermann, “‘Caviare to the general’?: Taste, Hearing, and Genre in *Hamlet*,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 62/2 (2011): 236-37.

³¹ Mary Carruthers, ‘Sweetness’ Sweetness,’ *Speculum* 81/4 (2006): 999-103.

³² This narrative has proponents across disciplines. The sociologist Jukka Gronow, for example, writes that, historically, ‘the physiological sense of taste acted as the model for judgement power,’ implying that physiological taste is a kind of prototype for aesthetic taste: both a precondition of it, and precisely what aesthetic taste must discard or disavow. Jukka Gronow, *The Sociology of Taste* (London: Routledge, 1997), 86.

industriousness, and rhetorical prowess. Focusing on Thomas Elyot's 1537 *The booke named The Governour*, Matz argues that Elyot's association of 'taste' with the faculty of literary judgement is a humanist appropriation of the cultural capital attached to the gustatory pleasures of aristocratic feasting in the older, feudal system.³³ Like Deutermann, Matz describes the emergence of taste as a term for readerly discrimination as a process of abstraction: 'Elyot's humanist project defines a trajectory which ultimately metaphorizes taste, divests it from its physical referent.'³⁴ Both Deutermann and Matz, then, challenge the conventional dating of aesthetic taste, but preserve the abstraction narrative. In each case, the birth of aesthetic 'taste' is understood to originate in the death of a metaphor. For early moderns, however, metaphor's figuration of the relation between bodily experiences and mental processes reverses the trajectory (from physical sensation to mental discrimination) that the abstraction narrative describes. Witness Thomas Wilson, writing in his 1553 *The arte of rhetorique*. 'Firste,' Wilson asserts, 'we alter a worde from that which is in the minde, to that which is in the bodye.' For example, 'when we perceive one that hath begiled us, we use to saye: Ah sirrha, I am gladde I have smelled you oute.' Similarly, 'beinge greved with a matter, we saye comunely we can not digest it.'³⁵ For Wilson, metaphors cannot be 'abstracted' from their physical origin because the route they follow is not from bodily experience to mental process, but rather from mental process to bodily experience.³⁶

Whilst Deutermann and Matz identify Shakespeare and Elyot, respectively, as the source of the notion of 'abstract' aesthetic taste, attending to commonplace culture's engagement with taste allows us to appreciate the extent to which use of the language of gustation to describe literary judgement retained a connection to physical sensation. In miscellanies and anthologies, references to familiar flavour sensations, and the use of bibliophagic imagery, keep literary taste, and the processes of judgement and discrimination that underlie it, resolutely bonded to the experience of perceiving flavour. The trope of the selective reader as a tasteful bee, for example, takes on a new force when we

³³ Robert Matz, *Defending Literature in Early Modern England: Renaissance Literary Theory in Social Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 39-46.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 40. Matz does acknowledge that, whilst Elyot and his fellow humanists ostensibly rejected the pleasures of the table, humanist pedagogy often endorsed making use of a child's physical desires in order to stimulate a love of learning. He comments in particular on Elyot's recommendation that a wet-nurse 'should speak Latin, or at least perfect English': the child, Elyot believes, will come to associate the pleasure of learning language with the alimentary pleasure of nursing. Nonetheless, in Matz's reading, 'the object of this pedagogy is to shift affect from the senses to letters, to move little by little from the material to the intellectual.' *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁵ Wilson, *The arte of rhetorique*, Z4r.

³⁶ Wilson's conception of metaphor thus stands in opposition to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson's influential argument, according to which metaphors 'have a basis in' and 'have arisen from our physical and cultural experience.' to George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 14.

recognise that bees really were thought to have a particularly acute sense of taste. In a range of agricultural and pastoral works, paratextual uses of the bee trope to describe processes of authorial discrimination and collation are echoed in discussions of the sensory capabilities of *actual* bees. In the series of obsequious poems prefacing Samuel Purchas' 1657 compendium of bee-related wisdom, *A theatre of politicall flying-insects*, for example, Purchas' 'diligence' in assembling and ordering his materials is said to surpass that of the insects themselves: 'much labour hath procured this... gathered hony sweet suck'd from each flower.'³⁷ The book itself is repeatedly depicted as a hive ('each page a comb') laden with 'mellifluous' honey, which – as Joseph Angier proclaims – Purchas' potential readers will 'long to taste.'³⁸ Subsequently, the language of literary, discriminative taste that introduces the volume is literalized by the text's own emphasis on the keenness of the bee's physical sense of taste: Purchas stresses the excellence of the bee's perception before concluding that 'their taste... is evidently as active as their other senses.'³⁹ The apian enthusiast Charles Butler is more emphatic, writing in the 1623 edition of his influential *The feminine monarchie*, that '[bees] have the Senses... both outward and inward: which their subtile and active spirits do excite and quicken... of their fift sense [i.e. taste] I make no question, sithens they are used to things of so different tastes.'⁴⁰ This notion that bees are possessed of an acute sense of taste is corroborated by John Norden's 1632 *A good companion for a Christian*, which identifies the bee, rather than the more traditional ape, as the iconographical representative of taste, commenting that 'many beasts excell man in the perfection of many of the senses... as the *Eagle*, in seeing; the *Hart*, in bearing; the *Spaniell* and *Hound*, in smelling; the *Spider*, in touching; and the *Bee*, in Tasting.'⁴¹ In *A theatre of politicall flying-insects* and similar works, then, a paratextual emphasis on the literary tastefulness of diligent, bee-like readers and writers is paralleled by the insistence of the texts themselves on the acuity of the apian senses, including – and sometimes especially – gustation. In the next section of this essay, I turn to a rare example of a (mainly) female-authored and compiled

³⁷ Joseph Angier, 'Upon the Authors Elaborate Treatise of *Bees*,' in Samuel Purchas, *A theatre of politicall flying-insects* (London: R. I. for Thomas Parkhurst, 1657), B2r, and T.P., 'Upon the Authors Learned and Elaborate Treatise of *Bees*,' and Joseph Fisher, 'To the Learned Author of this *Bee-like* laborious Treatise,' both in Purchas, *Politicall flying-insects*, B3v and B5v.

³⁸ Angier, 'Upon the Authors Elaborate Treatise,' in Purchas, *Politicall flying-insects*, B2r.

³⁹ Purchas, *Politicall flying-insects*, D4r.

⁴⁰ Charles Butler, *The feminine monarchie: or the historie of bees* (London: John Haviland for Roger Jackson, 1623), C3r-v. See also John Levett, *The ordering of bees* (London: Thomas Harper for John Harison, 1634), H2v.

⁴¹ John Norden, *A good companion for a Christian* (London: G. Purslowe for Richard Collins, 1632), H5v. A century later, Pope affirmed this association between the bee and the sense of taste. See Alexander Pope, *Essay on Man* (London: Cassell and Company, 1891), 240. Louise Vinge asserts that 'the bee is not common in early texts or images as a representative of taste, but may have been taken up [in the eighteenth century] to replace the monkey.' Louise Vinge, *The Five Senses: Studies in a Literary Tradition* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1975), 146.

manuscript commonplace book in order to explore the extent to which this persistent linking of alimentary and literary taste might be grounded in experiential and material reality.

III.

Folger Ms.VB.198, commonly referred to as the Southwell-Sibthorpe commonplace book, was compiled between the years 1626 and 1636, largely by the noblewoman and poet Lady Anne Southwell.⁴² Her poetry forms the majority of its contents, although it also includes correspondence, aphorisms, and inventories, *inter alia*. In a transcription of a letter to her friend Cicely MacWilliams, Lady Ridgway, included in the book, Southwell responds to Ridgway's self-description as a 'sworne enemye to Poetrie.'⁴³ Drawing heavily, but not slavishly, on Philip Sidney's 1595 *An apologie for Poetrie*, Southwell takes the opportunity to offer a spirited justification of the poet's art. Lady Ridgway's aversion to verse, she asserts, is a perversion of her sense of taste: 'I will take vpon me to knowe,' she determines, 'what hath soe distasted your palate against this banquet of soules, devine Poesye.'⁴⁴ Reading this statement alongside Southwell's own poetic *oeuvre*, recorded in her commonplace book, I argue that Southwell's use of the language of taste is not merely derivative, but descriptive of what was, for Southwell, an experiential reality grounded in humoral psychology. Whatever the precise cause of Lady Ridgway's 'distast' for poetry, Southwell continues in her letter, it must have its foundation in an illness caused by humoral imbalance.⁴⁵ Southwell depicts God's creation of the world and of man as an act of literary composition, the materials of which were:

poetically confined to 4. generall geenusses, Earth, Ayre, water & fire. The effectes wch giue life vnto his verse, were, Hott, Cold, Moist & Drye, wch produce Choller, melancholye, Bloud & flegme.⁴⁶

⁴² See Jean Klene, introduction to *The Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book: Folger Ms. V.b. 198*, ed. Klene (Tempe: Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 1997), xxxiii-xxxiv, for a discussion of the extent of Southwell's involvement in the book's compilation.

⁴³ Anne Southwell, 'To my worthy Muse, the Ladye Ridgeway,' in Klene, *The Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book*, fol. 3r-v. All references to the manuscript in this chapter cite the original folio numbers, which are included in Klene's edition.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The human body is portrayed as a kind of verse, vivified by the humoral flows of blood and phlegm. How then, Southwell enquires, ‘being thus poetically composed... can you bee at vnitye wth your self, & at oddes wth your owne composition...?’⁴⁷

Southwell’s suggestion that literary ‘distast’ can be attributed to a physiological disruption is reiterated in an original creation poem also collected in her commonplace book. In this poem, Southwell invokes the image of the reader-as-bee in order to anticipate his or her response to her work:

Let your cleare Iudgment, and well tempored soule
Condemne, amend, or ratiffye this scrole...
If you haue lost your fflowinge sweete humiddities
and in a dust disdain theise quantities
Pass it to oure beloued Docter Featlye
his tongue dropps honnye, and can doe it neatlye...⁴⁸

In the early modern period, one way in which the humors were distinguished was by their flavours.⁴⁹ Following Galen, melancholy was ordinarily considered sour, choler (sometimes called gall) bitter, phlegm unsavory, and blood sweet.⁵⁰ Southwell’s suggestion that a ‘cleare Iudgment’ of her poem must derive from the possession of ‘fflowinge sweete humiddities,’ then, is predicated on her conviction that readerly discrimination, or taste, is reliant on physical complexion. In particular, she asks her reader to approach the poem in what we might call a sanguine mood – bearing in mind the derivation of ‘sanguine’ from the Latin *sanguis*, blood (the humor generally thought of as sweet).⁵¹ If you have misplaced your ‘sweete’ humors, Southwell advises, then pass on the poem to Daniel Featley (rector of Southwell’s parish).⁵² In Southwell’s somewhat grotesque image, Featley-as-ideal-reader is figured,

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Southwell, untitled poem, *Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book*, fol. 26r., l.15-22.

⁴⁹ Evan Ragland notes that ‘although it has gone largely unnoticed by historians, the association of the humours and humoural powers with flavours and odours has a long history in western medicine.’ Evan Ragland, ‘Chymistry and Taste in the Seventeenth Century: Franciscus Dele Boë Sylvius as a Chymical Physician Between Galenism and Cartesianism,’ *Ambix* 59/1 (2012): 4.

⁵⁰ See, for example, Ambrose Paré, *The workes of that famous chirurgion*, trans. Thomas Johnson (London: Thomas Cotes and R. Young, 1634), B6v-C1r (12-13).

⁵¹ ‘Sanguine, adj. and n.’ *OED Online*, accessed 28 September 2012, www.oed.com/view/Entry/170657.

⁵² Featley was notorious as an ecclesiastical licenser, as well as (apparently) popular as a clergyman. Those whose works he suppressed or corrected in the former capacity found him a less generous reader. See Arnold Hunt, ‘Featley, Daniel (1582–1645),’ *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, accessed 01 August 2012, www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/9242.

implicitly, as a bee, not insofar as he extracts the nectar of the classics but insofar as the plenteous ‘honnye’ of his own humors floods his tongue, enabling him to amend the lack in her poem. Literary judgement, according to Southwell, is determined not only by the quality of what is read, but also by the flavour, or taste, of the reader’s own humors.

The notion that literary ‘taste’ is a physical, as well as a mental response – a sensation, as well as an act of cognition – is buttressed by Southwell’s attentiveness to the materials of reading and writing. If the human body is, for Southwell, ‘poetically composed,’ then conversely the constituents of poetic composition are corporeal. Because a poem is made, in its textual instantiation, not just of words and ideas but also of paper and ink, it possesses material qualities identical with or at least analogous to the humors. Her poem on ‘The ffirst Commandement,’ for instance, condemns recourse to the words of secular authorities in religious verse in precisely these terms: poets who ‘forsake[s] gods worde’ in favour of ‘vaine fables’ cause ‘a sicknes to, to much infecting paper’ and ‘mixe heuens milke with aconite of hell.’⁵³ Like human bodies, the materials of literary composition are subject to ‘sicknes’ and infection, as the heavenly milk of the white page is poisoned by the aconite of ink. For Southwell, there is an essential accord between the composition and materials of the body, and the composition and materials of poetry: both are humoral entities.

Ink, in particular, is presented by Southwell as a vital site of humoral transactions between reader, poem and author. This is clear in a poetic ‘Epitaph’ for Lady Ridgway, in which Southwell expresses her regret at having written a faux-elegiac poem that teased Lady Ridgway for being a lax correspondent by jokingly hypothesising that her death had prevented her from replying to Southwell’s last letter. Lady Ridgway, it turned out, had indeed shuffled off the mortal coil. Southwell describes her sense of guilt by cursing the pen with which she wrote the faux-elegy: ‘Now let my pen be choakt wth gall / since I haue writt Propheticall.’⁵⁴ The ‘gall’ that she wishes on her pen refers to one of the primary components of the most commonly-used manuscript ink in the early modern period. As Anthony Petti explains, the active ingredients in this ink were ‘galls (the round excrescences produced by the gall-fly on branches of oak trees) and iron sulphate (usually known as copperas or Roman vitriol), the reaction of the tannic acid in the galls with the iron salt causing a blackish compound to form.’⁵⁵ The fate that Southwell wishes upon her pen, however, is clearly also a representation of her

⁵³ Southwell, ‘The ffirst Commandement,’ *Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book*, fol. 28r, l.25-26.

⁵⁴ Southwell, ‘An: Epitaph vppon Cassandra MackWilliams wife to Sr Thomas Ridgway Earle of London Derry,’ *Southwell-Sibthorpe Commonplace Book*, fol. 21r.

⁵⁵ Anthony Petti, *English Literary Hands from Chaucer to Dryden* (London: E. Arnold, 1977), 7.

own grief: ‘gall’ refers not only to an ingredient in ink, but figuratively to bitterness of spirit.⁵⁶ Furthermore, this bitterness of spirit is associated, in the humoral economy, with the choleric humor that produces it, which is sometimes also known as gall.⁵⁷ By exploiting the belief that gall is a substance common both to the human body, and to ink, Southwell’s elegy insists on the material reality of the apparently metaphorical contiguity between physiological and poetical composition described in the letter to Lady Ridgway.

Southwell’s suggestion that ink has humoral properties coterminous with those of the human body, and that physiological and poetical composition are consequently also contiguous, is apparent in early modern commonplace culture more generally. In his 1646 compendium of common errors, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, Thomas Browne notes that ‘writing Inke’ is ‘commonly made’ of a mixture of vitriol and an ‘astringent humidity’ such as gall. He then goes on to observe that just ‘such a condition’ can be found ‘naturally in some living creatures.’⁵⁸ These ‘creatures’ are full of a black humor, which Brown calls ‘atramentous,’ a neologism deriving from the Latin *ātramentum*: blacking, ink.⁵⁹ Ink is made of the humor of gall; conversely, human bodies can be atramentous, or inky. The idea that bodily fluids and ink are in some respects fungible is also present in the work of the Tudor sonneteers, extracts from which largely constituted the first poetic miscellanies and anthologies. In particular, poets frequently describe the mingling of a lover’s tears with the ink with which he writes. The Petrarchan narrator of an anonymous poem included in *Tottel’s Miscellany* (1557), for instance, describes how, frustrated in love, ‘I wrote with ink, and bitter teares.’⁶⁰ Similarly, Francis Davison’s 1611 anthology *A poetical rapsodie* contains an anonymous poem in which the writer’s ‘drisling teares.... falling in my Paper sinke, / Or dropping in my Pen encrease my inke.’⁶¹ In Thomas Lodge’s 1592 *Rosalynde*, the eponymous heroine (disguised as Ganymede) teases the infatuated Rosander for carving love poems into trees, in the process making satirical use of this kind of rhetoric: Ovidian poets, she says mockingly, ‘have their humors in their inckpot.’⁶²

⁵⁶ ‘Gall, n.1.’ *OED Online*, accessed 03 September 2011, www.oed.com/view/Entry/76229.

⁵⁷ In Thomas Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, Vindice claims that even looking at ink for too long will make a man ‘melancholy.’ Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy*, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 4.2.49-50.

⁵⁸ Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia epidemica* (London: T.H. for E. Dod, 1646), Tt4v-Vv1r.

⁵⁹ ‘Atramentous, adj.’ *OED Online*, accessed 28 September 2012, www.oed.com/view/Entry/12637. Browne, *Pseudodoxia epidemica*, Vv1r.

⁶⁰ Anon, ‘The lover here telleth of his divers joyes and adversities in love,’ in Henry Howard *et al.*, *Songes and sonettes* [*Tottel’s Miscellany*] (London: Richard Tottel, 1557), 60.

⁶¹ Anon, ‘Elegie II. Of Letters in Verse,’ in *A poetical rapsodie*, ed. Francis Davison (London: William Stansby for Roger Kackson), E2V-E3r.

⁶² Thomas Lodge, *Rosalynde* (London: Abel Jeffes for T. Gubbin and John Busbie, 1592), H4r.

Ben Jonson, too, frequently conflates ink with the humoral fluids, especially with gall. In ‘To my book,’ the second poem introducing his 1616 *Epigrams*, Jonson anticipates that many readers, seeing the work’s title and author, will expect the book to be ‘full of gall.’⁶³ Similarly, in Nashe’s address ‘To all Christian Readers,’ which prefaces his 1596 *Have with you to Saffron-walden* – his coruscating reply to Harvey’s *Pierce’s Supererogation* – Nashe defends himself against Harvey’s accusation that ‘I... used in all this space nothing but gall to make inke with,’ and complains that ‘these bitter-sauced Invectives’ return little in the way of pecuniary remuneration.⁶⁴ In both cases, the joke hinges on gall’s double status as metonymic both of bitter ink, and of bitter bile. And both Nashe and Jonson associate ink with urine. In the mock biography of Harvey appended to *Saffron-walden*, Nashe invents a rumour that Harvey ‘pist incke as soone as ever hee was borne,’⁶⁵ whilst in the ‘Apologetical Dialogue’ which follows *The Poetaster* (1601), Jonson warns his detractors that he is willing to ‘squirt their eyes / With ink or urine,’ with the conjunctive ‘or’ implying an equivalence between the two.⁶⁶ Just as the association between ink and gall gains force from the facts of manuscript ink production, moreover, so too does the association between ink and urine have its roots in the material realities of print culture. As Bruce Boehrer has noted, ‘the signature odor of the Renaissance printing-house... was the pervasive stench of urine.... Ink balls... permeated with the printers’ urine, must have introduced some minute chemical residue of the digestive tract into the ink absorbed by the paper of Jonson’s books.’⁶⁷ Not only manuscript ink, but also print ink, then, was both notionally and literally imbricated with human body fluids.

We can see an awareness of the humoral – and with them the gustatory – qualities of ink informing the language of taste as literary discrimination in its early stages. For Southwell, a distaste for poetry is attributable to a pathological humoral imbalance; conversely, a taste for verse indicates a healthy, sanguine, or sweet complexion. For Jonson and Nashe, the bitterness of satire is not merely figurative or conventional, but rather bears a metonymic, but very real, relation to the bitterness both of choleric authorial humours, and of their oak gall ink. An alertness to the sensory properties of ink is also manifest in Hugh Plat’s much-cited introductory poem to his 1602 *Delightes for Ladies*:

... my pen and paper are perfum’d

⁶³ Ben Jonson, ‘To My Book,’ in *The Complete Poems*, ed. George Parfitt (London: Penguin, 1988), 35.

⁶⁴ Thomas Nashe, *Saffron-walden* (London: John Danter, 1596), C4r-v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, sig.K2r.

⁶⁶ Ben Jonson, *The Poetaster*, ed. Tom Cain (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 269.

⁶⁷ Bruce Boehrer, *The Fury of Men’s Gullets: Ben Jonson and the Digestive Canal* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 4.

I scorne to write with Copres or with galle...
Rosewater is the inke I write withall:
Of Sweetes the Sweetest I will now commend...⁶⁸

Plat makes use of the fiction of manuscript circulation in order to assert that he writes, not with oak-gall or copper sulphate ink, but with rosewater. In so doing, he implies knowledge of the olfactory and gustatory qualities of writing inks: his assertion that they are unsuitable because they are insufficiently sweet attests to his awareness of the bitterness of their flavour. In fact, recipes for manuscript ink included in commonplace books do frequently incorporate the same ingredients, implements and processes as the culinary and medical recipes amongst which they are nestled.⁶⁹ Directions for making ink commonly call for the inclusion of consumables such as vinegar, beer, and sugar, whilst Plat's assertion that he writes with rosewater seems less securely metaphorical when we notice that, in a recipe for candied flowers included in his 1654 *The Garden of Eden*, Plat instructs the reader to 'make gum water as strong as for Inke, but make it with Rose-water.'⁷⁰ Such examples suggest a degree of contiguity – in space, matter and conception – between the composition and production of early modern writing materials and the composition and production of consumables, and extend Wendy Wall's research into intersections of culinary and literary skill-sets in the early modern home.⁷¹

An awareness of the ways in which 'taste' as discrimination is literally responsive to the sensory qualities of its objects is also evident if we shift our attention from the literary to visual arts. In his *The Arte of Limning* (c.1600), Nicholas Hilliard's recommendation that 'a good painter hath tender senses, quiet and apt,' is ratified by his remarkable sensitivity to the olfactory and gustatory, as well as the

⁶⁸ Hugh Plat, *Delightes for ladies* (London: Peter Short, 1602), A2v.

⁶⁹ The 1596 *A Booke of Secrets* gathers together ink formulas which incorporate vinegar, beer, and hazelnut shells. William Phillip, *A Booke of Secrets* (London: Adam Islip for Edward White, 1596). In his 1641 *Mercury, or the swift and secret Messenger*, John Wilkins describes a number of recipes for invisible ink constituted of liquids including milk, onion juice, lemon juice, raw eggs, urine and fat. John Wilkins, *Mercury, or the swift and secret Messenger* (London: J. Norton for John Maynard and Timothy Wilkins, 1641), D5r. The commonplace book of John Locke (father of the famous philosopher) includes recipes 'To make writing Inke,' and 'To make good Inke' which specify ingredients including 'pomegranate oil' and 'sugar,' and include weighing, mixing, distilling and drying in the stages of preparation; adjacent recipes include 'To make Syrrup of Garlick,' and a drink 'For the Consumption,' and similarly call for flower and nut 'oils' and 'sugar.' William Sherman, ed., *Renaissance Commonplace Books from the British Library* [microfilm] (Marlborough: Adam Matthew, 2002).

⁷⁰ Hugh Plat, *The Garden of Eden* (London: William Leake, 1654), B5v.

⁷¹ 'Writing recipes and undertaking particular types of manual work trained women in alphabetic literacy and the conventions of book use, but handicrafts in the home also signified in their own right as forms of "writing" within a functional theory of making. Carving food or a quill, shaping edible tarts, and making marks on paper were household labors that enabled women to be socially and creatively expressive.' Wall, 'Literacy and the Domestic Arts,' 387.

visual, qualities of his materials.⁷² Thus, emphasizing the importance of fastidious cleanliness, he suggests using ‘water distilled from the water of some clear spring,’ as a base for making paints; or even better, ‘from black cherries, which is the cleanest that ever I could find, and keepeth longest sweet and clear.’⁷³ Hilliard uses ‘sweet’ to indicate water which is not stale, but given that this water is extracted from cherries, the word surely retains some of its gustatory connotations. More explicitly, Hilliard prohibits ‘all ill-smelling colours, all ill-tasting, as orpiment, verdigris, verditer, pink, sap-green, litmus, or any unsweet colours’; these, he warns ‘are naught for limning; use none of them if you may choose.’⁷⁴ His concern registers an awareness of portrait miniatures as entities intended to stimulate the senses in unexpected ways; at the very least, they must not be ‘ill-smelling’ or ‘ill-tasting’ (my emphasis). And elsewhere in *The Arte*, Hilliard recommends the use of salt and sugar ‘candie’ in limning colours.⁷⁵ In his directions for paint-making, then, Hilliard literalizes the language of aesthetic sweetness; *The Arte* offers a material grounding for the ubiquitous early modern association between saccharinity and pleasure in the literary and visual arts. From this perspective, we can see how – *pace* the abstraction narrative discussed earlier – the language of literary and aesthetic taste in this period resonates with material, sensory experiences of reading and writing, printing, and painting.

IV.

Perusing a section titled ‘The Interpretation of Dreams’ included in the anonymous 1698 miscellany *Wits cabinet*, the reader is advised that ‘to dream to eat Books, is good to Schoolmasters, and all that make profit by them, and which are studious for Eloquence; to others it is sudden death.’⁷⁶ In this uncompromising prediction, bibliophagy emerges as an apparently conventional dream phenomenon in the seventeenth century; its radically divergent consequences form a boundary line between the ‘studious’ and the unschooled. In this, the dream of book-eating emblemizes some of the concerns of this essay, which has argued that early modern literary taste is fundamentally rooted, if not in the actual alimentary consumption of books, at least in an acute, distinctly wakeful alertness to the

⁷² Nicholas Hilliard, *The Arte of Limning*, ed. R.K.R. Thornton and T.G.S. Cain (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1992), 45.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 69.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 79. Patricia Fumerton notes that ‘the intimacy of portrait miniatures was “sweet” (a term in which we taste the sugar candy added to limning colours), meaning that it was a false intimacy idealizing the sitter.’ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 80.

⁷⁶ Anon., *Wits cabinet* (London: H. Rhodes, 1698), A9r.

gustatory qualities of the materials of reading and writing.⁷⁷ Early modern men and women may not have habitually chomped on codices or munched manuscripts, but the feast of words described by Cavendish in my opening quotation is rather less removed from the experiential realities of reading and writing than we might presume. Against the usual scholarly presumption that the birth of aesthetic taste originates in the death of a metaphor, as the term lost its notional association with gustation, I have argued that the language of literary good taste is present in the commonplace culture of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, emerging in part from the trope of the reader as a bee who uses his or her sense of taste to select, and subsequently digest, the flowers of rhetoric. In commonplace books and anthologies, in paratexts and poems, the language of taste is grounded in the material, humoral reality of bodies and books. In its earliest incarnations, taste defined as literary discrimination was understood not simply as a figurative application of a term that had previously been used only to describe a physical sensation, but as rooted in the phenomenal reality of reading and writing as it engaged the senses. Within a humoral economy, the bibliophagic trope of the reader as bee takes on a literal, as well as a literary, dimension, as the similarity (even the fungibility) of the fluids that constituted both the human body and the writer's corpus made an alimentary exchange between the two a very real possibility.

⁷⁷ Although see Tanya Pollard's description of a number of early modern 'word-medicines' that necessitated 'not merely physical contact with words, but direct ingestion of them' in the form of written spells, with figures including John Aubrey and John Floyer recommending recipes in which gurgitation of a fragment of text is supposed to cure the effects of the bite of a mad dog. Tanya Pollard, 'Spelling the Body,' in *Environment and Embodiment in Early Modern England*, ed. Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 173-74.