

Stop and Smell the Romans:
Odor in Roman Literature

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
(Classical Studies)
in the University of Michigan
2015

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ISN'T IT STRANGE HOW SMELLS ARE SO EVOCATIVE, BUT WE CAN'T DESCRIBE THEM?



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ad maiorem Dei gloriam

Acknowledgements

This project would not have happened without the support and encouragement of many people, both within the Department of Classics and beyond:

Thanks first and foremost to my advisor, Ruth Caston, whose insightful comments and ability to unearth my main arguments from the chaos of early drafts were matched only by her patience and insistence that I believe in myself. Thanks also to Celia Schultz for coming on at the last minute but with no less enthusiasm for the project, to Victor Caston for helping me untangle the Greek philosophy of the senses, and to David Potter for providing historical perspective on my literary study.

Michelle Biggs and the office staff answered all of my questions (even the ones I asked more than once), fed me Twix bars, and prevented my dissertation, and the department, from spontaneously combusting. Without them we would all be hopelessly lost.

Comet Coffee provided the best lattes in Ann Arbor, and Zingerman's Delicatessen contributed the unrivaled Dirty Sheed and the world's best pretzel sticks. Thank you both for fueling this project.

My friends and family members kept my sanity in check with words of encouragement, cards and packages, and much-needed distractions. To my parents and siblings, who endured my grad-school-induced panic attacks and pretended not to notice when I brought too many books home over breaks, I can only say: thank you so much, and I apologize! Special thanks to my grandma, who asked how "the paper" was going every time I called. The Dissertators Gchat

Group (Ellen Cole Lee, Amy Pistone, Tiggy McLaughlin, and Tim Hart) offered the perfect balance of emotional support, accountability, and silly GIFs—“fulsome yays” to you all! I could not have kept at it without a host of fellow graduate students who made the department a friendly and welcoming place during an increasingly isolating process: shout-outs to Clara Bosak-Schroeder, Erika Valdivieso, Cassandra Borges, Elizabeth Platte, Rebecca Sears, Harriet Fertik, Evelyn Adkins, Bram ten Berge, Nicholas Rupert, Evan Lee, Jacqueline Pincus, Jessica Stephens, and Nicholas Geller. Lastly, to my non-department friends (Renee Mayes, Lauren Janicki, Elizabeth Miller, Kathleen Polk, Kristy Eason, and Kristie Good), for movie nights, wig days, prayers, and nodding and smiling when I rambled on about Latin: may the Force be with you all.

Finally, to my undergraduate advisor, Peter Anderson, who first guided me through Martial’s world of odors and planted the seeds which grew into this project. This is all your fault. And thank you.

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Introduction

“...the first condition of understanding a foreign country is to smell it.”

—T.S. Eliot¹

Why smell?

The Ongee of the Andaman Islands greet one another by asking *Konyune? Onorange-tanka?*, that is, “How is your nose?” “If the person feels 'heavy' with odour, the enquirer politely sniffs some of it away. If, on the other hand, the person feels she or he is low on odour-energy, the enquirer will provide an infusion of extra scent by blowing on her or him.”² This scent-based greeting stems from the Ongee belief that odor is the source of a person’s identifying characteristics and life force. Understanding one’s own odor and the odors of the community and environment thus leads to self-awareness and a sense of identity among the members of a specific group.

Odor can be used to divide people as well as unite them.³ Among the Dassanetch tribe of southwestern Ethiopia, odors related to cattle, such as that of manure, are considered fragrant. Because cattle are central to Dassanetch society, smelling of them suggests wealth and high social standing, a connection no modern Westerner would be likely to make. On the other hand,

¹ “In Praise of Kipling’s Verse,” *Harper’s Magazine*, July 1, 1942, p. 156.

² Classen et al. (1994) 114.

³ Cf. Manalansan (2006) 44: “I submit that the sense of smell is the basis for recognition and misrecognition and that it provides an opportunity to affiliate, to belong as well as to disidentify and to ostracize.”

the Dassanetch abhor the odor of fish, for fishermen are considered the lowest members of society and their odor is therefore classified as disagreeable. Far from being inherently “good” or “bad,” therefore, the status of these odors is culturally determined, based on an association with two different classes of people within a specific society.⁴

Anthropological work suggests that there are no universally “bad” odors. Some people actually like the smell of skunk (among them prominent smell psychologist Dr. Rachel Herz), while others dislike typically “pleasant” scents such as rose.⁵ Studies also suggest that our interpretation of, and consequent liking for, odors can be easily manipulated. Dr. Herz and her research team found that they could produce vastly different responses to a decontextualized odor just by giving it a new name: subjects refused to believe that the smell called ‘vomit’ and the one called ‘Parmesan cheese’ were actually the same odor, with only the label changed.⁶ Without the proper context—a bakery storefront, for example—we may not even recognize our favorite odors, such as baking bread or freshly brewed coffee. Additionally, while scents are extolled as among our strongest memory triggers,⁷ when asked to recall a *scent*, most people cannot do so.⁸ The resulting paradox is that preference for odors is indicative of a certain cultural

⁴ Classen 1992.

⁵ Herz (2007) 39 cites the example of a woman who first encountered the odor of roses at her mother’s funeral, and has disliked its scent ever since due to its associations with sadness and loss. For the record, I personally found the smell of skunk awful as a child, likely because I was terrified that I myself was going to be sprayed. Since I have gotten over this rather irrational fear of overbold attack-skunks, I have found the smell far less objectionable.

⁶ See Herz and J. von Clef 2001 and Herz (2007) 56-7. Cf. Galeano’s 1991 “Celebración de la desconfianza,” in which a professor’s suggestion that a massive flask is full of perfume, when it is actually full of water, causes the entire class to react strongly against what they perceive as an overwhelming odor.

⁷ The most frequently cited instance is Marcel Proust’s story in *À la recherche du temps perdu* of how eating a madeleine dipped in lime-flower tea sparked a host of childhood memories. For modern work on scent and memory, see Engen 1991, Schab and Crowder 1995, and Herz 2000 and (2007) 61-89. Interestingly, very little interest in this connection can be found in the ancient sources, although see *Phaedo* 96b for the relationship between memory and the senses.

⁸ For the powerful connection between odor and emotion, both processed in the amygdala, see Herz (2007) 3-4, 11-18.

like-mindedness,⁹ but on the other hand remarkably specific to the individual and also susceptible to deliberate manipulation.

A source of curiosity for millennia, the human olfactory system has remained an enigma far longer than our other sensory systems, though certainly not for a lack of trying—ancient scientists and philosophers, as I will discuss below, were already attempting to explain the workings of the human senses in the sixth and fifth centuries BC. It is only very recently, however, that our understanding of smell and odors has enjoyed an exponential increase. The 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine was awarded to Dr. Richard Axel and Dr. Linda B. Buck for their 1991 discovery of “odorant receptors and the organization of the olfactory system.”¹⁰ In 2008, Jennifer L. Pluznick and her colleagues discovered that olfactory receptors are present not just in the olfactory epithelium in the nose, but also in the kidneys of their test-subjects,¹¹ where they help regulate blood pressure and control metabolism.¹² And in 2014, a research team at Ruhr University Bochum in Germany discovered olfactory receptors in human skin cells as well.¹³ In addition, “exposing one of these receptors...to a synthetic sandalwood odor known as Sandalore sets off a cascade of molecular signals that appears to induce healing in injured tissue.”¹⁴ Even information as fundamental as the location and function of odorant receptors is thus still waiting to be fully clarified.

⁹ Cf. Drobnick (2006) 1: “...the manners and reasons people engage with the sense of smell are influenced by numerous cultural factors relating to the constructs a society creates integrating the environment, the bodies of its citizens and its symbolic worldview.”

¹⁰ “Press Release: The Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine 2004.” The Nobel Assembly at Karolinska Institutet, October 4, 2004. http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/medicine/laureates/2004/press.html (Accessed October 17, 2014).

¹¹ The experiment was performed on mice.

¹² Pluznick et al. 2009.

¹³ Busse et al. 2014.

¹⁴ Stone, Alex. “Smell Turns Up in Unexpected Places.” *New York Times*, Oct. 13, 2014. Accessed November 12, 2014. <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/14/science/smell-turns-up-in-unexpected-places.html>

Scents are, as I hope this brief survey has suggested, both fascinating and mysterious. They speak to a culture's sense of its own identity and values, give us insight into the human psyche, and are powerful enough to evoke memories. Yet at the same time they are so nebulous that they are often unidentifiable without context. And when compared to other sensory phenomena, they have until recent decades also been relatively understudied and often passed over as frivolous.¹⁵ Buck and Axel's discovery, made in 1991, was hailed by scientists as a "landmark finding."¹⁶ But after their 2004 Nobel win, the press reporting on the achievement wrote articles with bemused-sounding titles such as "Nothing fishy about sweet smell of Nobel success"¹⁷ and drew parallels between the Nobel win and an Ig Nobel Prize awarded just days earlier to a team of scientists who had demonstrated that herrings apparently communicate by "farting."¹⁸

The tagline of the Ig Nobel Prizes, "Research that makes people LAUGH and then THINK",¹⁹ in fact hits upon something fundamental about odors, at least in the modern West: they quite often make people laugh, sometimes uncomfortably at their lack of refinement,

¹⁵ In an internet quiz on the website Quibblo, for example, 56% of the 4495 respondents chose smell as the sense they would give up; the next lowest choice was taste, at 21%. (<http://www.quibblo.com/quiz/1JoM1SK/If-you-HAD-to-give-up-a-sense-which-would-it-be>) (Accessed Dec. 9th, 2014). Interestingly, a 2011 study on technology and young people showed that 53% would rather give up their sense of smell than give up technology. (McCann Worldgroup, "Today's Global Youth Would Give Up Their Sense of Smell to Keep Their Technology." *PR Newswire*, May 25, 2011. Accessed Dec 12, 2014. <http://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/todays-global-youth-would-give-up-their-sense-of-smell-to-keep-their-technology-122605643.html>)

¹⁶ Peter Mombaerts. 2004. "Love at First Smell – The 2004 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine." *New England Journal of Medicine* 351.25: 2579. Mombaerts notes that Buck and Axel's 1991 paper, which announced the findings for which they were awarded the 2004 Nobel Prize, had been cited 1177 times between the time of its publication and the time his own remarks were published (December 16, 2004). My search on Web of Science on December 2, 2014 turned up 2380 citations.

¹⁷ Ed Frauenheim, CNET News. http://news.cnet.com/Nothing-fishy-about-sweet-smell-of-Nobel-success/2100-1008_3-5399896.html (Accessed October 29, 2014). As indicated by the previous footnote, even people who took the finding seriously could not seem to resist the urge to pun on scents and at the same time call attention to the sight-centered nature of many English phrases. Plays on "scents" versus "sense" and "nose" versus "knows" are common, as is replacing sight-related words with scent-related ones: Holly Dugan (2011) speaks, for example, of "a nose witness" (104).

¹⁸ <http://www.improbable.com/ig/winners/#ig2004> (Accessed October 29, 2014).

¹⁹ <http://www.improbable.com/> (Accessed October 29, 2014)

sometimes with derision at their fleeting ephemerality. Though a focus on odors does not by any means make a scientific study somehow *less* scientific, the pun-filled headlines responding to the Nobel win hint that there is something not quite serious about scents.²⁰ To take odor seriously as a topic of study gives rise to surprise and doubt: can there really be anything worthwhile, anything academic, to say about body odor and Chanel No. 5?²¹

As Holly Dugan notes in her book on perfumes in Renaissance England, the sense of smell “bridges acute sensory perception and brute bodily materiality.”²² Olfaction is both scientific and funny because it is so often linked to the body, the locus of our engagement with the physical world but also the source of a variety of effluvia—including odor—too vulgar to mention in polite, or academic, society.²³ Though subtle and possessing great cultural significance, smells are at the same time associated with close proximity to the bodies of others and to the least pleasant aspects of human physicality such as waste and decay. This connection between odors and bodies makes smell an ideal mechanism for talking about interactions between individuals: an encounter with an odor, with another body, could mean exposure to the worst that human physicality has to offer and a threat to one’s own bodily integrity. Odors are, on the one hand, earthy, physical, and potentially dirty, and the close relationship some have to

²⁰ Google, for instance, announced “Google Nose”, a feature that allowed users to search for smells, as their 2013 April Fools’ joke. (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2013/03/31/google-nose-april-fools_n_2990114.html) The joke, however, may be on them: two olfactory products for smartphones have actually been developed recently, one (Scentee) which sprays a scent of the user’s choosing from a small bauble attached to the phone, the other (oPhone) which allows users to ‘text’ smells to each other.

²¹ Compare Emily Gowers’ (1993) remark on mentions of food in Roman literature, which could just as easily apply to smell: “The fact that what a man ate appears so often in the Roman sources shows what great potential food had for projecting an individual’s moral and cultural values. But this embracing of food as a literary subject always went hand in hand with squeamish contempt for the substance itself” (4). Nina Strohminger (2014) 478 notes the same of disgust, which was considered “insufficiently cognitive to deserve a slot in the emotion pantheon” in the 1980s and 90s.

²² Dugan (2011) 2.

²³ “Combining the possibility of great refinement, even sublimity, with the suggestion of debasement or decay, smell is simultaneously a sign of human ‘culture’ and a powerful reminder of grosser interaction with bodies and their various byproducts, including waste material and corpses.” Stevens (unpublished) 3.

the body and bodily functions gives rise to apologetic laughter.²⁴ On the other hand, they are ephemeral, invisible, and sometimes unidentifiable, so impermanent that, one might argue, they hardly merit our attention.²⁵ As Ashley Clements says,

...smell is both the sense of binary judgments (its effects registered primarily in terms of the polar extremes of attraction or disgust), but also of characteristic “incompleteness”, bringing with it an indeterminacy that transcends boundaries, permeates bodily limits, and effects a unity of perceiver and perceived, a taking “over by otherness”, or an atmosphere of something shared.²⁶

On top of these qualities, odors have been connected both with women and with animals.

Artificial scents were increasingly considered the purview of women, considered to be the more emotional, frivolous, and less intelligent sex, while the olfactory acuity of animals had long been recognized.²⁷ This array of associations led scientists and philosophers of the Enlightenment to conclude that our sense of smell was irrational and bestial, employed by creatures possessed of a diminished capacity for sophisticated thought.²⁸ Sight and hearing, instead, were championed as

²⁴ Freud’s *Der Witz und seine Beziehung zum Unbewußten* is of course fundamental.

²⁵ Dugan’s book is premised upon, and argues persuasively for, the materiality of odors: “That smells are worthy of scientific or historical investigation is premised on the fact that they materially exist, even though they cannot be seen” (185). Cf. Drobnick in his introduction to *The Smell Culture Reader*: “Considered earthy and animalistic, scents have nevertheless served as a long-standing component in spiritual practices” (1).

²⁶ Clements (2015) 46-7, quoting Gell (1977) 27, 29 and Howes (1987) for “incompleteness”; and Adorno and Horkheimer (1972) 184 for taking “over by otherness.” On the permeability of the “foul” body, see Bakhtin (1968) 26-7 and Douglas (2003) xxxvii-xxxviii.

²⁷ See Bradley (2015) 5 for a brief overview.

²⁸ E.g. Kant, *Anthropologie in pragmatischer Hinsicht* (1977) 452-3 calls olfaction “opposed to freedom.” A text from 1690 London, *Mankind Displayed: Or, The History of the Little World*, has the following to say about the sense of smell: “And as Seeing is allowed by all Naturalists to be the best and choicest of the Senses, so the Smelling is held to be the least needful.” (117).

Note that even though the Enlightenment played a large role in the degradation of the sense of smell, odor was already the object of unpopular opinion. Aristotle expresses in his *De sensu et sensibilibus* 441a1-2 the judgment that humans, out of all animals, have the worst sense of smell; on top of that, smell is the worst out of the human senses (χειρίστην ἔχομεν τῶν ἄλλων ζῴων τὴν ὄσφρησιν καὶ τῶν ἐν ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς αἰσθήσεων).²⁸ Cf. also *De anima* 2.421a10-12. This is perhaps the most famous judgment on smell and is also the most explicitly negative. His pupil and successor Theophrastus similarly reports at *De odoribus* 4 that our sense of smell is inferior to animals’. Meanwhile, philosophers attempting to link each element with one of the senses faced an obvious dilemma: there were four elements but five senses, leaving one sense without its own element. This “spare” sense tended to be smell. See for instance Plato’s *Timaeus* 66d, where he claims that the veins of our olfactory organs are too narrow for earth and water, but too wide for fire and air. For completely different ranking systems, see McHugh (2012) 46-8 on Hindu and Buddhist philosophy. As an example, the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣikas order the senses according to “how many

the highest and most civilised of the senses, those which should be relied upon most heavily by modern, enlightened man.

Smell in the humanities and classics

In the academic realm, this long-established preference for sight and hearing is reflected in the preponderance of scholarship dedicated to these senses, vision above all.²⁹ Smell, meanwhile, has been an unpopular topic of study until fairly recently, especially within the humanities. As we saw above, even in the sciences where one might expect greater objectivity and the value of studying one of the human senses might be considered a given, embarrassment lingers, if not among researchers themselves then in those who comment and report upon their findings. Despite the scientific, medical, and social import of the research being done,³⁰ a certain reticence to admit the seriousness of odors remains. At the very least, we may note the ease with which the dissemination of odor-related information can be turned into an opportunity for humor.³¹

In the humanities it has become commonplace in works on smell, even as the number increases, to remark upon the paucity of scholarship dealing with the subject (Q.E.D.). Scholars

types of sense data are found in the *object* perceived” (46, emphasis original). Thus earth can be smelled, tasted, touched, seen, and heard, but water cannot be smelled, and so on.

²⁹ Recent books on sight in the field of classics include Fredrick (ed.) 2002, Villard (ed.) 2002, Merker 2003, Clarke 2003, Zanker 2004, Villard (ed.) 2005, Smith 2005, Salzman-Mitchell 2005, Morales 2005, Maiatsky 2005, Bartsch 2006, Elsner 2007, Lovatt 2013. On sound, Kaimio 1977, Edwards 2002, Moore 2012.

³⁰ A selection of recent studies: Herz et al. 2005 on odor, emotion, and associative learning; Martins et al. 2005 on the influence of gender and sexual orientation on odor preferences; Walla 2008 on odor’s influence on word and face processing; Neuhaus et al. 2009 on olfactory receptors’ potential to inhibit the growth of prostate cancer cells; Imai 2014 on the neural circuitry of the olfactory bulb; and Logan 2014 on the genetics of olfactory perception.

³¹ Dissertation titles, for example. In a similar vein, Nina Strohming (2014) 488n.1 notes that she wanted to title her article “Disgust Discussed” but discovered that the title had already been used at least five times since 1999. Alternate suggestions from her colleagues included “Disgust: An Engrossing Emotion: Revulsion Revisited,” “Gross Encounters of the Turd Kind,” and “Aversion: A Version.”

draw particular attention to the modern West's focus on vision, its increasing insistence upon olfactory sterility, and the dearth of smell-related vocabulary with which to discuss olfaction.³²

Yet while the assertion that smell has been “virtually ignored”³³ in many fields of the humanities is by and large true, the subject has garnered increased interest since the 1980s as the social and cultural importance of odor, and the role culture plays in determining how one understands and thinks about odor, have become more apparent.³⁴

My work is inspired by studies which turn to odors not just to enrich our appreciation of daily life but also to broaden our understanding of a society's social and cultural practices and read more deeply into its literature. For example, Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination* demonstrates the links between the perception and fear of odor by the public, the nobility, and scientists, and the rise of public health and safety measures in eighteenth-century France. It focuses especially on the prevailing fear of miasmas and contagion, a major theme of this dissertation, and how this fear shaped not only responses to scents themselves, but also social interaction and even hygiene practices.³⁵ In *Scenting Salvation*, meanwhile, Susan Ashbrook Harvey traces the development of early Christian interaction with odors, navigating the apparent paradoxes present in a religion which at times rejected odors as hallmarks of a decadent and pagan world, but at others embraced incenses and perfumes as

³² On vision: Classen (1994) 9; Bradley (2015) 8; On modern sterility and deodorization: Le Guéer 1990, McPhee 1992, Damian and Damian 2006; On odor-related vocabulary: Bradley (2015) 3; Dugan (2011) 4; Drobnick (2006) 1, 7; Rindisbacher (1992) 15-16. Kate Fox, co-director of the SIRC, notes that “to smell” is an inherently derogatory verb, and if we wish it to be positive or neutral we must qualify it, e.g. someone *smells good*. “Smells are guilty until proven innocent.” http://www.sirc.org/publik/smell_culture.html. Rivlin and Gravelle (1984) 88-9, meanwhile, have suggested that the location of smell centers in the most primitive part of the brain makes it inaccessible to that part of the brain which processes language.

³³ Dugan (2011) 2, of historical scholarship specifically.

³⁴ For a good survey of the literature on olfaction and its increase since the mid-eighties, see Drobnick (2006) 2-4. Drobnick gives special mention to Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1982 in French, 1986 in English) and Süskind's *Das Parfum* (1986).

³⁵ Stephen Mennell credited Corbin with opening up “a whole new field, the historical sociology of smells.” (1987. Review of *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French Social Imagination*, Alain Corbin. *AJS* 93.3: 727-9.)

integral parts of their liturgies.³⁶ For the Christians, Harvey suggests, odors were sources of knowledge. They crossed the boundaries between Heaven and Earth and provided believers with information about and access to God while simultaneously functioning as indicators of sanctity or wickedness. And as we will see below in the cases of Plautus and Martial, an odor could suggest more than one characteristic: a good odor, for example, might to a Christian mind suggest either decadence and sin or holiness and purity depending on the context.³⁷ Finally, Hans Rindisbacher's 1992 *The Smell of Books* looks at how odors create meaning and effect in European literary texts from German bourgeois realist literature through the Holocaust and up to Süskind's *Das Parfum*.³⁸ He characterizes the human body as "an olfactory battlefield"³⁹ and suggests that all concern with olfaction can ultimately be attributed either to concern with sexuality or death. While I do not entirely agree with this view, there is no doubt that both of these ideas feature prominently in the Latin texts I will discuss below. Studies like Rindisbacher's demonstrate how sensitivity to odors within a specific cultural context can enhance both our appreciation of the texts themselves and of the beliefs and practices of the culture, and often the time period, which produced them.⁴⁰

³⁶ Cf. also James McHugh's 2012 *Sandalwood and Carrion: smell in Indian religion and culture*.

³⁷ See also Beatrice Caseau's 1994 dissertation *Euodia: the use and meaning of fragrances in the ancient world and their Christianization (100-900 AD)*, in which she explores the significance of odors in Mediterranean culture with which Christians would have to contend.

³⁸ A few other examples: Holly Dugan, focusing on embodiment and the materiality of odors, details the underestimated importance of a select group of scents, including rose and sassafras, to English culture during the Renaissance. Dugan's book, *The Ephemeral History of Perfumes*, is premised upon, and argues persuasively for, the materiality of odors: "That smells are worthy of scientific or historical investigation is premised on the fact that they materially exist, even though they cannot be seen" (185). Dr. Rachel Herz has also published two books aimed at the general reader: *That's Disgusting*, which delves into the origins and manifestations of the human emotion of disgust; and *The Scent of Desire*, which focuses specifically on odors and the human psyche. And in *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell*, Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synnott broadly examine the power of odors to shape social and cultural practices, create and reinforce social hierarchies, and indicate value.

³⁹ Rindisbacher (1992) 289.

⁴⁰ Thus Shakespeare's Sonnet 54 capitalizes on the contemporary craze for damask roses while simultaneously "demonstrat[ing] how embodied olfactory pleasure and its links to eroticism troubled emerging notions of Renaissance selfhood" Dugan (2011) 47-8.

While my own interests are most closely aligned with scholars who investigate the significance of odors in literary texts,⁴¹ the field of classics has instead been largely concerned with the ancient perfume industry, the material culture surrounding it, and the uses to which these materials were put in everyday life.⁴² For example, studies of sanitation, religious rites, sexuality, and dining practices have touched variously upon the importance of odor. David Potter's "The Scent of Roman Dining" (2015), for example, considers the actual scents of an elite Roman banquet but also the social, moral, and political implications of these odors for both the host and his guests.⁴³

Until very recently the only book to deal extensively with odors in literature was Saara Lilja's 1972 *The Treatment of Odours in the Poetry of Antiquity*. Lilja's book contains an extensive repository of citations from both Greek and Latin literature, but extended analysis of the odors and their cultural importance is minimal. Even so, Lilja's work made it plain that odor was an important, and until then overlooked, feature of Greek and Roman poetry.⁴⁴ Recent edited volumes, meanwhile, have sought to provide a broad and multifaceted overview of smell in the ancient world, redressing the longstanding bias in favor of sight as well as, in some cases, examining how multiple senses interact to create a many-layered sensory experience.⁴⁵ These

⁴¹ Cf. also Looby 2006, Gray 2006. "The use of odor in literature emphasizes that, while one may stand outside a visual landscape and judge it artistically, as one does a painting, one is *immersed* in smellscape; it is immediately evocative, emotional and meaningful" (Porteous (2006) 92).

⁴² Examples include Lucas 1962, Miller 1969, Grillet 1975, Detienne 1977, Groom 1981, Fauré 1987, Dayagi-Mendels 1989, Dierichs and Siebert 2006, Giordano and Casale 2007, Bodiou, Mehl, and Frère, (eds.) 2008, Verbanck-Piérard, Massar, and Frère (eds.) 2008, Squillace 2010, Bodiou, Mehl, and Bergé 2011, Carannante and D'Acunto (eds.) 2012.

⁴³ On sanitation, Scobie 1986, Gowers 1995, Scheidel 2003, Raventós and Remolà 2000, Hobson 2009, Aldrete 2014; on religion, Casseau 1994, Harvey 2006, Edlund-Berry 2006; on sexuality, Rousselle 1988, Hallet and Skinner (eds.) 1997, Porter (ed.) 1999; on dining, Gowers 1993; Potter 2015.

⁴⁴ Though the first to publish a book on the subject, Lilja was not the first to notice odors in ancient poetry. Two early examples are Schwenk's "Wohlgeruch der götter" in 1861 and Spaeth's "Martial and Morley on Smells" in 1922.

⁴⁵ *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* (2014, ed. Jerry Toner) is part of a larger series on the cultural history of the senses edited by Constance Classen. *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* (2013, ed. Shane Butler and Alex Purves) and *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (2015, ed. Mark Bradley), form the first two volumes of

collaborative volumes, in particular *Smell and the Ancient Senses* (ed. Mark Bradley), examine philosophical and medical theories of smell, odors in social life (dinner parties and religious festivals, to name two), the processes by which scents were created and stored, sanitation and the olfactory experience of everyday life, and odors in literature, among other topics.⁴⁶ This summary suggests just how many aspects of the ancient world can be illuminated through an olfactory lens, and one hopes that the approaches to smell in these volumes will be more widely applied in the future. The drawback to this diversity, however, is an unevenness of coverage, both in terms of approaches to smell and, in the volumes on all five senses, in the amount of attention devoted to smell specifically. *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* (ed. Butler and Purves) contains only one chapter focused primarily on olfaction, though several others consider it in less detail, while *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* (ed. Toner) tends to highlight multiple senses per chapter.⁴⁷ This ultimately amounts to what Bradley calls “the lack of a consistent and sustained interpretation of smell across these classical domains.”⁴⁸

Project overview

In this dissertation I aim to provide a more “consistent and sustained interpretation” of odors which looks not at what the Romans smelled and smelled like in their daily lives, but instead at how scents function in three sets of texts: Plautus’ comedies, Latin epic, and Martial’s

the *Senses in Antiquity* series. On multisensory experience cf. also Betts 2011, “Towards a Multisensory Experience of Movement in the City of Rome” and Jenner 2011, “Follow Your Nose? Smell, Smelling, and Their Histories.” el-Khoury (2006) 21 makes an interesting point about the visual aspect of smelling, noting that the accessories of odor (sachets, perfume bottles) are as much a testament to one’s cleanliness as actually smelling clean.

⁴⁶ Bradley (2015) 14: “the very subjectivity and malleability of smell, and the complexities and challenges involved in identifying, classifying and describing it, make its varied and elusive character one of the volume’s most significant and striking motifs.”

⁴⁷ *A Cultural History of the Senses in Antiquity* covers all five senses and therefore places smell in a wider context while being unable to give it sustained close attention.

⁴⁸ Bradley (2015) 14.

epigrams. I chose these texts in part because they contain significant mentions of odors, both quantitatively and qualitatively. In addition to a rich array of olfactory references, however, I also found throughout them consistent evidence for two Roman ideas about scents: their connection to knowledge and identity on the one hand, and to contamination and boundary-crossing on the other (on which more below). All of the authors I discuss begin with these two fundamental ideas about smells and smelling, but each goes on to tailor them according to the genre in which he is writing and the themes of his work: identity and role in Plautus, death and civil war in the epics, and the author's relationship to his readers in Martial. Although I have divided my chapters by genre in part because it is a useful organizational scheme, this choice also confronts the scholarly misconception that smell can only be found in "low" genres. While some have called attention to odors in Plautus and Martial, epic has long been considered too serious for odors, leading to research which privileges other senses, particularly sight.

My study is of course not exhaustive, and these are not the only texts in which odors make an appearance. For example, love elegy is full of scents, cosmetics, and discourses on feminine grooming. The elegists connect fragrances both to the luxuries of the East and to the allure or artificiality of their beloveds, a question of feminine identity which we will see explored in Plautus' comedies.⁴⁹ Suetonius, in contrast, employs smell-related anecdotes as well as instances of nose-related prosopography to characterize and criticize the subjects of his biographies. Vespasian's attempts to increase military discipline, for instance, are exemplified by his revoking a perfumed young man's military commission, remarking *maluissim alium oboluisse* ("I'd rather you'd smelled of garlic," 8.3). The extent of Caligula's profligacy, on the

⁴⁹ E.g. *Remedia Amoris* 347-5, where an unadorned *puella* is ugly, but her cosmetics are equally foul-smelling. Propertius praises unadorned female beauty at 1.2, and compares the perfume of Love to those from the east at 2.29a. Perfumes are not the only scents these poets mention—body odor, for instance, comes under fire at *Ars Am.* 3.193.

other hand, can be seen in his practice of bathing in perfumed oils.⁵⁰ Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis Historia*, meanwhile, is our richest source of information about the scents used by the ancient Romans and their various points of origin.⁵¹ His descriptions of plant properties include how they smell, a characteristic which seems to have been included as an aid to distinguishing different types of plant specimen; even so, he generally refers to these odors with imprecise adjectives such as *iucundus* ("pleasant") or *vis* ("strong") rather than attempting to characterize individual odors.⁵²

These examples show the breadth of interest in scents among ancient authors and the various ways in which they might be relevant within a text. I have chosen my particular texts in part because in them, smells occur repeatedly within a larger narrative framework—a comedy, an epic poem, or scattered throughout a corpus of epigrams—while isolated anecdotes and encyclopedic information such as Pliny's are less ideal for my study. Because of this I can consider whether odor is depicted consistently within a text, and look for a relationship between descriptions of odor and the overall themes and tone of the work. Moreover, while I do not think that generic convention is the only thing which determines the placement and use of odors in a text, it does provide a useful framework within which to consider the significance and meaning of smell. For instance, if it is comic convention that marginalized characters will have power throughout the course of the play, we can ask what it means when these characters interact with, and display knowledge about, certain scents. Beyond this, looking at how authors use odor to reinforce the themes of their texts, play with the standards set by their predecessors, or test the

⁵⁰ *Calig.* 37.1. See also *Div. Iul.* 67.1, *Aug.* 4.2, 86.1, *Calig.* 23.3; 27.4, *Nero* 31.2, 48.2, 51, *Vit.* 10.3, *Vesp.* 23.3.

⁵¹ Pliny also discusses animals and their peculiar scents and sensitivity to odors. For examples of odors in the *NH*, see 7.2.25 on the Astomoi, a race of people who subsist entirely on odors (a story reported by Megasthenes), 8.23 on the alluring scent of the panther, 13.1-6 on perfumes, and 25.94 on the mandrake root and its properties.

⁵² See Draycott (2015), esp. 61-2

limits of what is considered acceptable in a certain genre gives us a glimpse into how each individual author tailors odor to his own purposes within a larger tradition.

Within my chosen texts, I examine literary uses of smells as smells (the stench of a city) and smells as metaphors (Cicero's *odor urbanitatis* ("whiff of urbanity"), suggesting a cultured way of speaking).⁵³ Both reveal something about an author's own cultural framework for understanding and talking about the odor while simultaneously contributing to the reading experience itself.⁵⁴ To give a very basic example, scent in a poem which mocks a man for wearing women's perfume functions both culturally (suggesting a society in which certain odors are gendered) and literarily (creating a character who is effeminate or perhaps socially inept). By reading these texts from a culturally sensitive point of view, I hope to suggest not only what a Roman reader would have brought to the reading experience, but also what we as modern readers have overlooked in these texts by neglecting to account for odor.

In terms of this cultural approach, Shane Butler's chapter in *Smell and the Ancient Senses*, "Making scents of poetry," provides a useful point of comparison to my own aims. Butler considers how smell played into and shaped an ancient reader's experience of a particular text, but he does so by "consider[ing], as a test case, the persistent literary tradition of a single scent," the flower/perfume *amaracus*.⁵⁵ In the course of his article he details how references to *amaracus* function in the works of Virgil, Lucretius, Catullus, and Chaeremon, drawing evidence from authors such as Pliny the Elder, Dioscorides, and Theophrastus. While Butler's article is scent-specific, I instead consider a range of scents from each text as they pertain to the set of

⁵³ Cicero *De orat.* 3.161. On the "scent of language" see Stevens 2008. Cf. Gowers (1993) 5: "The significance of food in its literary representations lies both in its simple existence *and* in a bundle of metaphorical associations, a capacity to evoke a whole world of wider experience."

⁵⁴ Stevens 2014 briefly addresses the methodological issues of using texts as evidence for ancient sensory experience: "Authors operating in literary traditions will not have represented sensory experience 'accurately.'" But we thus stand to learn how experience was entered into discourse" (210).

⁵⁵ Butler (2015) 74.

themes mentioned above. Butler also traces the history—literary, medical, cultural—of one particular scent, but many of the odors I will discuss are far more vague—the stench of rotting corpses, for example, or “perfumes” considered as a whole. In this sense I am interested more in the role of smell *qua* smell in a literary text, and how its presence reflects Roman perspectives on odors and smelling, than in the cultural or historical resonances produced by the mention of a *specific* scent in a specific passage.

I argue that in Roman literature, scent was associated especially strongly with two sets of concepts: boundary-crossing and contamination on the one hand, and knowledge and identity on the other.⁵⁶ By the former I mean that odors, invisible and ephemeral, are difficult to contain, spreading outward indiscriminately from a source that is often impossible to identify; they were believed, as we will see, to transfer some aspect of their source to whatever they touched, which could be either beneficial or harmful depending on the odor. Because “[t]he senses were not seen as passive conduits through which perceptions flowed, but rather as directly influencing the physical body,”⁵⁷ the near impossibility of keeping the flow of smells in check gave rise to this anxiety about odor’s seeming lack of respect for boundaries. Roman authors focus both on the potential for contamination itself and on the often offensive and revolting qualities of the bodies which cause it. As something visceral, foul smells and their sources are causes of *fastidium* for the Romans, but this disgust, as Robert Kaster has discussed, can take several forms. Kaster draws a distinction between what he calls “per se *fastidium*” and “reasoned *fastidium*”—the first

⁵⁶ These concepts, while central to the Roman cultural understanding of odors, are not unique to Roman or even Mediterranean culture. Graham 2006 points to the Hua of New Guinea, for instance, among whom gender is defined more based on odors and fluids than anatomy. A male is therefore at risk if he inhales the odors of menstruating women, suggesting that this culture also associates odors with their ability to cross boundaries and effect change. I am therefore not claiming that the two themes I have identified are specific to Roman culture, but that their prominence in Latin literature suggests that these characteristics of odor resonated particularly strongly with the Romans.

⁵⁷ Toner (2014) 3. On the physicality of odor and the importance of touch in the conception of odors, see below pp. 19-21.

is a gut reaction arising from satiety, illness, or repugnance, while the second results from a deliberate ranking of one thing over another.⁵⁸ We will see both types of disgust at work, employed to very different ends by the epic and epigrammatic poets.⁵⁹

Odors are also connected to ideas of knowledge and identity, by which I mean that scents were believed to reveal a truth about a person or thing: issuing from the body,⁶⁰ they signaled a person's nature, status, gender, and more. Paradoxically, however, odors could also deceive because they could be artificially made and purposely applied to the body in order to mask an existing odor or other flaw: a perfume applied to conceal body odor, for example. Even more confusingly, these artificial odors could be just as indicative of a person's character as his or her "real" scents, as in the case of the effeminate, perfume-wearing man in the example provided above. The inevitable result of this web of olfactory associations is that identity (social, moral, gender, etc.) appears to be fluid, and a certain amount of olfactory sophistication is therefore required if one is to navigate olfactory codes successfully. This is true both for the person changing his odor to reflect a certain "truth," and for the person doing the smelling, who might choose to interpret the same odor differently depending on the situation.⁶¹ In the texts I shall discuss, humor derives from characters who lack this sophistication, while those men and women who possess it find themselves in a position of power.

⁵⁸ Kaster (2005) Chapter 5. Compare Herz (2012) 80, who argues that disgust requires mental processing while fear is instinctual and immediate.

⁵⁹ For a recent survey of scholarly work on disgust, see Strohminger 2014.

⁶⁰ On the connection between noses and the passage between the interior and exterior of the body, see Bradley (2015) 3.

⁶¹ As in, for instance, the aphorism attributed to Vespasian, *pedunia non olet* ("money doesn't stink"), the implication being that profit is good no matter its source. The phrase itself is not quoted by any ancient author, but appears to have its origins in a story reported at Suet. *Vesp.* 23.3: *Reprehendenti filio Tito, quod etiam urinae vectigal commentus esset, pecuniam ex prima pensione admovit ad nares, sciscitans num odore offenderetur; et illo negante: Atqui, inquit, e lotio est.* Cf. Juvenal 14.201-5.

Smell in Greek and Roman thought⁶²

Before turning to an outline of my chapters, I wish first to look briefly at evidence for the two ideas just discussed, odors as potentially infectious boundary-crossers and as indices of truth and bearers of information. Though my focus is on Roman literature, Greek philosophical ideas about the senses will be particularly important here, in part because early theories were concerned with the mechanics of sense perception, but also because these theories were inherited by the Romans.⁶³ In addition to philosophy I will also touch upon oratory, poetry, and even agronomy, as well as the Latin vocabulary of smell itself. This overview does not attempt to provide a comprehensive look at odors from any single perspective, but rather to show that the two characteristics on which I will focus in this dissertation were widely recognized, whether by the philosophers who first articulated them or by later writers who incorporated them, as part of an intellectual koine, into their texts.

Even from very early on, theories about the senses were, in the words of André Laks, “largely stories about travelling, going through, and reaching.”⁶⁴ The concern with odor and boundaries, movement between one source and another, and the eventual contact made between an odor and the perceiver are all present as early as the Presocratic philosophers, and not just with regards to smell but the other senses as well. The crucial question was how information got from the perceived object to the perceiver, and the classic model was Empedocles’ (c. 492–432 BC) theory of “emanations” or “effluences”, whereby streams left the object and made contact

⁶² For an overview of philosophical ideas about olfaction, see Squillace (2014) 51-59 and 71-90, Clements 2014, Baltussen 2015. Cf. Palmer 1993, King and Toner 2014 and Totelin 2015 for smell in ancient medicine.

⁶³ The Romans were by and large uninterested in developing their own theories and instead found new ways to talk and think about established ideas. As Striker (1995) 56 notes, “originality was not an issue at a time when philosophers, far from advertising their own innovations, were anxious to show that their doctrines went back to the great founding fathers—Socrates, Plato, Aristotle or even Pythagoras.” Cf. also Sedley 1989, but see Inwood 1995 for originality in Seneca. On the Roman reception of Greek philosophy, see Griffin and Barnes, eds. 1989 and 1997, Ahbel-Rappe 2006, Warren 2007, Sedley 2009.

⁶⁴ Laks (1999) 264. On Presocratic theories of smell, see Baltussen (2015) 35-39.

with the perceiver.⁶⁵ This perceiver, reports Aristotle’s pupil Theophrastus (approx. 371-287 BC), possessed passages (πόροι) into which the emanations entered, each type of sense-object fitting into the proper passages. Thus the reason we smell odors and not sounds, for example, is because odor effluences fit properly into the pores in our noses, while sound effluences do not.⁶⁶ The Epicureans, for whom sense perception was a crucial source of both knowledge and pleasure, inasmuch as the mind formed a correct opinion (δόξα) about what it perceived, held a similar theory, specifying that the streams were made of atoms.⁶⁷ The Roman poet Lucretius (approx.. 94–55 BC), whose *De Rerum Natura* seems to derive directly from Epicurus’ *De Natura*,⁶⁸ adds that odors not only stream off of things (*fluens...varius...fluctus odorum*, 4.675),⁶⁹ they come from deep within them (*ex alto*, 4.92), escaping with some difficulty and then scattering in all directions, if rather sluggishly.⁷⁰ Odors, like other types of sensory information,

⁶⁵ For examples from other philosophical texts suggesting the general acceptance of this theory, see Koenen (1997) 164-5.

⁶⁶ Theophrastus *De sensibus* 7. On Theophrastus’ own apparently inconsistent opinion about effluences (cf. *De odoribus* 3 and *De causis plantarum* 6.9.3, 6.14.11, 6.16.8, 6.17.1), see Sharples (1985) 193, Sedley 2009. Cf. also Aristotle *De sensu* 437b25-438a5 for Empedocles’ theory of vision as it relates to streaming objects; Aristotle suggests that Empedocles is inconsistent, claiming sometimes that fire streams out from the eye, sometimes that emanations enter the eye from objects perceived. The idea of effluences fitting into pores is echoed at Plato’s (439-347 BC) *Timaeus* 66d, where he characterizes odors as ἡμιγενές (“half-formed”), and claims that the veins of our olfactory organs are too narrow for earth and water, but too wide for fire and air. Theophrastus discusses and critiques Plato’s account at *De sensibus* 83-9 and *De causis plantarum* 6.1.3-5.

⁶⁷ Cf. Taylor 1999 on the atomists. For Epicurus on smell see *Ep. ad Hdt.* 53.

⁶⁸ Koenen (1997) 163, Warren (2007) 21, Sedley (2009) 41. Having apparently decided that Epicurus was “correct”, Lucretius did not feel the need to discuss other philosophies or take into account developments in Epicureanism since the death of Epicurus in 270. On Lucretius and Epicurus, see also Clay 1983.

⁶⁹ The elemental makeup and exact nature of odor-streams was also a subject of debate. The very first line of Theophrastus’ *De odoribus* claims that odors, like flavors, are the result of mixture: Αἱ ὀσμοὶ τὸ μὲν ὅλον ἐκ μίξεώς εἰσι καθόπερ οἱ χυμοί· (“Odors, on the whole, result from mixtures, just like flavors.”). Cf. *De causis plantarum* 6.1.1. Aristotle (*De sensu* 443a21-b2) names Heraclitus as a proponent of the theory that smell is part earth and part air, perhaps a smoky vapor. Aristotle himself goes on to argue against the vapor theory at *De sensu* 443a21-b2. At 438b24, however, he calls odor καπνώδης τίς ἐστὶν ἀναθυμίασις (“a sort of smoky vapor”), for which see Johansen (1997) 241n22. Cf. the Pseudo-Aristotelian *Problemata* 12.3 and 12.10 and *Timaeus* 66e. For the distinction between odor itself as a vapor and vapor as the medium through which odor is transmitted, see Johansen (1997) 240-1. The medical writer Galen (*De instrumento odoratus* 2.10-12) later advocated for the earth-and-air theory as well, perhaps also including fire alongside earth and air. See Eastwood 1981 for a discussion in favor of the inclusion of fire in Galen’s text.

⁷⁰ *tarde* (692), *perit ante* (692), *paulatim* (693), *vix emittitur* (694), *cunctando* (703). “To put it in modern terms, speed and information-density were recognized markers for the importance of these two senses [sight and hearing]” (Baltussen (2015) 30). On Lucretius’ olfactory theory, see Koenen 1997.

were thus constantly crossing boundaries, facilitating long-distance contact between one thing and another and saturating the air in between.

Not everyone was in agreement, however, about how exactly the effluences reached the perceiver. Democritus (b. 460–57 BC) modified his theory of vision, for example, to specify that the εἶδωλα emanating from objects left imprints on the air rather than travelling straight to the eye.⁷¹ Similarly, Aristotle (384–322 BC) suggested that odors are transferred to the perceiver through a medium (either air or water), and therefore no direct contact between the perceiver and the smell-object actually takes place.⁷² In fact, he goes on to argue, direct contact (touching a flower directly to the nose, for example) actually produces no sensation at all.⁷³ That *something* made contact with the perceiver, however, seems to have been generally agreed, even if it was a medium rather than the sense-object. In fact, notes Laks, “Aristotle remarks in the *De sensu* that early Greek thinkers, prominently represented by Democritus, had promoted touch to the principle of explanation of the other senses [442a29].”⁷⁴ Rather than needing an explanation itself, touch was the mechanism by which the other four types of sensory perception occurred.⁷⁵ Lucretius even refers to the effects of a smell as a *plaga* at 4.703,⁷⁶ and the physician Galen

⁷¹ Theophrastus *De sensibus* 50–3. On Democritus’ theory of vision, see von Fritz (1971) 594–622, O’Brien 1984, Rudolph 2011.

⁷² *De sensu* 443b1–2. “What [Aristotle] believed was that the object caused a change...in the adjacent part of the medium, which change, propagated onwards to the point where medium and organ meet, became the stimulus of perception” (Beare (1906) 154). On Aristotle’s theory of odors and the changes that do or do not take place during the process of olfactory perception, see Johansen (1997) Chr. 5, Johnstone 2012. Cf. *De Anima* 2 419a25 and 2.9ish; Galen *De instrumento odoratus* (Kollesch 62.1–12).

⁷³ *De anima*. 419a25: Ὁ δ’ αὐτὸς λόγος καὶ περὶ ψόφου καὶ ὀσμῆς ἐστίν. οὐθὲν γὰρ αὐτῶν ἀπτόμενον τοῦ αἰσθητηρίου ποιεῖ τὴν αἴσθησιν, ἀλλ’ ὑπὸ μὲν ὀσμῆς καὶ ψόφου τὸ μεταξὺ κινεῖται, ὑπὸ δὲ τούτου τῶν αἰσθητηρίων ἐκότερον. ὅταν δ’ ἐπ’ αὐτὸ τις ἐπιθῇ τὸ αἰσθητήριον τὸ ψοφοῦν ἢ τὸ ὄζον, οὐδεμίαν αἴσθησιν ποιήσει.

⁷⁴ Laks (1999) 265. He goes on to suggest (266) that hearing and sight may receive the most attention among the senses simply because it is more difficult to explain how contact is possible in these cases.

⁷⁵ Not everyone identified only five senses. See, for example, the Hippocratic *De victu*, in which there are seven. Cf. Jouanna 2003, Clements (2014) 135–6.

⁷⁶ On the Epicurean use of πλῆγη/plaga, Koenen (1995) 186–7.

(129-199?/216 AD) uses odor-induced headaches, delirium, and other problems as proof that some of the odorous material makes contact with the brain.⁷⁷

Being touched by an odor, however, did not always mean the mere activation of the sense of smell. Odor also came to be associated with contamination and the idea that changes could be effected by contact with scents.⁷⁸ In Sophocles' *Rhizotomoi*,⁷⁹ for instance, Medea averts her face when collecting juice from a root, and Macrobius explains that she does this lest she be killed by the odor (*ne vi noxii odoris ipsa interficeretur*, *Sat.* 5.19.9). Medea's collection of herbs is so potent in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that her team of dragons sloughs their skins after being touched (*tacti*) only by the plants' wafting odor.⁸⁰ While Sophocles' Medea may have been trying not to breathe in the odor, Ovid's serpents seem to have been only externally exposed to the noxious air, recalling the efficacy attributed by the agricultural writers to foul odors, which were employed as pesticides and often imbued with magical properties as well.⁸¹ The younger Seneca, meanwhile, employed the idea of exposure to odors to make a point about spending time with a philosopher: just as walking in the sun will cause sunburn and entering a perfume shop will cause you to smell like perfumes, so exposure to philosophy is bound to rub off whether you intend it to or not.⁸² In this instance smell not only touches, it *sticks*. This direct transfer of

⁷⁷ Galen *De instrumento odoratus* Kollesch, 62, 1-12. For Galen, the brain, not the nose, was the olfactory organ. See Siegel 1970. For odor as a means of medical diagnosis, see Totelin 2015.

⁷⁸ E.g., a text from the Hippocratic corpus notes, "When the air is full of *miasmata*, which are hostile to human nature, this is when men become ill." *De flatibus* 5, cited in and translated by Totelin (2015) 18.

⁷⁹ Fr. 491.1-3 Nauck.

⁸⁰ 7.236-7: *neque erant tacti nisi odore dracones, / et tamen annosae pellem posuere senectae.*

⁸¹ See Ager (2010) Chr. 4. While the implication may be that a powerful odor itself is enough to drive away undesirables such as snakes or rodents, Tavenner (1916) 95-6 notes that in many of these texts the instructions strongly indicate a magical element: when Scribonius Largus (*Compositiones* 163), for example, outlines the steps to follow when picking herbs that effectively combat snakebites, the instructions are so specific—the plants must be marked the previous day and then gathered before sunrise using the left hand—that the herbs' odor cannot be the only source of power. As Ager (2010) 232 remarks, "[S]mell seems to be used as a tangible explanation for magical effects, either as an explanatory alternative to natural antipathy or as the physical means by which antipathy is thought to find expression." Cf. *Geoponics* 2.18 and 12.39.

⁸² Seneca *Ep.* 108.4. In *Nat. Quest* 2.53.2, on lightning, Seneca notes that after lightning has struck, oil and unguents take on a disagreeable odor. From this he draws the conclusion that a *pestilentem potentiam* exists in

essence from smell-object to perceiver will feature especially prominently in Chapter 3, where Martial contends with the olfactory threat his subject-matter presents to his own integrity.

Seneca's example highlights the idea of involuntary or accidental influence—sunburn, perfuming, and philosophical edification all happen because the person has placed himself in proximity to things which leave their mark all on their own. Interestingly, the fact that odors stream off of things automatically, fill the air, and therefore have the potential to cause this sort of influence is reflected in the Latin vocabulary of smell.⁸³ Alongside words actually meaning “odor” such as *odor* and *nidor*, many words meaning “air” and “breath” can also be used to denote smell, such as *aura*, *spiritus*, and *halitus*, suggesting the inherent connection between odor and air which will be especially prominent in Chapter 2. In addition, the body of verbs meaning “to give off an odor”⁸⁴ is much larger than that of words meaning “to sniff at or detect an odor.”⁸⁵ This could be simply because it is more difficult to create variation in the idea “I sniff at” than in “this gives off an odor,” where there is room for a good or bad connotation: *olere* is fairly neutral while *fragrare* is more often positive and *putere* negative, for example.⁸⁶ The imbalance also, however, reflects the fact that odors of many types are present around us whether we are actively sniffing them out or not: it is not actually necessary to be *olfaciens* in order to catch a scent.

lightning, *qua non icta tantum cadunt sed et afflata*. The dangerous breath of lightning (sulphur?) causes a similarly dangerous, or at least unpleasant, breath issuing from oils and perfumes.

⁸³ Lilja (1972a) 274-5 contains a list of Latin and Greek words which relate to smell and perfumes, but the list does not include any of the “standard” nouns and verbs for smells and smelling such as *olere*. Greek, meanwhile, uses ὀσφραίνεσθαι for “to catch a scent of” and ὀζειν for “to give off a smell”, employing adverbs and adjectives to characterize the type of scent.

⁸⁴ *olere* and its compounds (*obolere*, *redolere*, *perolere*), *fragrare*, *halare*, *spirare*, *foetere*, *putere*, and occasionally *sapere*.

⁸⁵ *olfacere*, *olfactare*, *odorari*, *odorare*, meanwhile, means “to perfume, make fragrant.”

⁸⁶ E.g. *rosa recens a longinquo olet, sicca propius*, Plin. *N.H.* 21.7.18.37; *redolentque thymo fragrantia mella*, Verg. *Geor.* 4.169; *hoc simul edixi, non cessuere poetae /nocturno certare mero, putere diurno*, Horace *Ep.* I.19.10-11.

One additional feature of Latin olfactory vocabulary deserves mention, which is the way in which verbs of smelling have the potential to confuse agency, an issue which plays into the ethical dimension of odors which I will discuss below. On the one hand, verbs denoting the giving off of odors could be applied to characters or objects in the active or, to use a sexual metaphor, penetrating, role: they emit an odor which invades others' boundaries. Verbs denoting the detection of an odor would then describe those in the passive, penetrated role, as they are at the mercy of whatever they sniff at. However, while *olere* and related words could suggest agency, giving off an odor is not actually an active process: people and items emit scents involuntarily and even unwillingly. Additionally, *olfacere* and other transitive verbs, while suggesting that the sniffer is the passive recipient of an odor, *do* suggest taking an active role, that of deliberately sniffing at someone or something. This confusion of responsibility can also be found in metaphors for sniffing out knowledge. A common compound, *subolere*, literally means "to give off a smell to someone," and functions with the thing sniffed out in the nominative and the perceiver in the dative—a person or thing "reveals itself to" someone. Grammatically, the onus of secrecy is on the person not to give off a suspicious (metaphorical) odor, yet the perceiver is often credited with perceptivity.⁸⁷ The result is a further muddling of boundaries, this time between the role of the *olens* and *olfaciens*, both of whom are implicated in the process of olfactory assessment.

Such assessment was possible because, alongside causing possible contamination, odors were believed to transmit information about a person: their status, gender, sexual practices, and more. Both natural scents, such as body odor, and artificial scents, such as perfumes, could speak to a person's identity—the first because they revealed something innate, the second because they

⁸⁷ In the *Casina*, for instance, the *uxor* Cleostrata is thrice credited with "sniffing out" her husband's plot to get a hold of the girl Casina (*Cas.* 266, 277, and 554). Cf. also *Trinummus* 615 and 698, and Terence *Phormio* 473.

reflected a personal choice. Early Greek philosophy had little interest in this, focused as it was on how the senses actually functioned, and then, in the Hellenistic period, on the epistemological aspects of sense perception.⁸⁸ One early example of the ethical dimension of the senses, however, comes from Xenophon's *Symposium* 2.3-4.⁸⁹ When Callias suggests calling for perfumes, Socrates declines: different odors, he claims, are appropriate for men and women,⁹⁰ and it is inappropriate for men to wear perfumes to please other men. Men in their prime ought to smell of the olive oil used at the gymnasium, while older men should smell of καλοκάγαθία, a quality they can acquire from the company of other good men, but certainly not from the perfumer. A further problem with perfumes, Socrates goes on to say, is that they efface the

⁸⁸ For an introduction to various philosophical schools' views on sensory epistemology, see Everson (ed.) 1990, Gerson 2009; for ethics, Everson (ed.) 1998. On Hellenistic epistemology and ethics, Striker 1996. On the attempt to fit smelling, and sense perception more generally, into the ethical scheme of the "golden mean", see Baltussen (2015) 31ff.

⁸⁹ See also *Symp.* 5.6 for Socrates' *apologia pro suo naso*, in which he explains why his infamous snub nose is superior to Critias' downturned nose. Other instances of the ethical aspects of the senses occur in discussions of pleasure. At *Rep* 9.584b and *Philebus* 51b-e, Plato mentions smell as an example of a "pure" pleasure, one which comes neither as a relief from pain nor leaves any sense of pain behind when it has passed. Aristotle also includes the senses in a discussion of relative καθαριότης (purity) and the morality of various activities when he suggests (*Nic. Eth.* 1176a) that hearing and smell both excel taste in terms of purity, while intellectual pleasures surpass sensory ones. At *Nic. Eth.* 1118a8-16 he distinguishes between odors that are pleasurable *per se*, from which no other benefit is derived (such as flowers), and those that are pleasurable κατά συμβεβηκός, such as the scent of food which gives pleasure because it reminds one of the actual source of desire, the food itself.

Additionally, the suggestion made by Lucretius and others (Lucr. *DRN* 4.684-6; Theophrastus *De causis plantarum* 6.5.3-4 and *De odoribus* 4; Pliny *NH* 10.279; Plutarch *Mor* 87e, 710e; Aelian *De natura animalium* 3.7, 4.18.) that odors lead animals to the proper sources of nutrition and prevent them from consuming things that are harmful to them could suggest a correlation between odor and truth: a good odor indicates something good and wholesome, while a bad odor indicates something bad and harmful. On the other hand, we see in these same authors (Galen, *Simp. Med.* 4.22, pp.697.15-698.4; Aristotle, *De anima* 421 a26ff.; Theophrastus *De causis plantarum* 6.9.4, 6.14.5, 6.16.8; *De odoribus* 5; Pliny *NH* 21.35) the repeated suggestion that things which smell good taste bitter, while things with a sweet scent do not taste good, although of course a bitter taste does not necessarily indicate something harmful and nutritionally lacking. Interestingly, the medical writers applied this image of an animal attracted to and repulsed by odors to the womb; cf. Aretaeus *De causis et signis acutorum morborum* 2.11 and *De curatione acutorum morborum* 2.10. Soranus *Gynaecia* 3.29 objects to this comparison. See von Staden (1993) 16-20 for Hippocratic medicine and the womb.

⁹⁰ Cf. Theophrastus *De odoribus* 42, where the determining factor in whether a perfume is appropriate for men or women seems to be its strength and durability: heavier, longer-lasting perfumes, such as myrrh, are more appropriate to women, while rose and lily perfumes are, interestingly, more appropriate for men. For the theory that *De odoribus* is actually Book 8 of *De causis plantarum*, see Thompson's unpublished dissertation (1941), summarized in Wöhrle 1988; and Sharples (1985) 184.

difference between slave and free: perfumed, a slave smells no different than a free man.⁹¹ The ability of an applied odor (perfume, specifically) to eliminate an otherwise natural signifier of social status was thus recognized early on as problematic or, as we will see in the comedies of Plautus, humorously incongruous.

Later interest in the ethics of odors can be seen in Roman writers ranging from agronomists to philosophers, all of whom suggest that scents have something to say about a person's moral virtue or failings. In his *Post Reditum in Senatu*, for instance, Cicero tells Piso that Aulus Gabinius' perfumed odor and wine-scented breath (*illius unguentorum odor, ... vini anhelitus*) should have alerted him to the dangers of associating with such a man, for Piso will no longer be able to cover up his own degeneracy.⁹² The orator also mentions Gabinius' marked forehead (*frons calamistri notata vestigiis*), hinting at servile origins, so that the man's perfumes not only suggest effeminacy or decadence, they also recall Socrates' words about perfumes abolishing the difference between slave and free; odor here has both moral and social connotations. In *Pro Roscio*, meanwhile, Cicero makes a physiognomic judgment using an olfactory metaphor: Chaerea's head (his hairstyle, perhaps) and shaved eyebrows reek of wickedness, creating the image of a man who may very well stink of excessive perfumes as well.⁹³ In a similar discussion of the moral implications of odors in *Epistle 86*, Seneca combines actual and metaphorical scents when he contrasts the Romans of his day with those who lived in

⁹¹ But, he goes on (2.4), αἱ δ' ἀπὸ τῶν ἐλευθερίων μόχθων ὄσμαι ἐπιτηδευμάτων τε πρῶτον χρηστῶν καὶ χρόνου πολλοῦ δέονται, εἰ μέλλουσιν ἠδεῖαί τε καὶ ἐλευθέριοι ἔσσεσθαι ("odors arising from the toils of free men require especially wholesome pursuits and extended effort if they are to be sweet and redolent of freedom").

⁹² Cic. *Post Red. in Sen. 7*: *Non te illius unguentorum odor, non vini anhelitus, non frons calamistri notata vestigiis, in eam cogitationem adducebat, ut, cum illius re similis fuisses, frontis tibi integimento ad occultanda tanta flagitia diutius uti non liceret?* For Cicero's interest in epistemology, see the *Academics*. Odor is mentioned specifically at 2.20, where it is mentioned along with taste as a source of knowledge, *etsi vitiosa*.

⁹³ Of Gaius Fannius Chaerea. Cic. *Pro Quinto Roscio Comoedo 7*: *Nonne ipsum caput et supercilia illa penitus abrasa olere malitiam et clamitare calliditatem videntur? non ab imis unguibus usque ad verticem summum, si quam coniecturam affert hominibus tacita corporis figura, ex fraude, fallaciis, mendaciis constare totus videtur?* For physiognomy in the ancient world, see among others Evans 1969, André 1981, Barton 1994, Swain (ed.) 2007.

“the good old days.” Now, he says, people not only have to wear perfumes in order to be considered clean, they have to refresh them several times per day (*bis die terque*) lest they evaporate. In the days of Scipio Africanus, however, men bathed far less frequently, but they smelled of honest pursuits: *militiam, laborem, virum* (“the army, hard work, and heroism”).⁹⁴ The scent of good morals can also be found in the agricultural writers: Varro, for example, remarks that bees are pure by nature and therefore “dislike both bad odors and the smell of perfume; bees, in this conception, respond best to unadorned, old-fashioned virtue (3.16.5),”⁹⁵ rather like Socrates in Xenophon’s *Symposium*. Columella stresses the importance of purity in the beekeeper, who must refrain from having sex before visiting them, and not be drunk or reek of strong-smelling foods like *salsamenta* and *omnia liquamina* (“brine and all types of fish-sauce,” 9.14.3). For these writers, an objectively bad smell (sweat or body odor) could still indicate good character, while the fragrance of perfumes had the potential to offend everyone from insects to intellectuals. This perceived connection between odor and character is one we will see in both Chapters 1 and 3.

Chapter outline

In Chapter 1, odor’s capacity for revelation and transformation suggests that the smells of Plautus’ comedies are inherently theatrical, facilitating the assumption of new or improved identities but also calling attention to those who misunderstand how to use scents properly. This chapter opens by illustrating how odor can be used to establish someone’s identity or convey information about him, while also hinting at the fluidity of identity in comedy and the way in

⁹⁴ Seneca *Ep.* 86.12-13. Cf. Socrates’ remark at note 91 above.

⁹⁵ Ager (2010) 179.

which odors complicate the establishing of a single, clear identity. This malleability of identity is the focus of the second section. Unlike the sight-based disguises so often employed by clever slaves for their schemes, artificial odors such as perfumes are revealed to be inadequate when it comes to constructing and changing one's comic identity. Instead, they merely call attention to the disparity between someone's proper role and the one he is trying to adopt. Subjective and therefore open to multiple interpretations, scents are both too obvious and yet not powerful enough to give a character an entirely new identity or create a convincing façade. A misunderstanding of the proper use of odors therefore suggests a more fundamental misunderstanding of theatricality and performance itself. It may not be surprising that almost all of the shrewd sniffers in this chapter are women; on top of this, many are courtesans, whose business it is to make a show of themselves in order to attract customers, and who are therefore adept at assessing the performances of others.

Chapter 2, on Latin epic, focuses on the danger of contamination which stems from the rot of death and disease, where odor is both the cause of contamination and a lingering sign that it has already occurred and left its gruesome mark. This chapter explores literary depictions of the ominous odors of the underworld and the supernatural, as well as the unpleasant scents of death and decay which accompanied plague and battle. As a boundary-crosser and source of contagion, odor is closely aligned with the larger themes of these epics: anxiety about civil war, concern with moral injustice and the treatment of the dead, and the nature and source of death itself. The first section discusses the threat of death suggested by the odors of supernatural creatures—the Harpies—and underworld entrances. In the Harpy passages, odor's connection with both contagion and touch contributes to a very physical experience of rot and decay as embodied by the monstrous bird-women, whose foulness in effect accelerates the process of

death in whatever they touch. Emanations from the underworld, in contrast, resonate with the human fear of death in the abstract by playing upon odor's disregard for boundaries and its link to the environment, which seeps forth vapors so foul they even strike birds from the air as they fly over. In the second section I look at deaths caused by plague and civil war, particularly the gruesome emanations emitted by rotting corpses, as well as the earth and air which absorb and then redouble the pollution. In Lucan, plague is no more shocking or deadly than civil war, and in fact the plague's widespread contagion, represented by the hostile "breath" of the earth, reflects the all-encompassing harm caused by civil war. For Silius, in contrast, plague is an anti-war, an interruption, and the ignobility of dying of the plague stands in stark contrast to the honor of fighting and dying for Rome. In Lucan and Statius' civil wars, meanwhile, the blurring of the line between human and environmental pollution suggests the impossibility of assigning blame in a conflict where everyone is ultimately guilty. In addition, the lingering, ever-spreading miasma hints at the fact that civil war does not end when the battle is over, but instead remains, whether in the battlefield itself or in the memory of Roman readers haunted by civil war.

In Chapter 3, the themes of truth and identity seen in Chapter 1, and boundary-crossing and contamination featured in Chapter 2, come together in the *Epigrams* of Martial. In balancing his critical persona and concern with literary criticism alongside his claim to be intimately familiar with the "real" Rome, Martial attempts to point out the olfactory flaws of his subject matter without succumbing to corruption himself, and in this he is not always successful. My first two sections highlight Martial's critical persona, which he manages to preserve despite hints that he is vulnerable to the influences of his readership and critics. In the first section I explore the odors of Martial's Rome, some of which are outright foul, while others are pleasant and meant to conceal or distract from an underlying flaw. Throughout these encounters Martial

employs a variety of techniques in order to turn the readers' attention from his exposure to these olfactory offenders, and instead to invite them to pay attention to the flawed characters he is criticizing. The second section examines how the epigrammatist interacts with his characters in their guise as readers and critics by focusing on the relationship between noses and literary sophistication. As in the first section, Martial manages to both exercise his own critical *nasus* while simultaneously admitting his vulnerability—and then turning such potentially unflattering admissions to his benefit. In the final section, Martial's vulnerability to the influence of his readers becomes more prominent. Here I offer an extended look at the Postumus cycle, where Martial's literary concerns and his engagement with the contaminating world of Rome come into conflict as his attempts to criticize Postumus turn both him and his poetry into victims of one of the *Epigrams*' most relentless olfactory offenders.

Chapter 1

Sniffing out Stereotypes: Identity in Plautine Comedy

“I thought they smelled bad on the outside!”
--Han Solo¹

Introduction

Plautus’ plays were written at a time when the Romans were thinking more and more about their collective identity, particularly with regards to the Greeks and their ability to both corrupt and civilize. Emily Gowers has discussed how food in Roman comedy becomes an epicenter of Roman anxieties about their relationship with the Greeks: it can represent good old-fashioned Romanness as compared with Greek or eastern luxury and decadence, but can just as easily cast the Romans in the role of uncivilized barbarians eating bland and tasteless dishes. Rome’s continuing expansion made the Romans increasingly aware not just of how they measured up to other cultures, but also of the possibilities, and threats, presented by unfamiliar foods and products. Among these foreign luxuries were exotic spices and perfumes, used to season both cuisine and people. As Gowers notes, “the presence of exotic spice-names alone suggests that the Romans’ outlook was already cosmopolitan.”²

¹ Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back (1980).

² Gowers (1993) 64. A “réprobation générale” (Fauré (1987) 217) for imported luxuries and fear that they would negatively affect Roman moral values gave rise to a variety of sumptuary legislation during this period, references and allusions to which scholars have found in Plautus’ comedies. On this legislation, see Segal (1968) 10-14 and 47-8, Daube (1969) 117-28, Baltrusch (1989) 77-103, Wyke (1994) 139-40, Dauster 2003, Rosivach 2006,

While spices and scents could suggest identity on a national scale, they could also represent or overturn ideas of individual identity on the comic stage. Identity—from individual personality to comic stereotype—is a pervasive issue in Plautus. His characters spend a remarkable amount of time musing about who they are: they simply like to talk about their place in the (comic) universe, and many seem strangely aware of the specific role they are playing and how they should behave as a result.³ Diniarchus, for example, spends his opening monologue in the *Truculentus* elaborating upon the plight of the young lover, only to fall for the very tricks he claims to be well aware of. Smell, too, contributes to this investigation into identity, for one way comic characters talk about roles and behavior is by calling special attention to the olfactory qualities of both themselves and others.⁴ They may choose to emphasize either someone’s natural odor, a supposed indication of that person’s true self, or an artificial odor such as perfume,⁵ which points to how a person hopes to be perceived by others. As a result, any scent can be a source of knowledge about who a person is or thinks he is, a theme which will be prominent in Chapter 3 as well.

Zanda (2011) esp.19-25 on Plautus, Potter (2014), esp. 30. Bradley (2015) 138 notes that Scapha’s maxim on female odorlessness in the *Mostellaria* (to be discussed below) “must have struck a chord among Plautus’ mid-Republican audience, who were increasingly scrutinizing female propriety, and particularly the inappropriate use of self-adornment”.

³ Other examples abound: the advocates in *Poenulus* give a long speech about how they should behave and be treated in turn; Megaronides in *Trinummus* discourses on the plague that is town gossip and his own shame at getting caught up in nasty rumors about his friend. For the “topical song” and other means of characterization in Plautus, see Wilner 1938. James (1998) 6 notes that concern with proper behavior and attention to role playing is of course not limited to comedy but is a very Roman concern: “Roman social mores appear to have required, in virtually every situation, certain types of adopted artificial behavior: conscious role-playing... was part of daily, even hourly life in ancient Rome.” Comedy, in turn, either exaggerates or overturns these norms.

⁴ This chapter will not discuss actual odors in and around the Roman theatre, but the fact that the audience as a whole probably smelled strongly would have given these scenes special resonance: while the comedy’s performers occupied their eyes and ears, their fellow spectators would have provided a stench which truly brought these passages to life. Ancient sources also tells us that saffron was sprinkled on stage, for which see Lucretius *DRN* 2.416, Horace *Ep.* 2.1.79, Ovid *Ars Am.* 1.104, Propertius 4.1.16, Seneca *Nat. Quae.* 2.9.1, Martial *Epig.* 5.25 and *De Spec.* 3.8, CIL4.1177. For the senses in performance, see Bradley (2014) 197-205.

⁵ I use “artificial” and “external” interchangeably throughout this chapter to refer to odors that are not natural to a person (such as body odor) but instead are purposely applied (such as perfumes).

In this chapter I argue that in Plautus' comedies, odors are used both to reveal character identity and in hopeful but ultimately failed attempts to change or improve upon that identity, often by breaking out of one comic stereotype and into another—Lysidamus the *senex*, for instance, tries unsuccessfully to use perfumes to recreate himself as the *adulescens amans* instead.⁶ In a genre filled with metatheatrical deceptions in which a character takes on a new appearance and role,⁷ it should come as no surprise that odor-based identity is fluid and subtly metatheatrical as well.⁸ There is a crucial difference, however, between the efficacy of visual and olfactory transformations. Sight is by and large used successfully by clever characters to dupe foolish ones into believing something new: to take control of the plot, Plautus' characters must manipulate not only what the audience sees, but also what other characters see.⁹ A recurring pattern for artificial smells, in contrast, is their *failure* when used to produce something new or convincing.¹⁰ Many of the characters in Plautus who douse themselves in scents do not realize that, while odor is a potent source of information about identity, it is *not* a suitable way to *change*

⁶ For comic stereotypes, see Hanson 1965 on the *miles gloriosus*, Stace 1968 on slave types, James (1998) 7-10 for Roman comic stereotypes as they relate to Roman social mores and gender roles, McCarthy 2000 *passim*, Bianco 2003 on old people.

⁷ The term “metatheatre” was coined by Abel 1963, who defined it as “theatre pieces about life seen as already theatricalized” (83). A definitive definition seems not to have been accepted among classicists, many of whom have developed their own variations; Gentili (1979) even defined it as simply “plays constructed from previously existing plays” (15), what most would call *contaminatio*. See, among others, Petrone 1983, Slater (1985) 13-15 and 168-78, Hornby 1986, Muecke 1986, Frangoulidis 1994 and (1997) 1-2, Moore (1998) 8-49, González Vázquez 2001, Marshall (2006) x. Rosenmeyer 2002 discusses Abel's book and its implications for, and reception by, classicists. On the particularly visual aspects of metatheatre in Plautus, Muecke 1986 is fundamental. See also Sharrock (2009) Chr. 3.

⁸ Cf. Sharrock (2009) 6: “Comedy jokes at us for wanting to hold onto ourselves, for thinking that our identity is stable, but also it offers us the opportunity to play through the comic possibilities of the instability which we have a sneaking feeling might be inevitable (and hence, perhaps, not really too threatening).” See also Sharrock (2009) s.v. “identity”.

⁹ This may take many forms: Palaestrio convinces Sceledrus that he did not actually see their master's girlfriend kissing her lover in *Miles Gloriosus*; Mercury pretends he has not seen Sosia and tailors his monologue so as to frighten the eavesdropping slave in *Amphitryo*; and Tranio in *Mostellaria* draws a laugh by inviting two old men to inspect a wall painting of a crow taunting two vultures – while they insist they cannot see what he is pointing at, the audience knows he is really referring to himself (the crow) mocking the *senes* (the vultures). As Sharrock (2009) 107 remarks, “The comic answer to the problem of someone who has seen something he should not have seen is to change his perception of his own experience and make him see things differently.”

¹⁰ Muecke (1986) 225's remark that “Though failure of disguise or impersonation can be a potent source of amusement..., such failures are rare in Plautine comedy” applies to failures of vision-based disguises only.

that identity, or even, in most cases, to improve upon it.¹¹ The paradox of odor in comedy is that it is at the same time too theatrical and not theatrical enough: too theatrical, because it may call undue attention to itself and its artificiality; not theatrical enough, because a simple layer of perfumes can neither give someone an entirely new identity nor create enough of a façade to be convincing. That is, while costumes generally establish a specific and agreed-upon role which is plain for all to see, scent is far more subjective and easily reinterpreted, and can thus be thought of as a failed or, at best, insufficient costume. Far from creating a new identity, perfume may even clash with one's natural odor or physical appearance, drawing attention to an incomplete transformation from one role to another.

This chapter is divided into two sections, the first on the connection between odor and identity, and the second on attempts to change one's identity, or enhance oneself, through scents. In the *Amphitryo* and *Miles Gloriosus*, natural odors are the focus, and are mentioned by scheming characters in passages where someone's identity is particularly at issue. Whereas the slave Sosia's scent ultimately signals his impending loss of identity, the soldier Pyrgopolynices' odor instead reinforces his (flawed) understanding of himself, rendering him all the more vulnerable to a courtesan's manipulation. The second section considers odors as theatrical devices and explores scenes in which scents signal changed identities or attempts at self-improvement. This section moves from natural to mostly artificial odors, and suggests that they are unsuitable when it comes to constructing and changing one's comic identity. It is important to note that all of the plays from this section, as well as the *Miles*, feature women, rather than the clever slave, as the savvy sniffers. Both courtesans and free women use their superior theatrical

¹¹ A failure on the part of a character, however, is still a success for Plautus, whose olfactory scenes add an extra dimension of characterization as the audience watches these characters *try* to change or modify their assigned role. My thanks to Nicholas Geller for this point.

knowledge to point out how other characters misunderstand the relationship between odor and identity and, by extension, conventional methods of comic character-building as a whole.¹²

1. Identity and self-image

The opening scene of the *Amphitryo* depicts one of Western literature's earliest encounters with the self when the slave Sosia meets Mercury, disguised as his exact double, and is then forced to consider what exactly makes him *himself*.¹³ When the play opens, the eponymous master and his slave have returned from war, and Sosia has been sent ahead to announce Amphitryo's return to his wife Alcumena. When he arrives outside his master's home, however, the slave finds the god Mercury. Realizing neither that it is Mercury nor that his identity has been stolen, he eavesdrops on the god, who is loudly threatening to pummel anyone who approaches. But Mercury, it turns out, knows Sosia is present and uses this to his advantage: aware that he is being watched and listened to by the slave, the god frames his words so as to frighten Sosia, pretending to grow more and more aware that his next victim is nearby.¹⁴ After repeated vague threats against anyone who might approach, Mercury continues,

¹² Rei (1995) vi has observed that “[f]emale tricksters are said to be particularly well suited for roleplay and disguise because of their gender-specific association with *ornatus*, their use of makeup and clothes for the purposes of creating a seductive illusion.” This is particularly relevant in the cases of the courtesans, though less so for the free women, who rely more on prior personal knowledge of the people whose odors they are assessing.

¹³ Barnes 1957 argues that Sosia is the true tragicomic figure of this play, in that he is the character who confronts the issue of self-identity on a truly psychological and philosophical level. de Melo, in his 2011 Loeb introduction, calls this “almost a comical anticipation of Descartes’s *cogito ergo sum*” (4). *sed quom cogito*, says the slave, *equidem certo idem sum qui semper fui* (447). On this Cartesian element, see Corsano 1974, Schmitz (1996) esp. 189-99, and Bettini (2011) 178. Caston (2014) 45-53 connects Sosia’s philosophical dilemma with the interests of ancient philosophers. On the theme of twins and doubles in the *Amphitryo*, see Dupont 1976, Christenson (2000) 14-18; in Plautus, see Bertini 1995, Maurice 2003, Sharrock (2009) s.v. “twins and doubles”. Bettini 2011 explores doubles in classical culture more broadly; see Chr. 5 for a discussion of Sosia. Marshall (2006) Chr. 2, esp. 94-114, discusses the doubling of actors who would have played multiple roles; see also Schmidt 1870.

¹⁴ Slater (1985) 164-5 notes several Plautine twists on the typical eavesdropping scene, including situations such as this where the eavesdropped deliberately allows him- or herself to be overheard in order to manipulate the listener.

Merc: olet homo quidam malo suo.

Sos: ei, numnam ego obolui?¹⁵

Merc: Somebody stinks of his own bad character.

Sos: Oh dear, did I give off that stench?

The result is that Sosia realizes, for the first time, that Mercury knows he is there: his odor (no doubt an invention of Mercury rather than an actual scent) has given him away. Eventually Sosia will confront Mercury, and in their ensuing discussion the god will gradually overcome all of the slave's attempts to insist that *he*, and not Mercury, is Sosia, until the slave is hopelessly confused and convinced that there must be two of him. Thus Sosia's odor becomes important precisely at the moment that his identity becomes a crucial issue. This is perhaps because smelling *malo suo* speaks to the slave's comic identity on several levels, and although this is an admittedly brief reference to smell in an extensive scene, I begin with it because it is a useful introduction to the ways in which we can connect smell and identity in comedy.

On the literal level, what we have is a humorous fart joke,¹⁶ entirely appropriate for a comic slave who is unable to control his own body even when it is most crucial to do so.¹⁷ The connection made between Sosia and an eel (*murena*) at 319, as well as his pun on plucking one's armpits (*qui non alas intervelli*, 326), a notoriously bad-smelling area of the body, could also suggest a more general body odor and thus an all-around dirty character. Given the tradition in Greek mythology that the gods smelled like the fragrant ambrosia and nectar that were their

¹⁵ *Amph.* 321. Note that these lines follow immediately upon Sosia's statement that if Mercury *sees* him, he's a goner (*perii si me aspexerit*, 320).

¹⁶ "Anal emissions" as Lilja (1972a) 142 calls it. This would fit well with another comic staple, food humor: the slave notes at line 310 that he "just ate dinner" (*cenavi modo*) – perhaps Sosia's meal did not agree with him, or his nervousness is giving him indigestion. Compare Aristophanes' *Plutus* 693. On the "fart taboo" and its association with crassness and lack of discipline, see Largey and Watson (1972) 1023-4.

¹⁷ Note that not only can he not control his odor, he also seems incapable of keeping quiet, even when Mercury remarks *certe enim hic nescioquis loquitur* (331). The slave's response is a pun, but also another assertion of his identity: *salvos sum, non me videt: / nescioquem loqui autumat; mi certo nomen Sosiae est* (331-2).

foods,¹⁸ it is possible that the audience is also supposed to draw a contrast between the (implicitly fragrant?) god Mercury, who has assumed Sosia's identity and appearance, and the true Sosia, a low-class, foul-smelling *servus*. Perhaps a winged cap (143) is not the only thing distinguishing pseudo-Sosia from real Sosia, whose humanity is a crucial aspect of his identity in a play in which the all-controlling gods feature as characters. Alternately, however, the second line could also be translated "Somebody stinks, and to his own detriment," where a metaphorical smell suggests Sosia's lack of command over not just his body but also the scene. In this regard, the pungent scent of *malo suo* would alert the audience early on that Sosia is not going to come out on top of this particular plot:¹⁹ he is far from playing the clever slave role, and his *malum* is not the bad habits that characterize the misbehaving *servus* so much as the bad luck that follows him and his master through the rest of the play, in which lack of control is a persistent issue.²⁰

Sosia's olfactory identity, which hints at not only his own bumbling nature but also all of the problems he will have throughout the play, is closely tied to his concern with his physical body as one of the sources of his identity.²¹ Recapping his recent and current experiences, he notes that he is standing in front of his master's house, holding a lantern, awake and speaking; he recalls that Mercury has just beaten him and notes that his jaw still hurts.²² Later he compares himself to Mercury in terms of physical attributes: the god has his clothing, legs, feet, height, hairstyle, eyes, nose, lips and more—and if his back is scarred, well, then that settles the

¹⁸ On the fragrance of the gods, see Schwenk 1861, Lilja (1972a) 25ff and Clements 2015.

¹⁹ Christenson (2000) 25-6 notes Sosia's repeated failures to gain the audience's sympathy in these opening scenes, as all his efforts are undermined by Mercury.

²⁰ The entire plot is set in motion due to Jupiter's own inability to control his lust for Alcumena. Additionally, Sosia claims at line 163 that his master's *immodestia* is the reason he has been sent on an errand so late at night. And both Sosia and Amphitryo are hopelessly outmatched given that they are up against a situation set in motion, and acted out, by two gods.

²¹ For this connection, see Barnes (1957) esp. 20, Dutsch (2015) 19.

²² *Amph.* 406-8.

matter.²³ So, too, the odor supposedly exuded by the slave comprises another aspect of this physicality which, for the audience, also confirms Sosia's comic identity. And yet even as he avows that clothing and scars—*visual* cues, as appropriate for theatre—are markers of “Sosia,” the slave is not so ready to claim credit for the stink. The phrase can express Sosia's fear that he has been discovered (“Oh, have I given myself away?”) but it can also be read as an expression of doubt (“Oh, did *I* give off that stink?”). He knows what he looks like because he has often looked in a mirror (*saepe in speculum inspexi*, 442), and he simply *feels* that he is Sosia when he thinks it over, but in the end he is unsure of the revelatory power of his own scent, despite the fact that it so appropriately points at both his hapless nature and his impending loss of the role he is fighting to maintain.²⁴ Perhaps the slave's loss of his identity is not so surprising after all, given that he does not recognize it when it passes under his nose.

Sosia's odor indicates who he is though he fails to recognize it, but the description of Pyrgopolynices' scent in the *Miles Gloriosus* plays instead on who he believes himself to be and the laughable confidence he has in his own self-image. In order to get the soldier to release the girl Philocomasium, the clever slave Palaestrio and his troupe of conspirators have to convince him to transfer his affections to Acroteleutium, a courtesan who is posing as a Roman matron desperately in love with the soldier. Decked out as a matron, Acroteleutium is heading for the soldier's door when she pauses and announces to her maid that he is not inside.

ACR: scio de olefactu; / nam odore nasum sentiat, si intus sit.

PYR: hariolatur. / quia me amat, propterea Venus fecit eam ut divinaret.²⁵

ACR: nescio ubi hic prope adest quem expeto videre; olet profecto.

PYR: naso pol iam haec quidem plus videt quam oculis.

PAL: caeca amore est.²⁶

²³ *Amph.* 443-6.

²⁴ Sosia's loss, notes Leadbeater (1986) 144, “foreshadows dramatically crises to be suffered subsequently by other characters in the play.” Cf. also Martin 1970.

²⁵ It is possible we are supposed to hear an echo of *olere* in *hariolatur*. Cf. Deena Berg's (1999) translation of this line as “Venus has given her foresmell!” One might also say “She's prophesmelling!”

ACR: I know from sniffing; for my nose would know by the scent if he were inside.
PYR: She's prophesying. Since she loves me, Venus has made her a diviner.
ACR: The man I wish to see is somewhere nearby; that's his odor for certain.
PYR: She sees better with her nose than her eyes!
PAL: She's blinded by love.

Like Mercury in the *Amphitryo*, Acroteleutium knows she is being eavesdropped upon and uses this knowledge to her advantage, but in this case she chooses her words in order to manipulate her eavesdropper by deliberately confirming that he is exactly who he believes himself to be.²⁷ Ironically, while the over-the-top nature of this scene reveals the soldier's delusions about his identity, it at the same time accurately reflects his actual identity—he is just as overblown and gullible as his reactions here would suggest. Keen to interpret everything he hears as flattery and further proof that all women are attracted to him, Pyrgopolynices buys even the suggestion that Acroteleutium's infatuation is such that she can smell his presence.²⁸ In addition, he connects the courtesan's intense love with the power of the gods, which not only recalls divine fragrance, it also anticipates, perhaps even prompts, his own self-identification as the grandson of Venus at 1265.²⁹ Thus the soldier himself takes Acroteleutium's ridiculous suggestion and makes it even more laughable by declaring that only the gods could have attuned the woman to his (semi-

²⁶ *Miles* 1255-9.

²⁷ In doing so, notes Leach (1979) 203, she gives him "the opportunity to assume the position he already pretends to fulfill," namely, ladies' man. For typical characteristics of the *miles gloriosus* in comedy, see Ribbeck 1882, LeGrand (1917) 94-7, Duckworth (1952) 264ff., Boughner (1954) 5-20, Hanson 1965, Segal (1968) 93-7 and 123-8, Schaaf (1977) esp. 140-7, 196ff. for Pyrgopolynices, Sussman (1994) 63-81. Boillat 1991 argues that Pyrgopolynices is essentially Greek rather than Roman in character, leading him to suggest that either the character was taken directly from Plautus' model, or "le Miles a été profondément remanié par un dramaturge d'époque plus basse, du IIe siècle de notre ère par exemple..." (309).

²⁸ Traill (2005) 527, who explicates the Sapphic allusions in this passage, notes that the initial emphasis on smell "play[s] with the notion of a lover's hypersensitivity to the presence of the beloved" and, additionally (citing Sappho fragment 94), recalls Sappho's own use of "olfactory imagery in erotic contexts."

²⁹ Cf. also *Miles* 61-62 for Artotrogus' assertion that the soldier is Achilles' brother. Traill rejects Alexander as a model for the soldier, noting that "There are no stories about Achilles or Alexander rebuffing lovesick housewives" (522) as there are about Phaon and Sappho, but it is worth noting that Plutarch reports that Alexander's mouth and skin exuded a pleasant fragrance (*Life of Alexander* 4.2-3). On Pyrgopolynices as a divine figure see Traill (2005) 527n.38, after Lorenz n.5 207 *ad* 1256. See Lohmeyer (1919) 3-14 for scent and divine epiphany, as well as Chr. 2 n.10.

divine) presence. The fact that this is his default explanation for her behavior underscores how ready he is to believe in his own extraordinary qualities.

The scene foregrounds and hyperbolizes the idea of the soldier as a (sensory) spectacle,³⁰ and the focus on odor shifts from what has until this point been emphasis on Pyrgopolynices' visual charms.³¹ In the opening scene, for example, the parasite Artotrogus invents a conversation he claims to have had with two women who pointed to Pyrgopolynices and remarked on his handsomeness and beautiful hair. The women, says Artotrogus, begged the parasite *ut te hodie quasi pompam illa praeterducerem* ("that today I lead you past them this way, like a parade," 67). Throughout the conversation the soldier presses his parasite for more details, and at the end he laments how difficult things are for a man who is too handsome (68).³² At the end of the play, with the deception in full swing, Acroteleutium outdoes Artotrogus' imaginary women by claiming that she can appreciate the soldier even without a *pompa*. His odor, instead, is sufficient to confirm his identity and presence.

The particular efficacy, and humor, of smell in characterizing the soldier can be seen when we realize that Acroteleutium claims to be aware of a smell, but not necessarily a *good* smell. While visual disguise succeeds because it suggests a specific idea, usually a new role (Acroteleutium as a matron or the young lover Pleusicles as a sailor), these olfactory references can be interpreted in multiple ways, a fact which demonstrates Pyrgopolynices' blind belief in the identity he has constructed for himself, as well as shows how malleable that identity is in the hands of others. The courtesan employs standard words for smell and smelling (*olefactu, odore,*

³⁰ For actors themselves as objects of the gaze, see Edwards 1997, Dutsch (2008) Chr. 4, especially 181-86, Dutsch 2015.

³¹ In fact, Pyrgopolynices' first concern of the play (*Miles* 1-4) is for appearances—not his own, but his shield's. Mazzoli (1995) 43 calls the play "la commedia delle vanità."

³² Leach (1979) 195: "In revealing erotic gullibility as Pyrgopolynices' chief weakness, the [opening] scene anticipates the means by which the conspirators will defeat their enemy." But cf. Segal (1968) 94, who attributes the soldier's downfall to his "pragmatic, mercenary mentality."

olet) without positive or negative connotations, and the flattery Pyrgopolynices hears comes from his own interpretation of her words and behavior: he assumes that she is complimenting him, and that a powerful odor is appropriate for a semi-divine brother of Achilles and descendant of Venus. Yet the soldier's scent could just as easily be foul, and all of Acroteleutium's words would still apply. Perhaps the audience is supposed to get the impression that Pyrgopolynices actually stinks but is too full of himself to realize it. Staged in such a way that the soldier could hear but not see the women, Acroteleutium and Milphidippa could even play up the idea of a malodorous soldier, for instance by plugging their noses or waving away an oppressive odor.³³ Even without additional physical comedy, however, attention to the olfactory words in this scene makes us realize how easy identity is to reinterpret when it is based on something as subjective as odor, an idea which will be especially important in the next section. Pyrgopolynices' belief in his own superiority means that everything he sees and hears merely reinforces his self-image; he never considers that others may not share his high opinion of himself, let alone that they might view or represent him as anything other than perfect.³⁴

2. Transformation and self-improvement

³³ Even without the idea of foulness the suggestion of excessive perfuming could still be at play. Acroteleutium calls the soldier a boastful, curly haired, perfumed (*unguentatum*) adulterer at 924, and the parasite Artotrogus alludes to the soldier's odor by claiming he can "smell in advance" (*praeolat*, 41) the braggart's wishes. Mazzoli (1995) 47 connects Artotrogus' remark here with his role as parasite, in that he "affida a due sensi per eccellenza 'gastronomici' olfatto e gusto, la sua straordinaria capacità di dare corpo alle vanità del *patronus*". On the staging of this scene, see Marshall (2006) 172-3.

³⁴ The soldier's cluelessness when it comes to comic roles can also be seen if we consider that attunement to odors is in a sense inappropriate for the character Acroteleutium is playing, a matron. Though one could argue that her behavior—kicking her aged husband out of the house in preference for the soldier—is decidedly unmatronly in a Roman comedy, it is still worth noting that fragrances in Plautine comedy are much more commonly associated with courtesans than matrons (cf. *Poen* 701-3, *Most* 309-10, *Men* 353-5 for just three examples.) That the soldier believes Acroteleutium is particularly attuned to his scent could therefore be interpreted as another sign of his lack of role awareness.

The cases of Sosia and Pyrgopolynices demonstrate how odor can be used to establish someone's character or convey information about him, while the *Miles* also hints at the fluidity of identity in comedy and the way in which odors problematize the establishing of a single, clear identity. This section picks up the idea of malleability and explores scenes in which odors signal identities in flux, whether a complete change of role or simply an effort to improve upon what is already there. More often than not, scents reveal some sort of unsuitability or ignorance when it comes to changing one's role, and therefore a misunderstanding about the nature of Plautine theatricality more generally. In the *Epidicus*, for instance, a woman uses an olfactory metaphor to point out that a courtesan is inherently inappropriate to play the role of a respectable virgin, while in the *Casina* an old man's attempt to make himself into an *adulescens amans* through perfumes betrays a fundamental misunderstanding about the "right" way to construct identity according to theatrical convention. In the *Mostellaria*, moreover, a blending of both natural and artificial odors signals further theatrical failure as one's original role bleeds into and belies the newly constructed exterior. These olfactory failures characterize not only those who smell, but also the women whose superior theatrical knowledge allows them to successfully manipulate their own identities while policing the less accomplished efforts of others. In doing so they demonstrate that artificial scents, while inherently theatrical, are insufficient when it comes to creating an entirely new identity. Odor-based identity is fluid precisely because odors such as perfumes do such a poor job *fixing* an identity: easily reinterpreted by others and wont to clash with one's appearance or natural odor, they instead represent a transformation that never quite arrives at its goal, but instead continues to provide a reminder of what was there before.

In a passage about mistaken identity from the *Epidicus*, a smell-based metaphor is used to call attention to the disparity between reality and appearances, and thus to accuse the *senex* Periphanes of not recognizing a woman's change of role. Reunited with Philippa, the woman he had raped long before the start of the play, Periphanes assures her that he has found their lost daughter, who has been captured as a prisoner of war. He produces Acropolistis, a courtesan whom his slave Epidicus has pawned off on his master as the missing daughter, but who is not actually the couple's child. Though the *senex* is ignorant of the truth, Philippa realizes it immediately: she declares that she does not recognize Acropolistis and insists that she cannot be her daughter.³⁵ When Periphanes insists that this is only because Acropolistis is dressed and decked out differently, Philippa stubbornly replies with what sounds like an aphorism: *aliter catuli longe olent, aliter sues* ("puppies and pigs smell vastly different," 579). The sentiment might sound odd because the more obvious difference between puppies and pigs would seem to be their appearances. Philippa, as the lost girl's mother, should be able to tell just from looking whether or not her daughter is standing before her, and in fact that is how she actually identifies the impostor (*nec scio, nec noui neque ego hanc oculis uidi ante hunc diem*, 577).³⁶

By remarking upon the *odor* of puppies and pigs, Philippa is not making any claims about actual scents, but is instead saying that the nature or essence of these two animals, represented by their odors, is different. That is, for the purposes of this scene, there is a fundamental difference between free women and unfree women, enough that dressing one up to look like the other will fail to mask the truth, which raises uncomfortable questions about the status of the real daughter,

³⁵ On the relationship between character knowledge and audience knowledge in this play, see Manuwald 2001, especially 152-7 for the identity of the daughter. She notes at 158 that the explanations provided by Philippa's appearance, as well as that of the soldier, "substantiell für das Publikum nichts Neues bringen, sondern für Periphanes' Entdeckungen von Bedeutung sind."

³⁶ For the importance of vision and seeing properly in the *Epidicus*, see Slater (2001) 191-6.

a free woman sold into slavery.³⁷ In making this statement Philippa presents the surprisingly untheatrical idea that some types of identity cannot be altered at all, not even through the usual means of costume change and convincing acting. Periphanes, meanwhile, ultimately behaves more like a proper spectator who buys into visual deceptions, though the fact that he is repeatedly duped by Epidicus' scheme makes him a laughable character within the plot of the play.³⁸ His assurance that Acropolistis only looks different because she has a new outfit is truer than he knows: the woman is, after all, just a courtesan dressed and behaving as a respectable virgin. The *senex* even uses the technical theatrical term *ornatum* to describe Acropolistis' changed appearance,³⁹ but does not realize the implications of his words for the deception in progress until the courtesan remarks that she can just as easily be his and Philippa's daughter as not.⁴⁰

Philippa, of course, has an unfair advantage—she is not the intended victim of the deception; Periphanes is.⁴¹ While most duped characters are deceived in part because they have never before seen the people deceiving them, she knows exactly who she is looking for, and Acropolistis is not that person. What the courtesan's "odor" tells her is not that this woman is not

³⁷ Richlin (2015) 39 notes that a sub-theme of the *Epidicus* is "whether there is a qualitative difference" between Telestis, the daughter-and-prisoner-of-war, and Acropolistis, the courtesan-and-fake-daughter.

³⁸ Periphanes in fact spends a great deal of the play thinking one woman is another. In addition to being fooled by Acropolistis, he also tries to sell a flute girl to a soldier thinking that she is Acropolistis, only to discover (497-8) that the girl was freed over five years ago. On confused identities and family relationships in this play, see Musti (2006) esp. 38-43, 46-55.

³⁹ *Epid.* 577. See Duckworth (1952) 89 for *ornamentum* and *ornatus* in relation to clothing; Muecke (1986) 219 on the role of *ornamenta* and related terms in creating metatheatrical moments in Plautus; and Maurice (2004) 274 on this scene specifically.

⁴⁰ *Epid.* 587-92: PER. *Cur me igitur patrem vocabas? ACR. Tua istaec culpast, non mea. / non patrem ego te nominem, ubi tu tuam me appellas filiam? / hanc quoque etiam, si me appellet filiam, matrem vocem. / negat haec filiam me suam esse: non ergo haec mater mea est. / postremo haec mea culpa non est: quae didici dixi omnia; / Epidicus mihi fuit magister.* Sharrock (2009) 115: "Identity becomes something to be picked up and dropped at will." On Periphanes as a failed playwright in this scene, see Slater (1985) 32-3. For the possible incestuous overtones of this scene, see Slater (2001) 199-202.

⁴¹ As such, notes Manuwald (2001) 153, her criticisms of his credulity "sie erscheint gegenstandslos angesichts Periphanes' sachlicher Schwierigkeiten, weil er seine Tochter seit der Geburt nicht mehr gesehen hat (600)." Cf. also Slater (2001) 193: "Recognition is not solely... a matter of visual matching, because the knowledge and experience necessary are not always available."

her daughter, which she realizes merely by looking, but that she is not a free woman at all.

Through her olfactory metaphor Philippa calls Acropolistis out as a fake, but just as importantly she scolds Periphanes for his inability to recognize this classic comic role-play in action—how, she seems to be asking, could he *not* realize that Acropolistis has merely taken on a new role when she is so obviously inappropriate for it? Her remark flies in the face of his comment, made earlier in the play, that there is an obvious difference in the behavior of virgins and whores.⁴²

The *senex* claims to be aware of the same fundamental difference between people which Philippa identifies, but his inability to recognize Acropolistis for what she is tells a different story. Even if he does not have the advantage of knowing what his daughter looks like, he also, Philippa suggests, does not have a nose for other types of identity marker, those which frustrate theatrical deception because they make certain people inappropriate to play certain roles. It is clear that when it comes to identity, Periphanes relies on his eyes rather than his nose—as any good spectator of Roman comedy should.⁴³

This passage is unusual in that the odor here is metaphorical and thus not limited to the properties of actual odors. While the courtesan Anterastilis will suggest below that it is possible to wash away one's natural scent and cover it with something new, Philippa instead chooses odor to represent qualities which cannot be masked, not even in the typical Plautine way, through costume and deceit. The rest of the passages in this section will focus instead on real odors,

⁴² Periphanes insists that a lyre girl be kept away from his (supposed) daughter, because *diuertunt mores uirgini longe ac lupae* (403). Compare also his brief monologue at 382-95, where he “makes clear to the audience that he once wore a different mask, that of the *adulescens amans*” (Slater (2001) 194). Even recognizing his own change of masks does not seem to have helped.

⁴³ The irony of all this, of course, is that in terms of the comic *actors* playing these roles on the Roman stage, there is little to no difference between a courtesan character and a virgin character, nor even between a man and a woman, since every role would have been played by a male slave or freedman. It is quite possible that the same actor played both Telestis and Acropolistis, which would only increase the humor of this scene; cf. Musti (2005) 68-70. Manuwald (2011) 80-90 provides a recent account of Roman acting troupes, with bibliography on the subject at 85n.147. See also Leppin (1992) 18-23. Dutsch 2015 and Richlin 2015 consider how the use of male slave actors affects the characterization and objectification of women on the stage. On costuming and masks, see Duckworth (1952) 88-94, Beare (1964) 184-95, Petrone (1992) 371-402, Manuwald (2011) 75-80.

particularly perfumes which, far from representing some indelible aspect of one's character, instead contribute to shoddy role-playing and point to a misunderstanding of theatrical conventions among those who employ them.

In the *Casina*,⁴⁴ this misunderstanding is exemplified by the *senex* Lysidamus, who is convinced that all he needs to construct a new identity for himself is a spritz of perfumes. In this play, the typical romantic plot is overturned by the complete removal of the young man and his eponymous beloved from the story; instead the focus is on his father Lysidamus and mother Cleostrata, both of whom take on new roles as the action progresses, with differing degrees of success.⁴⁵ Enamored with the slave-girl Casina, Lysidamus plans to marry her off to his slave Olympio so that he himself can have access to her. Cleostrata, meanwhile, advances her absent son's interests and plans to marry Casina to the *armiger* Chalinus so that the son, instead, can have access to the girl.⁴⁶ When Lysidamus finally enters the stage he is singing the praises of love, which he describes as a condiment which improves every dish it spices: gall will be turned to honey if love is added, just as it will turn a *tristis* man (like Lysidamus himself) into one who is *lepidus* and *lenis* (223).⁴⁷ Almost before he has been properly introduced to the audience as the

⁴⁴ Odor in the *Casina* has not gone unnoticed. The eponymous slave girl Casina has a name recalling the perfume *cassia*, and two other female characters may have smell-related names as well (see Connors 1997, who discusses the names Casia, Myrrhina, and Pardalisca and their relations to odors, and Franko (1999) 10.) In three instances, a female character *subolet* ("sniffs out") a male's attempt to deceive. And O'Bryhim 1989, exploring possible meanings of the verb *obolere*, argues (unconvincingly, in my opinion) that the main character, whom most texts call Lysidamus for lack of an actually attested name in the manuscript tradition, is in fact called Casinus. On metaphors of food and perfumes in this play, see Chiarini 1978, Gowers (1993) Chr. 2 for food, Franko (1999) 5-8 and 15-6 for a list of olfactory references throughout the play.

⁴⁵ As Williams (1993) 42 notes, this opening scene between Lysidamus and Cleostrata establishes the "dissatisfaction of both protagonists with the roles awarded them". She also suggests that "Lysidamus pursues Casina precisely to escape the role of Old Man—to convince himself that he is not yet 'past it'" (43). See also pp. 47-52 on Lysidamus as both failed actor and playwright.

⁴⁶ For the relationships between slaves and masters in this play, see Forehand (1973) 241-2 and McCarthy (2000) Chr. 3. For Lysidamus' homosexual relationships with his slaves, Cody 1976.

⁴⁷ On this entrance monody and its similarity to those in other plays, see McCarthy (2000) 90-1. Connors (1997) 305 notes that "When the *Casina* was performed in Rome in 185, audience reactions to Lysidamus' shopping trip might be [*sic*] affected by prohibitions on the sale of *unguenta exotica* which had been declared by the censors

father-figure, Lysidamus is already proclaiming a change in his identity and a disavowal of his assigned comic stereotype. Won over by love like an *adulescens*, he has frequented all the perfume shops and anointed himself with whatever he can find: *myropolas omnis sollicito, ubiquomque est lepidum unguentum, unguor* (“I pester all the perfume shops, and wherever there’s a charming ointment, I anoint myself,” 226). The old man uses the same word, *lepidum*, to describe both the perfumes he is seeking and the type of man produced by the spice of love. According to his interpretation of the situation, his perfumes perform two tasks: they reveal that he is in love by virtue of their *lepidum* quality while at the same time transforming him into someone who is also *lepidus*,⁴⁸ the sort of character who ought to be doing the falling in love in this play.⁴⁹ Additionally, he hopes they have a transformative effect on Casina as well, that of making her similarly pleased with him (*ut illi placeam*, 227). For Lysidamus, perfumes are sufficient to construct a new identity for himself and to proclaim that identity to everyone, no costume change required. As we will see, however, this coating of scents clashes not only with his physical appearance, but also his natural, and far more unpleasant, odor, both of which indicate what role he should actually be playing.

Unfortunately for Lysidamus, the first person he meets after his olfactory makeover is his wife, Cleostrata. The moment she smells his perfumes, inappropriate for a man his age, she recognizes that something suspicious is afoot, and Lysidamus’ attempt to steer her wrong, a claim that he was merely accompanying a friend to the perfumer and the scents rubbed off on

in 189”, citing Pliny *N.H.* 13.24 for the date of the prohibition. For 185 as the date of the first performance, see MacCary and Willcock (1976) 11.

⁴⁸ Ironically, Lysidamus will use this same word of Cleostrata at the end of the play after she has forgiven him his transgressions: *lepidiorem uxorem nemo quisquam, quam ego habeo hanc, habet*, 1008. *Lepidum*, of course, would later become a “buzzword” of the neoteric poets.

⁴⁹ For the *senex amator*, see Ryder (1984) esp. 184-5 for Lysidamus; Bianco 2003 discusses old people in comedy generally and aged lovers in particular at 55-66. On Lysidamus, Forehand 1973, Cody 1976, Chiarini 1978. Franko (1999) 3 notes that Lysidamus is in fact trying to play both clever slave and young lover at the same time: he advances a scheme, but it is one by which *he* benefits. Amusingly, while Cleostrata takes on the role of the *servus callidus*, her name suggests a *miles gloriosus*.

him (241), does not fool her. For Cleostrata, her husband's new odor is a signal that something is amiss in his behavior, and rather than suggest a new identity, it instead emphasizes his former state and proper role. Lysidamus declares that the unguents have made him a new man, but for Cleostrata, they are a reminder that he is an *old* man, a *cana fulix* ("white-haired coot," 239).⁵⁰ His scent, she points out, is not appropriate for his age: *senecta aetate unguentatus per vias, ignave, incedis* ("You fool, are you walking through the streets, covered in perfumes, at your old age?" 240). This is, then, almost the opposite of Philippa's view, in that Cleostrata assesses her husband's new odor against a visual standard, while Philippa assessed Acropolistis' visual disguise against her (metaphorical) scent.

Both Cleostrata's and Lysidamus' reactions to his perfumes revolve around the idea of changing one's role, but each promotes a different means by which this might be accomplished. Kathleen McCarthy has provided a thorough and insightful look at this play, highlighting the different ways these two characters exert their authority and the "styles" of theatre they employ to achieve their ends. She argues that while Cleostrata creates trickery as though she were a clever slave—that is, as a less powerful and marginalized character who employs metatheatrical deceptions—Lysidamus, as *paterfamilias* and master, relies on an "extreme confidence in being able to change fundamentally the essence of things," an almost divine and mystical authority.⁵¹ This confidence, as she points out, can be seen in this opening monologue, where Lysidamus expresses the belief that his perfumes not only *reflect* a change in his character, they actually *create* one. Cleostrata, meanwhile, is a character whose deceptions play on "the gap between

⁵⁰ I have accepted Renahan's 1976 proposed emendation of the manuscript's *hic anaculix*, which has typically been corrected to *cana culix*, "white-haired gnat". MacCary and Willcock (1976) 31, however, note that "flies are proverbially associated with lechery".

⁵¹ McCarthy (2000) 92. On Lysidamus' connection with Jupiter, see 83, 97, and 115-7, where she compares Lysidamus to Jupiter in the *Amphitryo*. On the connection between the *Amphitryo* and *Casina* see Leadbeater 1986, where he argues that the *Casina* may even be "an adaptation of the *Amphitryon*" (135).

appearance and reality,⁵² and this is exactly what the *uxor* notices in this scene. It is especially noteworthy that the alleged power of odors to effect change, which will be prominent in the following two chapters and which Lysidamus praises here, is completely denied by Cleostrata, who refuses to believe that any such change has taken place in her husband. Putting her stereotypical wifely qualities to good use,⁵³ she sniffs quite literally into his business,⁵⁴ but rather than smell a *senex amator*, she notices instead the incongruity between the role he should be playing and the one he is trying to usurp in the absence of his son.⁵⁵

For Cleostrata, smell represents a deviation from, or a poor addition to, Lysidamus' already established role, an incomplete transformation which leaves him evincing characteristics of both *senex* and *adulescens amans*. As a theatrically savvy character who understands traditional comic conventions and stereotypes and whose deceptions, as just mentioned, employ those hallmarks of Roman comedy, costume changes and manipulative acting, Cleostrata is particularly attuned to the fact that her husband is “doing it wrong,” as it were.⁵⁶ Any comic *architectus* could tell you that the best way to assume a new identity is to put on a new costume,

⁵² McCarthy (2000) 83.

⁵³ Cf. Williams (1993) 49 and McCarthy (2000) 104 on how Cleostrata plays to the stereotypes of her role. James (2015) 112 recalls lines 584-6, where Lysidamus asks his wife to speak more *blanda*, and she replies that this is the task of a courtesan, not a wife. On her speech patterns, see Dutsch (2008) 73-83 and James (2015) 110-1. Cf. also Slater (1985) 77ff. on this scene.

⁵⁴ Cleostrata is thrice credited with “sniffing out” Lysidamus' plot to get a hold of Casina (*Cas.* 266, 277, and 554). Compare Joyless of Brome's *Antipodes*, who must become a “nose witness” to the “rankness” of his wife's possible dishonor (Dugan (2011) 104). On scent-based metaphors, see the Introduction p. 21. See Bianco (2003) 41 on the connection between plot-sniffing and actual odor.

⁵⁵ What the *senex* does not realize, as Slater (1985) 77 points out, is that “love is an additive, which can change how something registers on the senses (the bitter made sweet, 223) without changing the nature of the thing. Lysidamus' perfume works much the same way: the old goat thinks he can become a sweet young thing merely by perfuming himself.”

⁵⁶ This is not to deny, as McCarthy has shown, that his method is not in many ways successful, only to point out that it is unconventional and un-Plautine. While McCarthy's analysis of the *Casina* is rich and generally persuasive, I am not entirely convinced that Lysidamus is as sympathetic in his role as “comic rebel” as she suggests. Tatum (1983) 85-9, however, suggests how Lysidamus may be more sympathetic in performance than he is on the page.

as Chalinus will prove later in the play when he emerges disguised as Casina.⁵⁷ Lysidamus instead has visited, not the *choragus*,⁵⁸ but the *myropolas*. The problem with this is that in comedy, artificially applied odors do not effect change as Lysidamus supposes, but they also do not create a complete false front or new role, as does costume. Added to what is already there, they can only compliment preexisting elements or call attention to the disparity between the old and the new. Lysidamus' failure to understand this in a sense justifies Cleostrata's subsequent policing of his attempt to change his role. She, after all, is behaving just as unconventionally by taking on the role of *servus callidus*, yet her success comes because she understands the traditional elements of theatre and uses them "properly."

Both the conspicuousness and the subjectivity of scents play into Lysidamus' efforts as well.⁵⁹ The *senex*'s perfume constitutes an additional "costume piece" which stands out *as* an addition, rather than creating a full-scale transformation in his character; his odor's relationship to his foundation—that is, his assigned role as *senex*—is necessarily open to interpretation by other characters who did not hear his opening monologue explaining what it means. For both *senex* and *uxor* there is no denying that some sort of change has taken place in Lysidamus—deception is decidedly not the goal here. The type of change (superficial versus fundamental), however, and what it implies, are debatable.⁶⁰ This disagreement over what Lysidamus'

⁵⁷ On cross-dressing in his play and its implications for ideas of (gender) identity, see Gold 1998.

⁵⁸ Cf. *Persa* 154-60, *Trin.* 853-60, and *Curc.* 462ff, where the *choragus* is specifically named as a provider of costumes.

⁵⁹ Cf. Forehand 243: "[Lysidamus] is so obvious that everyone can see what he is after, but so absorbed he cannot see that he is vulnerable." Fontaine (2010) 38 points out that Lysidamus' "repeated slips of the tongue inadvertently betray his secret wish to wed Casina himself." His odor is therefore rather like his tongue: too revealing. See also Chiarini (1978) 118.

⁶⁰ Amusingly, both Lysidamus' and Cleostrata's understanding of the meaning of his perfumes are flawed. The *senex* thinks he has become a charming lover, but the rest of the play will prove this initial claim to be false as he is revealed to be nothing more than a foul-smelling and lecherous old man taking advantage of his slaves, and not just Casina, but Olympio and Chalinus as well. Cleostrata, meanwhile, is on the right track, but she assumes that he has *already* been engaging in inappropriate sexual liaisons, for which there is no direct evidence (not that anyone would be surprised if there were). Since he smells, to her, of unfaithfulness, she is naturally led to demand what

perfumes mean contrasts with what seems to be the obvious, and only, interpretation of later references to the *senex* as a rank and lust-driven goat.⁶¹ His *unguenta* not only clash with his old age, they are also all too noticeable on a man whose typical odor seems to be something much worse, and far more appropriate for his actual character and role as a lecherous old man. As the comedy progresses the unguents seem to wear away, so much so that at the very end of the play, when the closing speaker threatens those who do not applaud with a “goat scented with bile” in place of a mistress (1018), we understand Lysidamus to be the goat in question.⁶² The once-perfumed *senex* has not only sunk from a role he cannot properly play back into his old position, he has fallen even further, until he is no more than a malodorous and oversexed animal.⁶³ The success of his quest to obtain Casina, the “cinnamon-girl,” ultimately mirrors the progression of his olfactory identity, for his perfumes do not change his identity but fade away, revealing the truth beneath.

The fact that artificial odors are so open to (mis)interpretation further explains why they are so susceptible to misuse in the world of comic identity: unlike costumes, which establish a specific and agreed-upon role, scents are much more easily reinterpreted when left to speak for

other types of bad behavior he has been engaging in: *unde is, nihili? ubi fuisti? ubi lustratu's? ubi bibisti?* (“Where are you going, worthless man? Where were you? Where were you whoring? Where were you drinking?” 245). As Bianco (2003) 40 puts it, “Innegabile appare l’equivalenza *libido/inganno/unguentum*”. The idea that odors call attention to themselves and invite (mis)interpretation will be central in Chapter 3, on Martial’s *Epigrams*.

⁶¹ As Christenson (2015) 167 remarks, “On the level of smell, he is the polar opposite of Casina, the alluring “Cinnamon-Girl,” in that we are made to imagine him as reeking of a noxious combination of cologne (236-240), wine (245-246), and halitosis (727-728).” Lysidamus is called a “foul, toothless goat” at 550 and attributed with bad breath at 727. Hough (1940) 190n.8, suggests that the Greek “ὄ Zεῦ!” at 730 continues the theme of bad breath as a pun on ὄζενς.

⁶² Most scholars agreed that this is likely meant to recall Lysidamus, but if this is the case then McCarthy’s (2000) 120 claim that end of the play grants Lysidamus “farcical authority” clashes with her suggestion that “The *paterfamilias* who fails to understand that farce is the source of his salvation will be punished as Lysidamus was, by the substitution of his love object” (114-15). If farce is the source of Lysidamus’ salvation and he ends the play with farcical authority, how does the *senex* also end up as the substituted love object? On animal imagery see Svendsen (1971) 289-313, Forehand (1973) 245, MacCary and Willcock (1976) 31, Chiarini (1978) 119, Slater (1985) 93, Franko (1999) 8-9, Bianco (2003) 39-47, esp. 40-1 for Lysidamus.

⁶³ Cf. Chiarini (1978) 118: “tale uso si fa, agli occhi dello spettatore, segno del contrario, segno della degradazione morale di questo vecchio, squallido sognatore di stupri.”

themselves—and what they say to those who encounter them may not be the intended message. This problem will return in Chapter 3, where Martial’s invective capitalizes on the ambiguity of odors and their ability to suggest multiple offences at once. In the next two plays, the *Poenulus* and *Mostellaria*,⁶⁴ we will see that even courtesans, women adept at using makeup and perfumes to create allure, express differing views on the relationship between scent and identity. These priming scenes, which are imagined as “backstage” preparations and expose the theatricality of feminine presentation,⁶⁵ begin with the courtesans discussing the strictures they apply to themselves, from washing to dressing and styling, all of which are designed to create the illusion of natural beauty without calling attention to the cosmetic costume. In both scenes, scent is undesirable, but in one case the aversion is for a woman’s naturally bad odor, which hinders the creation of a pleasing façade, while in the other it is for perfumes, which stand out as too noticeably artificial.

The first opinion is expressed in the *Poenulus*, a play that emphasizes the senses throughout.⁶⁶ It begins with Agorastocles and his slave Milphio eavesdropping on a debate about *cultus* in which the courtesan Adelphasium declaims to her sister Anterastilis about the unnecessarily complicated processes women go through in order to make themselves attractive,

⁶⁴ The *Mostellaria*’s very long *cultus* scene has long been considered possible evidence of *contaminatio*. See Williams (1958) 22-27 (with a review of earlier arguments) and Lowe (1995) 29-31. For *contaminatio* in the *Poenulus* scene, see Jachmann (1911) 249-78, Lowe 1988, Fraenkel (2007) 184-90.

⁶⁵ Rei (1995) 157 suggests that “revealing personal grooming is analogous to letting the spectator see the creative process, the scaffolding that supports the scenery on stage.”

⁶⁶ The *adulescens amans*, Agorastocles, is in love with a girl he has never touched (281) but whom he admires from afar and praises as a visual spectacle. The courtesans are headed to the festival of Venus, to a *mercatus meretricius* (“prostitute fair,” 339) where they will be displayed for potential customers to ogle and admire. Alongside this comes language of cleanliness and dirtiness, and such language encompasses things that are dirty to see, smell, touch, and even taste. In addition, the pimp Lycus is several times accused of having a filthy character (156 and 826). For the emphasis on the visual in this play, see Moore (2004) 142-3 and *passim*. See also Rei (1995) 142ff. on the sensory aspects of the play. For a possible connection between Lycus’ name and the filthy bottom-dwelling fish called *lupus*, see Fontaine (2010) 150-2, adducing Gratwick (1990) 306. Other dirty pimps appear at *Persa* 406-7, *Ph.* 526, and *Rud.* 543.

or even simply presentable.⁶⁷ They are endlessly washing, drying, scrubbing, polishing, painting, and embellishing themselves, an exhausting and expensive process.⁶⁸ Anterastilis, meanwhile, has a very different and rather misogynistic take on *cultus*.⁶⁹ All the washing and polishing is necessary because women *au naturel* are considered unappetizing and malodorous, like extra-salty pickled fish lacking any appealing qualities (*sine omni lepore et sine suavitate*, 242).⁷⁰ Without thorough soaking they are stinky and salty, so that no one will want to touch them. Just so, a woman without primping is bland and unattractive and, one presumes, equally untouchable.⁷¹ Pre-cosmetics, she is not only unpleasant to look at, but also repugnant to the other senses as well, particularly the nose, because stench is part of her natural identity.⁷² Hence the importance, for Anterastilis, of washing it away before the woman can even begin to make herself into something new.⁷³

⁶⁷ *Poen.* 210-32.

⁶⁸ *ambae numquam concessamus / lavari aut fricari aut tergeri aut ornari / poliri, expoliri, pingi, fingi* (219-21). Fantham 2004 argues that Plautus “consciously professionalizes” (245) the two women, but Adelphasium’s constant touting of moderation and modesty paradoxically recalls a matron as well. For other Plautine passages about excessive female grooming, see *Miles* 685-700, *Tri* 243-54a, *Epid* 221-32, and *Aul* 505-22. For feminine hygiene in the ancient world, see Wyke 1994, Bradley (2009) 162-74 and (2014) 194-7. Lucilius (W 1088-9) uses a string of eroticized grooming words to describe being victimized in satire: *Quin totum purges devellas me atque deuras / exultes [adequites] et sollicites*.

⁶⁹ Johnston 1980 has argued that this sisterly debate parodies the attitudes surrounding Roman sumptuary laws at the time the play was written, particularly the Oppian Law. Drawing on Livy’s narrative of the debate between Cato the Elder and Lucius Valerius Flaccus over the repeal of the law, she suggests that Adelphasium represents Cato’s sensibilities, while Anterastilis represents Flaccus’. “*Munditiae et ornatus et cultus* are feminine necessities without which Anterastilis, like Valerius’ *mulierculae*, feels pain and indignation.” (154). On women’s dress, see Sebesta and Bonfante (eds.) 1994, Croom 2002, Edmondson and Keith (eds.) 2008, Olson (2008) esp. Chr. 2 on cosmetics and Chr. 3 on “The Dangers of Adornment”.

⁷⁰ Cf. Dutsch (2008) 43: “Plautine ‘women’ routinely side with *alii*, warning the audience... against feminine wickedness and extravagance...” Of *lepos*, also a significant word for Lysidamus in the *Casina*, Maurach 1975 *ad loc.* notes, “Zudem verwendet Plautus (nach LODGE zu urteilen) *lepos* nur im abstrakten Sinne des “Herzerfreuenden”, während hier die Nähe zum “Schmackhaften” deutlich ist.”

⁷¹ *Poen.* 243-7: *nisi multa aqua usque et diu macerantur, / olent, salsa sunt, tangere ut non velis. / item nos sumus...insulsa admodum atque invenustae / sine munditia et sumptu*. Cf. *Asin.* 178-80, in which a procuress compares her clients to fish. For men at risk of consumption by prostitutes, see Dutsch (2008) 58-60. James 2006 discusses a more general anxiety among elite Roman men about the relative freedom possessed by the not-slave-not-wife courtesan.

⁷² Is this, perhaps, what Roman audiences expected slave-actors to look like beneath their costuming?

⁷³ Classen, Howes, and Synnott (1994) 126 note that in modern Arabia, perfumes are applied only after the body has been washed. The point is not to mask unpleasant odors, but instead to make the clean body smell nice.

Even more severe than Adelphasium, Scapha of the *Mostellaria* preaches austerity, an amusingly un-stereotypical perspective for an ex-courtesan to hold.⁷⁴ Whereas in the *Poenulus* the two women were merely talking about *cultus*, in this scene the freed courtesan Philematium is actually in the process of decking herself out, or rather, trying to. One by one her maid Scapha rejects all of Philematium's attempts to improve herself, so that the scene in fact becomes an anti-primping vignette instead.⁷⁵ Pretty character will suit her physical beauty better than a pretty dress (168-9); in addition, her attractiveness will make any garment look good on her (173); no, she does not need a mirror, and in fact she herself would make the best mirror (250-1); if she is beautiful, her hair will look beautiful, too (255); neither white lead (258-9) nor rouge (261-4) is necessary, nor any makeup at all; and no ointments, for it is better to smell like nothing at all (273).⁷⁶ Ironically, Scapha's advice on *cultus*, which is clearly designed for attracting customers in the plural despite its unconventionality, will be used by Philematium in order to continue pleasing only Philolaches, the young man who freed her.

Smell thus represents the extremes of feminine presentation in these two scenes.⁷⁷ For Anterastilis it signals an unwashed woman, one whose natural flaws must be removed as much as possible before she can attempt other aspects of beautification. For Scapha, makeup,

⁷⁴ At 197-202 Scapha claims that she, like Philematium, dedicated herself entirely to one man, only to be discarded when she grew old and grey. For her perspective on *cultus* cf. Ovid's *Remedia Amoris* 347-56, where he advises arriving unexpectedly at a *puella*'s house in order to catch her unadorned and ugly, and Propertius 1.2, who instead praises unadorned female beauty. Lucretius 4.1171ff. complains that even naturally beautiful women fumigate themselves (*taetris se suffit odoribus*, 1175) just like ugly women.

⁷⁵ See Dutsch (2015) 26-30 on this scene and the "performance" of female attractiveness. Duncan (2006) 262-3 notes how this scene contrasts Philematium's apparent sincerity with Scapha's professional, money-centered arguments, but glosses over the fact that Philematium is the one obsessed with *cultus* while Scapha ironically preaches "sincerity." On Philematium's espousal of the values of Roman marriage, see Williams 1958 and Owens (2001) 221-4.

⁷⁶ Though Scapha claims no smell is best, Philolaches later refers to Philematium as "myrrh-oil" (*stacta*, 309). For the same sentiment about odorlessness see also Martial's *Epigrams* 2.12.4 and 6.55.5; Cicero's Letter to Atticus 2.1.1; and Ausonius 125.2. The two poems of Martial will be discussed in the final chapter.

⁷⁷ For the fine line between feminine artificiality and attention-seeking on the one hand and careless neglect on the other, see Olson (2008) Chr. 3. On the anti-cosmetic tradition of Greek and Latin literature, see Knecht (1972) 39-55, Gibson (2003) 21-5.

perfumes, jewelry, and fancy garments only serve to make a woman seem fake and overdone—*cultus* is nothing more than a too-obvious costume which calls attention to the courtesan’s transformation, just as Lysidamus’ perfumes alerted Cleostrata to his suspicious behavior.⁷⁸ These perspectives on the overall process of *cultus* also demonstrate the link between primping and theatrical artifice, both of which are essential to a successful courtesan and which, we will see, are so poorly understood by other women. Though each woman presents a different view of feminine grooming, they all reveal the truth behind these false disguises by describing what is involved in constructing a courtesan’s exterior and, in the view of Anterastilis, why construction is required at all.⁷⁹ It is important to note that all three women are concerned not only with the façade, but also the woman’s true identity, the “base” to which makeup, perfumes, and clothing are all added. Adelphasium’s diatribe against excessive grooming is also excessive in its number of verbs for washing and polishing: *lavare* (220, 223, 229); *tergere* (220, 229); *fricare* (220); *ornare* (220, 229); *polire* (221, 229); and *eluere* (223) are all packed into ten lines. This idea is picked up by her sister, whose comparison to salted fish emphasizes the need for thorough soaking as a first step to making both fish and women desirable. Scapha, meanwhile, rejects *cultus* precisely because Philematium, who is defined by her natural beauty, is such a perfect canvas to begin with.

When Scapha and the sisters turn their attention and criticism towards other women, we see again this concern with a balance between external and natural odors, or, in the case of Adelphasium’s target, the unusual lack of natural scents. Both women attack scapegoats, non-

⁷⁸ Cf. *Truc.* 288ff., Horace *Sat.* 1.2.123-4 and Juvenal 6.461-73. Cicero compares the plain style of speaking to an unadorned woman at *Orat.* 23.78-9, and Dionysius of Halicarnassus says Lysias outshines Isocrates as much as naturally beautiful bodies outshine those adorned by cosmetics (*Isocrates* 3).

⁷⁹ Note that each woman grounds her views in what she thinks is the best business practice: Scapha hopes to reel in customers, Anterastilis is concerned about not driving them away, and Adelphasium fears the financial burden imposed by constructing a façade. Cf. Anterastilis at 235-6: *quom sedulo munditer nos habemus / vix aegreque amatorculos invenimus.*

speaking or even non-existent characters who are referenced so that the courtesans can speak their minds and point to their own success where others have failed. Like Philippa and Cleostrata, they critique spectacles not meant for them, applying their own theatrical knowledge and strictures to the cosmetic efforts of others and assuming, interestingly, that male viewers and customers will employ these same standards (on which more below).

Scapha takes a turn attacking a smelly scapegoat in order to illustrate her point that it is best for women to smell of nothing at all. Her target is *veteres*, old women who use makeup and perfumes to conceal their flaws and make themselves seem younger and more desirable:

quia ecastor mulier recte olet ubi nihil olet.
nam istae veteres, quae se unguentis unctitant, interpoles,
vetulae, edentulae, quae vitia corporis fuco occulunt,
ubi sese sudor cum unguentis consociavit, ilico
itidem olent quasi quom una multa iura confudit coquos.
quid olant nescias, nisi id unum ut male olere intellegas.⁸⁰

For, by god, a woman smells right when she doesn't smell at all.
Now as for those old crones who perfume themselves with ointments, those fakes,
toothless old hags who conceal their bodies' flaws with paint—
when their sweat has mixed itself with the ointments, straightaway
they smell exactly like when a cook has thrown together many sauces.
You can't tell what they smell like, except for this: you know they stink.

The *veteres* are akin to Lysidamus in their laughable effort to perfume their way into a new comic role, transitioning from *uxores dotatae* to women who are young and alluring, only to land halfway between the two and smelling terrible.⁸¹ Her emphasis on smell highlights again the idea that, from a theatrical perspective, odor is insufficient when it comes to assuming a new identity, too obvious not to be noticed, but too weak to completely cover up what is underneath. These women are not like Philematium: they are old, wrinkled, saggy, toothless, and sweaty; as Dutsch summarizes, “the discontinuity between the deteriorating body and its refurbished surface makes

⁸⁰ *Most.* 273-78. For a similarly noxious Roman matron, cf. Juvenal 6.461-74.

⁸¹ It is possible that these women are not *dotatae* but old (ex-)courtesans like Scapha, but Philolaches' response to her criticism, on which see below p.59, suggests that we are meant to think of them as old wives.

an image-obsessed matron look like the costumed and masked actor playing a prostitute on the Plautine stage.”⁸² Yet what Plautus highlights is not their visual impact, but how they assault the *nose*: the most prominent feature of their costume is perfume, which can only do so much to establish a new identity, as we have seen. Like Lysidamus, these women misunderstand the proper way to construct one’s character based on theatrical convention, but while Lysidamus’ perfumes clashed with his white hair and aged body, the visual signs of his proper role, the *veteres*’ olfactory coating (*unguentis*) instead meets and then combines with (*consociavit*) their natural stench (*sudor*), which they have neglected to eliminate. The result is something so abhorrent that it is unidentifiable as anything other than just plain bad (*male*). While donning a second mask may create the visual illusion of success (*quae vitia corporis fuco occulunt*), the smell of their original selves lingers, frustrating their efforts at becoming desirable again by both revealing their former identity and contaminating their new one. As mentioned above, odor is at the same time too theatrical and not theatrical enough: it is not enough to make these women young and desirable again because it cannot completely overpower their natural body odor, but the resulting mixture is so obvious that it calls attention to itself and the incongruity it represents. If the Plautine courtesan character is “quintessentially a physical appearance,”⁸³ it is easy to see why these women fail, being rather quintessentially olfactory nuisances. In the end, perfumes are as inappropriate for these unattractive women as they are for the beautiful Philematium, and though Scapha remarks that a woman who denies her age needs a mirror (*mulier quae se*

⁸² Dutsch (2015) 29-30. “Roman matrons,” she goes on, “like comic actors, stage their attractiveness.” Both this article and Richlin (2015) provide useful insights into the physical portrayal of women on the Roman stage, the relationship between *cultus* and costume, and the significance of the male actor underneath it all.

⁸³ Wyke (1994) 135.

suamque aetatem spernit, speculo ei usus est, 250), it seems that what she actually needs is a more objective nose, which the old woman is more than happy to provide.⁸⁴

Scapha uses this example to illustrate to Philematium her claim that a woman smells best when she smells like nothing, but the women she chooses to vilify are not courtesans, and the caricature is humorous because it must have appealed to husbands in the audience stuck with dowered wives at home.⁸⁵ Adelphasium, on the other hand, assesses a pack of low-class, dirty prostitutes, fellow professionals who are, however, on an entirely different and far lower level:

ADEL: maneat pol. mane.
turba est nunc apud aram. an te ibi vis inter istas vorsarier
prosedas, pistorum amicas, reginas alicarias,
miseras schoeno delibutas servilicolas sordidas,
quae tibi olant stabulum statumque, sellam et sessibulum merum,
quas adeo hau quisquam umquam liber tetigit neque duxit domum,
servolorum sordidulorum scorta diobolaria?⁸⁶

Let [our master] wait; hold up.
Now there's a crowd around the altar. Surely you don't want yourself
mingling amongst those common prostitutes, girlfriends of bakers, queens of the mill,
miserable, filthy slavelings, smeared with rush,
who come at you with the stench of the brothel and street solicitation, the smell of the
stool and bare chair,
whom hardly any free person would touch or take home,
the two-bit whores of filthy little slaves?

Despite its familiar obsession with female presentation, this passage is actually unusual in several ways. For one, while the previous passages distinguished between visual presentation and scent (Acropolistis, Lysidamus) or natural and artificial odors (Scapha's *veteres*), Adelphasium instead differentiates between two types of external odor: those the women apply purposely, and those which seem to rub off on them, creating the sense that there is nothing natural about these

⁸⁴ As Dutsch (2015) 29 observes, "No one, except for the woman herself, is deceived [by the application of perfumes]..."

⁸⁵ Cf. Philolaches' remark at 280-1: *verum illud esse maxima adeo pars vestrorum intellegit, / quibus anus domi sunt uxores, quae vos dote meruerunt.*

⁸⁶ *Poen.* 264-70.

prostitutes at all. The first scent she touches on is the one the prostitutes apply on purpose: they coat themselves with *schoeno*, an aromatic rush used to season wine, rather than any of the perfumes traditionally associated with erotic love.⁸⁷ While courtesans like Adelphasium and Anterastilis spend countless hours washing and polishing in order to achieve a proper illusion of ideal feminine beauty, the prostitutes are “smeared” (*delibutas*), a single messy and imprecise-sounding word with no hint of refinement or moderation. Together the words suggest a poor attempt at self-improvement in imitation of high-class courtesans, but in the end the women are *miseras* and *sordidas*, as well as sticky, stinky, and unalluring. Adelphasium’s emphasis on the dirtiness which defines the prostitutes, their work, and even their single tool of betterment makes one wonder whether the rush had any effect at all.⁸⁸ The description anticipates Thais of Martial’s *Epigrams*, who similarly uses a variety of sticky and malodorous methods to cover her own body odor, a practice which fails but also leaves Thais, like the prostitutes, less desirable than ever.⁸⁹

Whereas Martial describes the underlying odor Thais is trying to conceal, Adelphasium goes on to list yet more external odors. As she does, the theatrical nature of olfactory identity takes an unexpected turn in that the prostitutes become their costume or, to read Adelphasium’s words even more literally, the props and set, and by extension their profession itself. While a courtesan’s goal is to distract from the fact that her relationships with her clients are ultimately business transactions rather than actual love affairs, the defining smell of the prostitutes is—prostitution. The next line of Adelphasium’s tirade (*tibi olant stabulum statumque sellam et*

⁸⁷ Cf. Maurach 1975 *ad loc.*: “Dies Parfum war ein Binsenextrakt, dem Kalmusgeruch vergleichbar, Varro, L.L.7,64, Fest. 328f M.; 442,7 LINDSAY.”

⁸⁸ For the association of prostitutes and dirtiness, see Horace *Sat.* 1.2.30, Propertius 2.23, Seneca *de Vita Beata* 7.3, and Juvenal 6.131-2. For ancient ideas of pollution more generally, see Parker 1983, Richlin 1983 *passim*, Bradley and Stow (eds.) 2012.

⁸⁹ Martial *Ep.* 6.93; this passage will be further discussed in Chapter 3.

sessibulum merum) suggests that the women's olfactory identity is shaped as much by their profession as their conscious efforts, and questions whether they have any identity at all outside of this profession. The alliterative description, which hints at a sort of desperate attempt to use every trick in the book all in one go, recalls Scapha's item-by-item rejection of the elements which typically make up a courtesan. These women, however, are composed not of jewelry, clothing, and cosmetics, but only odors, and what they smell of is prostitution itself, its physical accoutrements and methods of solicitation.⁹⁰ This description might even encompass the smell of their customers, or imply a combination of all these elements which creates something worse—anything other than the feminine ideal the courtesans are so keen to achieve. This is not the failure to misunderstand theatricality which makes an old man think perfumes will suffice to change his identity. Instead it implies that the prostitutes, as exemplified by their odors, are entirely artificial: along with rush, their identity is defined by whatever smells happen to rub off on them, scents over which they have no control. If any transformation takes place in these women, it seems in fact to be a *loss* of identity. The odors which typify them make them, in Adelphasium's eyes, part of the scenery as much as characters in their own right, women defined not by the illusion they create but the blatant reality which subsumes them.

Like Cleostrata and Philippa, both Scapha and Adelphasium assess spectacles not intended for them, bringing their knowledge as performers of feminine beauty to bear against women whose odors signal a failure to live up to the courtesans' standards. While both Scapha and Adelphasium have a strong interest in how scent reflects or transforms the identity of these women, at the end of the day they are not husbands or potential customers, and their opinions

⁹⁰ Maurach 1975 *ad loc.*: “Erheiternd VALLAs Interpretation: *statumque sellam*: quia a nimis stando et considendo malus provenit odor.” It is worth noting, in fact, how many times in Adelphasium's speech the prostitutes are identified based on their relationships and work rather than as women themselves: they are *pistorum amicas*, *reginas alicarias*, and *servolorum sordidulorum scorta diobolaria*. Compare this with Scapha, who seems bent on characterizing the *veteres* in as much physical and sensory detail as possible.

reflect a professional interest born from their own awareness of how female identity is best created. These two eavesdropping scenes, however, provide the audience with young lovers, Philolaches and Agorastocles, to act as foils to the women and either to accept or reject, from a man's perspective, their strictures on feminine beauty. Unfortunately, the two men are just like any other young men in love: they see no faults in anything their beloveds do, and are essentially useless critics. Philolaches' approval or disapproval of Scapha's sentiments, for example, is based not on whether he, as a man, agrees, but on whether Scapha is complimenting or insulting Philematium and approving or disapproving of her relationship with him. He begins the scene in support of the old woman, who flatters Philematium for her beauty, then threatens her and calls her a criminal when she advises the courtesan not to expend all her energy on him alone, then takes up a tone of praise once more when the discussion of Philematium's attractiveness resumes. His only actual criticism of feminine *cultus* confirms Scapha's diatribe against poorly made-up old women, but for this he appeals not to his own experience, but the audience's: *verum illuc est: maxuma adeo pars vostrorum intellegit, / quibus anus domi sunt uxores, quae vos dote meruerunt* ("true that: a great part of you surely know it, who have old wives at home who bought you with their dowries," 280-1). Whether Scapha is actually giving advice a male lover could endorse is therefore hard to say: Philolaches endorses Philematium no matter what, just as Agorastocles can find no fault with Adelphasium.⁹¹ Though young lovers at times prove themselves surprisingly cognizant of their own comic roles and are of course painfully aware that their relationships with courtesans are based on their ability to pay, their ultimate concern with how these women present themselves seems to be largely limited to their "faithfulness." The fact that their natural beauty might be the result of artifice never crosses their minds, even when it is

⁹¹ Agorastocles' slave Milphio reacts strongly when Adelphasium insults slaves who hire foul-smelling prostitutes (270), but he has nothing more constructive to say about her and her sister's grooming discussion than Agorastocles does.

discussed or acted out right in front of them. In the end the courtesans are harsher critics of their fellow women by far, assessing them as professionals in the art of feminine theatrics. Though looking past the artifice that is *cultus* demonstrates “how an apprentice lover and spectator can learn to suspend disbelief and enjoy the show,”⁹² the courtesans here see the show in terms of its constituent parts, whether those parts indicate the clash of two identities in one person or the loss of identity entirely.

Conclusion

Many of the themes from this chapter come together in a final example, a scene from the *Menaechmi* in which the parasite Peniculus plays two markers of identity, costume and scent, off of each other. In doing so, he also contrasts the reality of a matron (and her odors) with the idealized artificiality of a courtesan. After stealing a *palla* from his wife as a gift for the courtesan Erotion, Menaechmus asks Peniculus to sniff it and tell him what it smells like. The parasite recoils, explaining that smelling the bottom of a woman’s garment is hazardous (*summum oportet olfactare vestimentum muliebre, / nam ex istoc loco spurcatur nasum odore illutili*, 167-8).⁹³ He agrees, however, to sniff at the top half of the *palla* which, he announces, smells like *furtum*, *scortum*, *prandium* (“theft, a prostitute, and lunch,” 171). The parasite makes an effort to assert the power of the husband to do what he wishes over Menaechmus’ absent wife by radically reinterpreting the scents of her *palla* to reflect the men’s afternoon agenda rather

⁹² Dutsch (2015) 23.

⁹³ For the smells of the lower half of the *palla*, see Lilja (1972a) 143 n.1, who assumes the smell comes from urine, and Richlin (1983) 26, whose discussion of the foul qualities attributed to the female genitalia seems far more applicable to this scene: they were “almost exclusively described as disgusting—squashy and foul in texture and constitution (*lutus*, “muck,” Diehl 615; cf. VA “Quid Hoc Novi Est?” 26-37), hairy or depilated (Diehl 691, Mart. 3.74), salty and rank (Mart. 11.21). Indeed, the castigation of female genitalia forms one of the chief concerns of invective against old women.” See also Richlin (1983) 67-9, 113-9, and 122-3; Adams (1982), esp. 80-1; Henderson (1991) 30-45 and 130-47.

than the reality of Menaechmus' married life. Peniculus' reinterpretation of the garment's scent plays upon the subjectivity of odors seen in the second section, but it also suggests that the meaning of individual costume pieces could be just as open to reinterpretation. The *palla*, which appears to have been standard female-character garb regardless of specific role,⁹⁴ is stripped of its link to a matron and made instead to represent a courtesan, all through a simple reference to how it smells. As we have seen, this method of changing identity does not have a high rate of success; however, with no one around to question Peniculus' claim, smell is sufficient in the minds of the two men to indicate the garment's new purpose, just as perfumes satisfied Lysidamus' desire for a new role. The ease with which the *palla*'s "identity" shifts is all the more humorous given that Peniculus is parodying the idea of innate odor discussed in the first section and also put forth by Philippa. The joke, of course, is that he has simply invented these particular "truth-telling" odors to reflect the truth as he and Menaechmus would prefer it to be.

Peniculus attempts to deny the wife both her power and her identity by claiming that her matronly odors can be disregarded and replaced, but his refusal to sniff at the bottom of the *palla* suggests otherwise. His line about the odors "down there" recalls the foul scent of unadorned, "natural" women mentioned by Anterastilis; for the parasite, the scent issuing from the lower half of the *palla* is not just disgusting, it is distinctly feminine. Moreover, it is so powerful that it cannot be washed away (*illutili*), unlike Anterastilis' salted-fish odor: this is a true innate odor, and Peniculus' only way around it is to ignore it and move his nose elsewhere. In doing so, the parasite not only reinvents the wife's *palla* as a prostitute's garment, he also shifts his focus from real to theatrical femininity. The wife's complete lack of desirability is marked by the fact that

⁹⁴ Cf. Duckworth (1952) 89 and 91. The scene gains additional humor from the fact that Menaechmus himself dons the garment in order to sneak it out of the house, so that the *palla* is in fact pulling triple duty (*Men.* 149, 190). See Leach (1969) 42 and Dutsch (2008) 177-9 for the emasculation of Menaechmus, and Leach (1969) 34-5 for Menaechmus' attempts to recast his theft of the garment as a Herculean feat.

the one womanly scent which Peniculus *cannot* remake into something pleasant is the foul and not at all erotic scent of female genitalia clinging to the lower end of the *palla*. That is, the two men's romantic afternoon has nothing at all to do with the actual scents identifying female physicality, which Peniculus characterizes as infectious, permanent, and disgusting. In the face of this enduring and foul odor, all they can do is imagine an idealized erotic encounter scented with *furtum*, *scortum*, and *prandium*—perhaps not the perfumes Philematium was considering in the *Mostellaria*, but still far and away more pleasant than anything the wife, identified by her stench, has to offer.

Peniculus avoids the *palla*'s bottom because he fears more than just encountering a stench. His concern, rather, is with the stain produced by that malodor on any nose unfortunate enough to come too close: *spurcatur nasum odore illutili*. The power of scent not just to convey identity, but to do so in a way that actually *transfers* some of that identity to the sniffer is one we have not encountered in this chapter, but which constitutes one of Martial's central concerns in Chapter 3, where identification at the risk of contamination is a constant problem for the poet. The theme of contamination itself, meanwhile, forms the basis of Chapter 2, and it is these scents, which not only stain but even kill, to which I now turn.

Chapter 2

Smelling Strife: Death and Decay in Latin Epic

And those that leave their valiant bones in France,
Dying like men, though buried in your dunghills,
They shall be famed; for there the sun shall greet them,
And draw their honours reeking up to heaven;
Leaving their earthly parts to choke your clime,
The smell whereof shall breed a plague in France.
Mark then abounding valour in our English,
That being dead, like to the bullet's grazing,
Break out into a second course of mischief,
Killing in relapse of mortality.

--King Henry V¹

Introduction

Death in the ancient world was an occasion for encountering a wide spectrum of odors. Funeral preparations brought members of the deceased's family into contact with the smells of decay, but also perfumes and spices designed to mask the natural scents of the body.² Cypress, placed outside the doors of houses in mourning, smelled strongly,³ and the roses and other

¹ Shakespeare, *Henry V* 4.3.102-111.

² Hope and Huskinson (2011) Chr. 2. Cf. Pliny *NH* 12.41.83; Statius *Silvae* 2.6.84-93; Martial 10.97 and 11.54. For an extreme example, see Plutarch's *Life of Sulla* 38, where a woman provided so much incense for the funeral that images of Sulla and a lictor were molded from it. On death in the ancient world, see Toynbee 1971, Hinard (ed.) 1987 and 1995, Davies 2000, Hope and Marshall 2000, Hallam and Hockey 2001, Hope 2007, Edwards 2007, Erasmo 2008, Hope 2009, Hope and Huskinson (eds.) 2011, Mirto 2012.

³ Pliny *NH* 16.60.139. Servius *ad Aen.* 3.64 claims that the branches warned *pontifices* not to enter the house lest they become polluted themselves. On death-pollution see Lindsay 2000, Bendlin 2007, Šterbenc Erker (2011) 41-44.

flowers arranged around the corpse or at the grave would have provided their own fragrances.¹ Grave cult activity and festivals for the dead would also have been redolent with the odors of flowers and spices.²

Death was an odorous affair even in the most comfortable and sanitary of places, but not every person had the luxury to die peacefully at home surrounded by a ready supply of perfumes and flowers.³ This chapter moves from the humor of Roman comedy to literary depictions of the ominous odors of the underworld and the supernatural, as well as the unpleasant scents of death and decay which accompanied plague and battle. For these odors I turn to the Roman epics of Virgil, Lucan, Valerius Flaccus, Statius, and Silius Italicus.⁴ I have selected this genre in part because smell and epic have traditionally been considered incompatible on the assumption that such a high and serious genre is an inappropriate place for the gruesome or especially foul. M. Gwyn Morgan notes that “the stench of physical decomposition had for centuries been thought an inappropriate theme for epic poetry.”⁵ Saara Lilja’s overview of the scents of Greek and Roman epic suggests that the two most prominent foul smells are those of sulphur and the

¹ Hope (2007) 98. Cf. Propertius 1.17.22 and 3.16.23-4; Tacitus *Hist.* 2.55; *CIL* 6.10248 = Dessau 8366. See Juvenal 7.207ff for the presence of roses in the urn.

² See Caseau (1994) 185-193 for odor-related grave offerings and care of tombs, as well as Potter (2014) 36-44. For the scents of sacrifice more broadly, see Weddle (2011) Chr. 1.

³ On dying in the Roman home, see Noy 2011.

⁴ The dates of birth and death, and of the publication of these epics, are not all certain. Virgil lived from 70-19 BC, and the *Aeneid* was published after his death. The *Bellum Civile* was likewise published after the death of Lucan (39-65 AD). Valerius Flaccus’ *Argonautica* is considered a Flavian epic, and his death is placed sometime in the 80s-90s AD; all else is uncertain. Statius lived from approximately 45-95 AD, and his *Thebaid* was published near the end of his life, perhaps 91/2. Silius Italicus (26-101 AD) perhaps began his *Punica* in the late 80s, but an exact publication date is unknown. For further details, see Conte 1994.

⁵ Morgan (1992) 28. Epic is not the only genre to which this restriction has been applied. Morgan suggests that at *Historiae* 2.70, Tacitus deliberately omits olfactory words in order to prevent his readers from experiencing a feeling of disgust, which would distract from the reactions he is trying to elicit. He contrasts this with Suetonius’ description of the same scene at *Vit.* 10.3, which does include an olfactory component. Suetonius, however, is “writing biography... [and therefore] under no obligation to avoid mentioning odors” (27). In a similar vein, Dinter 2012 addresses the allegation that the increasing violence in Roman epic was one characteristic of “the baroque embellishment of decadent Imperial Latin literature” (38). He attempts to “improve the bad reputation of the poets’ fondness for dismembered body parts in particular” (38), another aspect of battle descriptions supposedly too disgusting for epic.

Harpies; her single paragraph on bad smells in epic attests to the impression most scholars have concerning the subject.⁶ Yet Lucan and Statius amply prove that the gruesome can and does appear in epic, and one aspect of that gruesomeness is stench.⁷ Given the underappreciated role of scents in epic, I aim to show the various ways in which these epic poets make use of the characteristics of odor in order to explore the world of death and dying.

This chapter focuses on the boundary-crossing and contaminating abilities of scents, the power of odor both to spread widely and touch physically, to inspire disgust as well as fear.⁸ The scents featured here include the decay of corpses, the pollution of the Harpies, and the mephitic exhalations of caverns and groves believed to be entrances to the underworld. Whereas Plautus and, we will see, Martial, confuse the idea of “good” and “bad” odor by suggesting that a good scent might actually imply something negative, descriptions of foul smells in epic play upon the fact that smell is, at its core, “the sense of binary judgments,”⁹ inspiring an automatic feeling of either attraction or repulsion.¹⁰ The odors here are *bad*. It is important to note, however, that the specific scents themselves (what exactly does a Harpy smell like?) are less important than the idea that these gruesome odors are also boundary-violating and polluting. They are not just

⁶ Lilja (1972a) 215-17. She calls the odor of sulphur “an impressive feature of the landscape” (217). See also Edlund-Berry 2006. The Harpies will be discussed below.

⁷ Fuhrmann (1968) 50: “Kein Werk der römischen Literatur ist so reich an grausigen und ekelregenden Partien wie die *Pharsalia* Lukans.”

⁸ As Herz (2012) 215 explains, “[S]cent is the most powerful for eliciting emotion, because of its uniquely intimate connection to the neurological seat of emotional processing...” For disgust generally, see Miller 1997, Menninghaus 2003, Kelly 2011, and Herz 2012. See Kaster (2005) Chr. 5 for Roman *fastidium*, on which more below. Fuhrmann 1968 discusses the role of disgust and the gruesome in Latin poetry.

⁹ Clements (2015) 46-47: “smell is both the sense of binary judgments (its effects registered primarily in terms of the polar extremes of attraction or disgust), but also of characteristic “incompleteness”, bringing with it an indeterminacy that transcends boundaries, permeates bodily limits, and effects a unity of perceiver and perceived, a taking “over by otherness”, or an atmosphere of something shared.”

¹⁰ Cf. Kaster (2005) 108-9, who remarks that the mere thought of something noxious is enough to arouse disgust—the fact that a reader cannot actually smell or see a battlefield, for example, is immaterial. For example, of the smell of crows in the *Mātāngalīlā*, McHugh (2012) 89 notes, “this might be a case of a certain odor being mentioned, not so much because it was often smelled, but because it was considered innately significant, even if most people had not smelled it.” The same principle is no doubt at work in Latin epic, even if a reader is unfamiliar with the stench of a corpse or a sulphurous cave.

aesthetic, they *act* even as they create atmosphere. This chapter demonstrates how the epic poets capitalize on the aversion inspired by foul-smelling and widespread contagion in order to express different ideas about death and dying: fear in the face of death, disgust at the presence of gore and decay, horror at the carnage wrought by civil war, indignation at the ignobility of dying of disease. In the end, we might say that odor is not so much un-epic as *unheroic*, representative of the shameful, fearful, and vile.

My first section focuses less on real deaths than on the frightful and threatening *idea* of death. As such, the passages discussed in this section are drawn from mythology and the supernatural,¹¹ specifically the Harpies from the *Aeneid* and *Argonautica* and entrances to the underworld in the *Aeneid* and *Punica*.¹² In the same way that these creatures and locations are frightening but ultimately fictitious or exaggerated, so too do they convey the gruesome characteristics or ominous encroachment of death without bringing the reader face-to-face with its stark reality. Odor's peculiar connection with touch and its ability to infect dominate the descriptions of the Harpies, whose essence is described in terms of a reeking, suffusive slime. As the physical embodiment of rot and decay, the Harpies in effect speed up the process of death by turning whatever food they touch into nothing more than rotting gore, as though it were the remains of a corpse—that is, the possible fate of both Phineus and the Trojans. Stench produces a

¹¹ Copious examples of the connection between odor and the nonhuman can be found in descriptions of the gods, both in Greek and Latin literature. In these cases the scents are positive, fragrant, and sometimes seductive. Familiar examples include Bacchus, whose presence in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* is indicated when *olent murraeque crocique* ("scents of myrrh and saffron are present," 4.393); and Hera, who ἀλείψατο δὲ λίπ' ἐλαίῳ / ἄμβροσίῳ ἔδανῳ ("anointed herself with ambrosial, richly fragrant oil") at *Iliad* 14.171-2. Atchley (1909) 74 has suggested a connection between the burning of incense and fragrant woods as offerings to the gods, and the odors of the gods themselves. See also Lohmeyer 1919, Lilja (1972a) 25ff, Prost 2008, Bodiou and Mehl (2008) 142-150, and Clements 2015. Interestingly, while the gods were depicted as fragrant, Lilja (1972a) 29 notes that "Roman poets do not often characterize sacred places as fragrant", citing Propertius 3.17.27 and *Aen* 6.658 as exceptions.

¹² The *nekylia* extends as far back as the *Odyssey*, and ἄρπυιαι also appears in at *Od.* 1.241 and 20.77, of whirlwinds. At Hesiod *Theo.* 265-9 the Harpies are goddesses of the wind (Aello and Okypete), unthreatening or at least not foul food-snatchers. See Paratore 1978 *ad Aen.* 3.214. Geographical locations associated with the underworld were, of course, real, but their ominous auras and sulphuric fumes inspired the idea that they opened onto hell.

very physical experience of the most grisly aspects of death, and its power to spread and contaminate suggests how easily the threat of the Harpies could taint not only the heroes but also their quests. Emanations from the underworld, in contrast, resonate with the human fear of death in the abstract by playing upon odor's disregard for boundaries and its link to the environment. Rather than associate it with gruesome filth, Virgil and Silius here identify odor with air, and its ability to reach beyond the underworld and strike down the living suggests both a dangerous physicality and an ominous, widespread threat. The idea of the earth breathing forth the stench of death sets the tone for these passages, characterizing ominous and sinister locations designed to set the reader on edge, rather like music in a horror movie. Smells emanating from the land and polluting the air, moreover, will also feature prominently in the second section on plague and war. There we will see how the environment not only releases deadly odors, it also absorbs and redoubles them, contributing to the pollution caused by human crime and war.

The second section shifts from the threat of death to its gruesome reality and from mythology to history (or, in the case of Statius, mythology which resonates with history). The odors of this section are born of sickness and human warfare, particularly civil war, and are derived from Lucan's *Bellum Civile*, Silius' *Punica*, and Statius' *Thebaid*. Again we will see how these poets play upon the polluting and permeating qualities of odor in order to consider the horrors of civil war, the unjust treatment of the war dead, and the ignobility of an unheroic death. The odors of both plague and war are strongly linked to the environment, just as, in the first section, the stench of death seeped up from gloomy caves and groves leading to the world of the dead. In the case of plague, the mephitic vapors rising up from the earth and hanging in the air cause human deaths which in turn contribute to the pollution when their unburied corpses begin to rot. I suggest that for Lucan, the all-encompassing contagion represented by the plague, and

especially by the deadly “breath” of the hostile environment, mirrors the ubiquitous harm caused by civil war. For Silius, in contrast, plague is the opposite of war, and in his description of the noisome air and scorched earth we see especially prominently the connection between smell and the unheroic—in this case, dying of the plague rather than in battle. The passages on civil war from the *Bellum Civile* and *Thebaid*, meanwhile, intensify the blending together of human and environmental pollution hinted at in the plague passages. Human corpses rot away and pollute the land and air, which become contributing parties themselves as they intensify the stench of death and breathe the horrors of civil strife back upon the survivors. This blurring of the line between human and landscape suggests the impossibility of determining guilt in a civil conflict where everyone is both victim and aggressor. Furthermore, as the miasma continues to spread and contaminate, it becomes clear that civil war does not end when the battle is over, but instead lingers on, just like a foul stench in the air.

1. Nature and the supernatural

The scope of epic allows it to explore the human condition and the political and social realities of the culture which produced it. At the same time, however, it brings its heroes into contact with the un-real, monsters, locations, and scenarios which nevertheless speak to human concerns and fears. The Harpies, first as storm goddesses and eventually as ravenous polluting bird-women, are connected with death which first takes the form of violent wind and becomes more and more foul and defiling as the tradition develops. The Harpy narratives of both Virgil and Valerius Flaccus ultimately derive from Book 2 of Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica*.¹³ Interestingly, Apollonius’ description is almost purely olfactory. Three times he mentions an

¹³ *Argo*. 2.209-300.

attendant stench: first the narrator relates how the Harpies pour a putrid stench (μυδαλέην ὀδμὴν χέον, 191) upon any food left remaining to Phineus, a stench so foul no one can even stand nearby, let alone actually consume the leftovers. Phineus himself repeats this claim in his address to the Argonauts: τυτθὸν δ' ἦν ἄρα δήποτ' ἐδητύος ἄμμι λίπωσιν, / πνεῖ τόδε μυδαλέον τε καὶ οὐ τλητὸν μένος ὀδμῆς (“If they ever leave me a bit of food, it emits a powerful stench, putrid and unbearable,” 228-9). And as predicted, when the Harpies do arrive, they swoop in, snatch away the food, and fly off, leaving an intolerable odor behind them (ὀδμὴ δὲ δυσάσχετος αὔθι λέλειπτο, 272).¹⁴ Noteworthy here is not only the primacy given to odor, but also the fact that it applies for the most part to the remains of the food left behind by the monsters, rather than to the Harpies themselves. Even though they “pour a putrid stench” over the unconsumed food and are clearly the cause of its stink in the other two passages as well, Apollonius’ phrasing suggests more strongly the contamination of the food than that the bird-women themselves are actually foul-smelling. It is their polluting *effect* which matters, the rot and decay left behind which will continue to punish Phineus even after the creatures are gone.¹⁵ Smell here is as much a sign of death and decay as a cause of it, an idea we will see throughout this chapter.

Virgil in *Aeneid* Book 3 and then Valerius in *Argonautica* Book 4 take Apollonius’ odor-heavy but comparatively mild description and develop the Harpies into a disgusting nightmare that assaults multiple senses at once:¹⁶

Tristius haud illis monstrum, nec saevior ulla
 pestis et ira deum Stygiis sese extulit undis. 215

¹⁴ Green 2007 *ad locos* is silent about the sensory aspects of this episode. Felton (2013) 405n. 3 notes that Apollonius, focusing on smell, does not actually describe the Harpies’ physical appearance at all except to mention their beaks at 188. In this way they are actually more akin to their wind-goddess predecessors in the *Odyssey* and *Theogony* than the bird-women depicted later. On the physical makeup of the Harpies, see Felton (2013) 408-10. For artistic depictions of this scene, see Smith 1892-3, Blome 1978, and Kefalidou 2008.

¹⁵ Even more so because he has little other option than to eat the mephitic food.

¹⁶ Foulness is of course not uncommon for mythological monsters. Cf. *Thebaid* 1.106-9, where Tisiphone breathes *igneus atro / ore vapor, quo longa sitis morbique famesque / et...mors una* and her skin is *suffusa veneno /...ac sanie gliscit*.

Virginei volucrum voltus, foedissima ventris
proluviis, uncaeque manus, et pallida semper
ora fame.

...

At subitae horrifico lapsu de montibus adsunt 225
Harpyiae, et magnis quatiunt clangoribus alas,
diripiuntque dapes, contactuque omnia foedant
immundo; tum vox taetrum dira inter odorem. (*Aeneid*)¹⁷

There is hardly a more miserable monster than these, nor did any fiercer pest and divine wrath ever raise itself from the Stygian waves. The birds' faces are those of virgins, but a most filthy discharge issues from their stomachs, their hands are taloned, their faces are always pale with hunger...

But suddenly the Harpies make their terrible descent from the hills and shake their wings with a mighty clamor; they tear apart the feast and foul everything with their filthy touch, and a horrible cry rises up amidst the loathsome stench.

diripiunt verruntque dapes foedataque turbant
pocula, saevit odor surgitque miserrima pugna, 455
parque mihi monstrique fames. sprevere quod omnes
pollueruntque manu quodque unguibus excidit atris
has mihi fert in luce moras.

...nec prodita pestis
ante, sed in mediis dapibus videre volucres.
fragrat acerbus odor patriique exspirat Averni
halitus, unum omnes incessere planctibus, unum
infestare manus. inhiat Cocytia nubes 495
luxurians ipsoque ferens fastidia visu.
tum sola conluvie atque inlulis stramina mensis
foeda rigant... (*Argonautica*)¹⁸

They tear apart and overturn the banquets and knock the befouled cups around. Their stench rages and a most pitiable battle arises, for the monsters' hunger is equal to mine. What all have scorned and polluted by their touch, whatever has fallen from their black talons—this prolongs my time among the living.

...nor does the pestilence arise beforehand, but they see the birds in the very midst of the feast. A harsh stench wafts abroad and the breath of their paternal Avernus rushes forth. One man they assault with blows, one alone the band molests. A deadly cloud spreads wide, ever-increasing, causing

¹⁷ *Aen.* 3.214-18, 225-8.

¹⁸ *Argo.* 4.491-8.

disgust by its mere appearance. Then they soak the ground and blankets with filthy refuse, the tables spoiled.

As Nelis observes, “[i]n general, those aspects which Apollonius leaves to the imagination of readers already familiar with the Harpies are set out explicitly by Vergil in a concentrated, brilliantly repulsive description which, in comparison with the model, deepens the atmosphere of horror and fear.”¹⁹ The same could also be said of Valerius. Both poets’ descriptions of the Harpies emphasize their foul nature, fierceness, and fearsome otherness. Deadly and pestilential monsters, they are caught between woman, animal, and god, and are even characterized as a *pestis*, the plague incarnate.²⁰ Phineus repeatedly stresses their violence, likening them to “a black tornado-cloud” (*niger intorto ceu turbine nimbus*, 452).²¹ In Valerius even their stench rages (*saevit*) as they despoil the old man’s meals. These vivid descriptions outline the essence of the Harpies: they are violent and unnatural and thus polluters; plunderers but also defilers.²² The sense of threat presented by ferocious bird-monsters is balanced by a feeling of revulsion in the face of such a gore-dripping *pestis*.²³ The Harpies inspire a frightful blend of fear and disgust

¹⁹ Nelis (2001) 33. See pp. 32-38 for Virgil’s overall reception of this scene from Apollonius, and Murgatroyd (2009) *ad* 4.423-32ff for Valerius’. Lesueur 1978 provides a comparative study of all three episodes, describing Valerius’ poem as “une reproduction condensée de celui d’ Apollonios et accommodée au goût virgilien” (47).

²⁰ Cf. Felton (2013) 414: the Harpies are “liminal beings who cross the boundaries of female, animal, and monster.” See also Rabel (1985) 318, Khan (1996) 131. For the polluting power of the unnatural, see Douglas 1966. Murgatroyd 2009 *ad* 4.482 counts five instances of plague imagery in Valerius’ Harpy narrative (lines 431, 482, 491, 529, and 551), all using the words *pestis* and *lues*. Cf. *Aen.* 3.214-5 (...*nec saevior ulla / pestis et ira deum*...), the only explicit comparison of the plague and Harpies in Virgil, but perhaps the inspiration for Valerius’ emphasis on the plague.

²¹ Cf. Apollonius *Argo.* 2.267. On the Harpies as storm and wind, and the relationship to the storm which has just driven the Trojans ashore, see Horsfall 2006 *ad Aen.* 3.192ff, Murgatroyd 2009 *ad Argo.* 4.452.

²² Otis (1963) 258: “[Virgil] accordingly emphasizes simply their uncanny, unearthly frightfulness.” Casali (2007) 206 notes that, “The connection Celaeno-κελαινός-κηλῖς is likely also relevant to Vergil’s emphasis upon Celaeno’s filthiness and on the act of “contamination,” “dirtying” (κηλιδόω).”

²³ Felton 2013 suggests that the unspecified *proluviis* of *Aen.* 3.217 is menstrual blood.

because they bring with them the most physical and disgusting characteristics of death, then spread them even further.²⁴

These emotions are aroused by a cacophony of sensory details, yet the strongest impression left by these descriptions is one of physical pollution, a tactile dirtiness that covers everything, regardless of whether the source of filth is solid, liquid, or gas.²⁵ The Harpies *are* decay, the process of rot and decomposition which accompanies death, embodied by creatures which cause this same process to occur instantly in whatever food they touch.²⁶ In Virgil we see this especially in the gore dripping from their stomachs (*foedissima ventris / proluviae*) and the squalor that accompanies their touch (*contactuque.../ immundo*). The adjective *taetrum* (“loathsome”), characterizing their stench, also carries connotations of the physically offensive, calling to mind an odor born of rot.²⁷ In Valerius, the blanket of mephitic air which spreads widely (*Cocytia nubes luxurians*) is so dark and polluted that it can be clearly seen and causes disgust even before it is smelled (*ipsoque...fastidia visu*). His Harpies’ last act echoes Virgil: they soak everything with refuse (*conluviae.../ foeda*), the pervasiveness of the muck suggested by the distance between the words.²⁸

In the *Argonautica*, odor in particular is an active defiling force; Valerius’ descriptions of stench make it the subject of various verbs, and all of the phrases in question, as Murgatroyd

²⁴ On fear versus disgust, see Herz (2012) 80, where she argues that fear is instinctual while disgust requires attention and mental processing (X is disgusting because it is Y, and Y is threatening to me).

²⁵ Interestingly, in Apollonius, Phineas himself is the dirty one: lines 200-201 describe his body as caked with filth.

²⁶ Note that while in the *Argo* the Harpies directly assault Phineas, in the *Aeneid* they are interested only in the food. Nelis (2001) 33-4 connects Virgil’s innovation here to *Odyssey* 12, in which Odysseus’ men slaughter the cattle of the Sun. Many scholars consider the Trojans’ behavior on the Harpies’ island unnecessarily aggressive and a failure of *pietas*. See Nethercut (1968) 82-5, Kinsey (1979) 120, and Rabel (1985) 317. For a defense of Aeneas’ behavior, cf. Khan 1996. See also Horsfall 2006 *ad* 209-269, 221, and 223.

²⁷ Cf. OLD s.v. 1.

²⁸ This drawing out of not only phrases but the attacks themselves also differs from Apollonius, who highlights the speed of the Harpies, both in terms of their sudden arrival and the time it takes them to devour everything. By comparison, the descriptions of the two Roman poets require the reader to dwell upon the sensory experience which a visit from the Harpies entails. Additionally, Virgil ends his description at 225-8 with the word *odorem*, suggesting the lingering stench even after the Harpies are gone.

notes, are uncommon and striking. As a result, odor gains “an existence of its own, as a savage and raging force.”²⁹ The phrases *saevit odor*, *fragrat acerbus odor*, and *patriique expirat Averni / halitus*³⁰ all emphasize the power and violence that dominate this scene as well as the disgusting, “all-too-human”³¹ reality of the stench that accompanies but also effects decay. These phrases characterize odor as something like a Harpy itself, an active and deadly source of contamination which rushes in and despoils everything it touches.³² Appropriately, this odor-centric Harpy attack, with its emphasis on rushing air, will be met by the twins Zetes and Calais, the winged sons of Boreas whose own power over the air becomes the means by which they pursue and (almost) kill the Harpies.³³

The Harpies are carrion birds which *make* their food into carrion, attracted by meat which is still fresh only to “kill” it, as it were, by causing it to rot.³⁴ Amidst the sensory onslaught, the prominence of touch in these passages drives home their very physical presence and increases the sense of threat to the characters themselves.³⁵ The danger is heightened even further because stench, too, can touch, and not only touch but spread, widening the range of contamination; the connection between odor and touch, while latent in Apollonius, is brought to the fore in Virgil and Valerius. It is thus easy to imagine the human characters becoming tainted as well. How long

²⁹ Murgatroyd (2009) 227.

³⁰ *Argo*. 4.455, 493, and 493-4. See Murgatroyd 2009 *ad locos* for comparanda. At 493, the doubling of both a verb and a noun for smell (*fragrat* and *odor*) and the fact that *fragrare* is more often used of pleasant-smelling things, combine to emphasize the disgustingness of the Harpies’ stench. Cf. Spaltenstein 2004 *ad loc.*, who remarks on the unusual use of *odor* with *fragrat* and suggests *flagrat* as an alternate reading.

³¹ Cf. Green (2007) 317 at AR *Argonautica* 4.597-626: the stench of Phaethon’s charred body “forces Ap.’s reader into an all-too-human appraisal of Phaëthon’s fall, which otherwise might seem mere symbolic allegory.”

³² Murgatroyd 2009 *ad* 450-9 calls them “more dark and aggressive” than the Harpies of Apollonius.

³³ Indeed, by 4.514-5 it is the Harpies who fear death’s approach, not the Argonauts (*hic fessae letique metu propioris anhelae / dum trepidant...*). Lesueur (1978) 47 notes that Apollonius’ description of the chase scene, in contrast, does not describe the movement of flight as well, and his hunting simile “nous ramène au niveau terrestre.”

³⁴ Cf. Horsfall 2006 *ad Aen* 3.234: “Is the mere touch of their beaks enough to befoul their plates of beef? Or does some unnamable pollutant emerge? ...here, though, the sharper contours of the poet’s *enargeia* fade into a horrid (and only too successful) half-suggestion of food somehow rendered inedible.”

³⁵ *uncaequae manus; contactuque.../ immundo; pollueruntque manu; unguibus...atris; incessere planctibus*. Murgatroyd 2009 *ad* 457 notes of *unguibus...atris*, “*Ater* is well chosen by the speaker: as well as denoting a black colour, it has associations of squalor, ill omen, terror, the Underworld and malevolence (*OLD* s.v. 4, 6, 8, 11).”

before one of the Trojans or Argonauts is no more than a rotting corpse? This idea of impending doom is particularly strong in the *Aeneid*. The Harpy attack follows shortly after Aeneas' vision of his family's *penates*, who provide him with a source of hope and the assurance of the gods' continued support.³⁶ Just after this the Trojans encounter the Harpies, whose foul and infernal nature is contrasted with the heavenly origin of the apparition.³⁷ If the Harpies suggest the threat of death, they also hint at the possible failure of Aeneas' mission despite the hopeful words of the *penates*,³⁸ and all the more so because the Harpy Celaeno will go on to prophecy terrible hunger (*dira fames*, 256) for the Trojans.³⁹ The disgusting and pervasive reality of the famished monsters' stench and pollution, set against the dreamlike vision of the *penates*, serves in a way to confirm the truth of Celaeno's dire prophecy. Aeneas and his companions receive a (rotten) foretaste of the ignobility they will have to suffer before the distant promise of the gods is fulfilled. Though Otis claims, in regards to Celaeno's prophecy, that "[t]he Harpies are not a physical threat, not a tangible danger, but a symbol of the dread which invests the unknown,"⁴⁰ there is no denying their ability to produce the most gruesome aspects of that dreadful and dishonorable unknown right before the eyes, not to mention the hands, ears, and nose.⁴¹

³⁶ *Aen.* 3.147-71.

³⁷ The fact that they have polluted a sacrifice to Jupiter further suggests their opposition to the heavenly powers; cf. *Aen.* 3.365-6: *sola novum dictuque nefas Harpyia Celaeno / prodigium canit....*

³⁸ Cf. Heinze (1903) 89: "Die Prophezeiung der Celaeno...nimmt auch in der Ökonomie des Buches eine hervorragende Stelle ein: nachdem die Penaten auf Kreta endlich das Ziel gewiesen zu haben schienen, und die Troer hoffnungsvoll gen Westen steuern, tritt hier ein schwerer Rückschlag ein".

³⁹ *Aen.* 3.247-57. On the theme of *fames* in this episode, see Horsfall 2006 *ad* 209-269(iv) and 216ff. Contrast this with Phineus' hopeful prophecy at *Argo.* 4.553ff. Focusing on Celaeno's role as deliverer of the curse, Heinze (1903) 111 argues that the increasing tension invests this gruesome and disgusting scene with a sense of terror, which in turn transforms Celaeno "über das Spukhaft Monströse ins Mythisch Heroische." While this is incompatible with my suggestion that odor and the gruesome are indicative of unheroic aspects of epic, it is worth noting that Celaeno does not take on the role of prophetess until the descriptions of pollution are finished.

⁴⁰ Otis (1963) 257.

⁴¹ It is also worth noting that the Trojans actually try to make corpses of the Harpies. They accomplish nothing through physical force (*sed neque vim plumis ulla nec volnera tergo / accipiunt*, 242-3) and their own attempt at polluting their enemies (*ferro foedare*, 241) is a failure, yet when one considers the effects which the Harpies produce while alive, it becomes clear that they would be little different in death. Whether the Harpies spoil the food or the Trojans slaughter them, the result would still be reeking carcasses half-eaten by carrion birds and

Unlike the Harpies, descriptions of underworld entrances are far more sinister and ominous, inspiring foreboding at the suggestion of death rather than disgust at decay and carnage. The stench described in these passages resonate with human fears about the inescapability of death owing to their disregard for boundaries, for the scents of death, as we will see, do not stay where the dead belong. The fact that there are almost no explicit references to smells in the underworld itself suggests further that odor and the underworld are linked through the idea of threat: humans fear the power of death while still alive, but once they have reached the land of the dead, it is too late to be afraid.

In Book 6 of the *Punica*, the veteran Marus tells his listener Serranus the story of the Roman army's encounter with a massive serpent in Libya under the general Marcus Atilius Regulus (Serranus' father).⁴² Before he narrates the actual battle against the serpent, Marus describes its lair, a dark and sinister place opening up from the underworld:

lucus iners iuxta Stygium pallentibus umbris
seruabat sine sole nemus, crassusque per auras

other animals, and the *vestigia foeda* of rotting corpses. The effect of Aeneas' encounter with the Harpies on future Roman religious practice has been noted; as Rabel (1985) 317 summarizes, "...the pollution of the sacrificial meal by the Harpies results in Helenus' later recommendation that the head of the priest be veiled as a precaution against unfavorable omens and thus serves as a prodigy marking the beginning of Roman religious practice of the historical period" (citing Wolfgang Hübner's *Dirae im römischen Epos: Über das Verhältnis von Vogeldämonen und Prodigien* (1970) 70).

⁴² For considerations of space I omit discussion of the giant serpent itself. Initial descriptions of the serpent and its cave are strongly reminiscent of the physicality of the Harpy attacks, and like the Harpies its odor, in the form of foul breath, becomes an extension of its threat (but cf. Spaltenstein 1986 ad 6.186-7, who argues that the description does not convey the idea of odor). The serpent, however, actually kills Roman soldiers, and in this sense does not just threaten death but actually deals it out. Its breath, moreover, is more like the underworld emanations I will discuss next. It is described as Stygian (*Stygios aestus fumanti exhibilat ore*, 219) and depicted as a deadly force extending the death-dealing power of the serpent beyond itself (*uictorque cateruas / longius auectas adflatus peste premebat*, 239-40). The serpent is not just a creature of the underworld, it brings the underworld with it and breathes that very threat of death into the air, a noisome warning of what is to come. We see this again when the soldiers have finally defeated it: stretched out along the shoreline, finally conquered, it breathes forth not its spirit, as a human is wont to do in epic narrative, but instead a poisonous cloud (*tandem exhalauit in auras / liuentem nebulam fugientis ab ore ueneni*, 281-2). Ironically, the slaughtered serpent is discovered to be a servant of the Naiads despite every suggestion that it is an evil creature of the underworld (as is Statius' giant serpent at *Theb.* 5.505ff). For the confusion of earth, heaven, and hell in Roman epic, see Hardie (1993) Chapter 3, and especially 70-71 for this passage and its consequences for the characterization of Regulus. The serpent itself seems to have been real: cf. Livy *Per.* 18, Gel. 7.3, Pliny *NH* 8.37, Val. Max. 1.8.ext.19. On monstrous serpents, cf. Spaltenstein 1986 *ad Punica* 6.155 and Austin 1964 *ad Aen.* 2.204ff.

halitus erumpens taetrum expirabat odorem.
 intus dira domus curuoque immanis in antro
 sub terra specus et tristes sine luce tenebrae. 150
 horror mente redit. monstrum exitiabile et ira
 telluris genitum, cui par uix uiderit aetas
 ulla uirum, serpens centum porrectus in ulnas
 letalem ripam et lucos habitabat Auernos.
 ingluuiem immensi uentris grauidamque uenenis 155
 aluum deprensi satiabant fonte leones
 aut acta ad fluuium torrenti lampade solis
 armenta et tractae foeda grauitate per auras
 ac tabe adflatus uolucres.⁴³

Nearby a grove preserved trees motionless and without sun, Stygian in their pale shadows, and from it burst forth a thick exhalation which breathed a horrid odor throughout the air. Within was a terrible dwelling, an enormous subterranean cave in a curved hollow, and miserable darkness without light. I shudder just thinking about it. A monster inhabited that fatal bank and Avernian grove, deadly and born from the wrath of the earth: a serpent one hundred ells in length, whose like scarcely any generation of men shall see again. The gluttony of his massive stomach, that belly heavy with poison, he filled with lions caught at the spring, or flocks driven to the stream by the light of the scorching sun, and birds pulled down through the sky by the foul stench and corruption of the air.

Even before Marus introduces the presence of the serpent, he places his story in a location one would not want to visit. It is eerily dark and rank; the shadows come from the trees, but also from thick, foul odors emanating from the grove (*crassusque, taetrum*), perhaps pitching the air black.⁴⁴ The image of the dirty, mephitic cloud bursting (*erumpens*) from the trees hints at the violent emergence of the deadly serpent from its cave later in the scene, the true source of death which is indicated here by the foul and visible stench spreading through the air.⁴⁵ The sinister power of both the serpent and its grove is especially evident in the last two lines, where the air surrounding the place is so contaminating that birds are actually struck from the sky by the

⁴³ *Punica* 6.146-59.

⁴⁴ On the eerie silence and stillness of the grove, which would have contributed especially to the feeling of suspense, see Spaltenstein 1986 *ad* 146. Interestingly, the *Punica* is in general a very auditory poem. See for examples, 3.300ff, 3.697ff, 4.66, 4.260ff, 9.7, 9.50, 9.333, 11.279-80, 11.290, 12.597-8.

⁴⁵ *Punica* 6.174-87.

miasma, a common illustration of the boundary-crossing power of underworld emanations, as we will see. Both odor and serpent are products of the underworld (even the grove is *Avernos* at 154), encroaching upon the world of the living and bringing death with them.

The scene makes Marus uncomfortable to describe even years later (*horror mente redit*).⁴⁶ Yet at the time the story takes place, Marus and his two companions apparently approach the grove completely unaware, wondering whether the place is safe (*imprudentes tantae pestis.../...scire neums pacemque loci explorare*, 166, 168). Given the ominous scene and pervasive miasma he has just described, the soldiers' ignorance of the danger seems entirely unlikely. This suggests that the old veteran is using these sensory details not so much to provide Serranus with an accurate sensory description of the grove as to set the mood for what follows, much like a poet himself might do.⁴⁷ What the place smells like does not matter, only the fact that a foul smell means death. We might compare this to diegetic versus non-diegetic sound in a modern horror movie.⁴⁸ The audience hears suspenseful music and shouts at the characters in the film, wondering how they can be so ignorant of impending danger, even though we know the music is non-diegetic and only there for our benefit. Here Marus uses stench and darkness rather than music, but the result is ultimately very similar. The threat of death represented by odor inspires a sense of dread in the audience, but it is simultaneously absent within the story so that the characters' ignorant approach seems plausible.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Cf. *Aen.* 2.204, *horresco referens*, as the twin serpents approach Laocoon out of the sea.

⁴⁷ Cf. Spaltenstein 1986 *ad* 168: "Par ailleurs, cette notion positive ne correspond pas aux suggestions dramatiques des vers 146 sqq."

⁴⁸ See Harper, Doughty, and Eisentraut (2009) esp. 47-8, 115-16, and 343-9. My thanks to Sarah Caston for suggesting this modern parallel.

⁴⁹ Neither Virgil nor Valerius employs this sort of scene-setting in their Harpy narratives. Both poets warn the reader in advance of what is to come, Virgil through the narrator's voice and Valerius through first the narrator's description and then Phineus' warning to the Argonauts. However, unlike the serpent story, in the *Aeneid* and *Argonautica* the landscape betrays no hints of the polluting threat. Valerius is silent about the state of Phineus's island, while on the Strophades of the *Aeneid* the Trojans find unattended herds of cattle and goats, more appropriate for an idyllic landscape than one infested with monsters (3.219-24).

Both the *Punica* and *Aeneid* contain other locations of a similar nature, though lacking in serpents, and all of these passages capitalize on the power of odors to travel to places they do not belong and harm those who should be out of reach. In describing birds struck from the sky by stench, Silius employs a common characteristic of underworld entrances,⁵⁰ but one which poignantly illustrates their threatening aura.⁵¹ Virgil remarks similarly of the cave located within the crater adjacent to Lake Avernus:

Spelunca alta fuit vastoque immanis hiatu,
 scrupea, tuta lacu nigro nemorumque tenebris,
 quam super haud ullae poterant impune volantes
 tendere iter pennis—talis sese halitus atris 240
 faucibus effundens supera ad convexa ferebat:
 [unde locum Grai dixerunt nomine Aornon.]⁵²

The cave was deep and vast in its wide expanse, rocky, sheltered by the black lake and the shadows of forests, above which scarcely any birds could safely wing their way – such a breath, pouring forth from those black jaws, rose to the dome of the sky. [Whence the Greek name for the place, Birdless (ἄ- ὄρνις)]⁵³

The nature of the geography is similar to the grove of Silius’ serpent, as well as to what one might expect to find in the underworld itself: a massive cave, dark and shadowy, which emits noxious fumes so deadly that birds cannot even fly over the area without being struck down

⁵⁰ *Averna loca dicuntur avibus pernicioso*, as Calderini 2001 [1470-3] summarizes *ad Punica* 6.154. No birds were harmed in the writing of this chapter.

⁵¹ The earliest *nekyia* we possess, *Odyssey* 11, contains no sensory details in the description of Odysseus’ approach to the underworld other than visual ones, yet the link between ominous and sometimes odorous locations and underworld entrances was commonplace very early on. Strabo 5.4.5. writes that “people before our time” located Hercules’ *nekyia* at Lake Avernus, where the natives told stories about birds in flight being struck down by the lake’s poisonous fumes, καθάπερ ἐν τοῖς Πλουτωνίοις (“just as in the cases of the Plutonia”). Cf. also Pliny the Elder XXXI.21. An alternate, and rather more amusing, tradition suggests that birds might be knocked from the sky by the thunderous shouts of an amphitheatre’s worth of spectators, for which see Aldrete (2014) 55-6, citing Plutarch *Titus Flaminius* 10.5-6 and Valerius Maximus 4.8.5. On underworld entrances and the oracles placed at such caves, see Ustinova (2009) 68-89.

⁵² *Aen.* 6.237-42.

⁵³ Austin 1986 *ad loc.*: “This line is agreed to be an interpolation...[which is] alien to the tone and tension of the passage.” Even if this is a case, the line demonstrates how important the lack of birds was when characterizing such areas and thinking about the threat they posed.

(*quam super haud ullae pterant impune volantes / tendere iter pennis*).⁵⁴ The environment itself is threatening, a theme which will be especially salient in the next section. Here it is given jaws (*faucibus*) which breathe forth the bird-killing stench, as though the land itself is intent upon devouring whatever it strikes down. This ominous aura is increased by the fact that the air here is not characterized as dirty or dark: the “breath” of the earth is not only deadly, it is invisible. And because odor disregards boundaries, one cannot rely on the foreboding features of the landscape to indicate a safe distance. As the dead birds indicate, the stench of the underworld travels well beyond its proper domain.

Other passages suggest these same ideas. Hannibal’s tour of Southern Italy at *Punica* 12,⁵⁵ for instance, describes the same area in which Aeneas and the Sibyl performed their sacrifice, a dark and murky place dreadful to birds (*tristi nemore atque umbris nigrantibus horrens / et formidatus uolucris*, 122-3); Silius additionally makes the place spew poison into the sky (*letale uomebat / suffuso uirus caelo*, 123-4).⁵⁶ Virgil’s King Latinus, meanwhile, seeks an oracle in another shadowy grove which exhales a deadly stench (*saevamque exhalat opaca mephitim*, 7.84).⁵⁷ Physical in its foul darkness and ability to smite birds from the air, the stench of these caverns is also ominous and chilling, creating a sense of unease about such lethal places that extends beyond the merely aesthetic because it is an active force all its own.

⁵⁴ Virgil may have been primarily inspired by Apollonius Rhodius’ *Argonautica* (4.601-3), where the smoldering remains of Phaethon send up steam which strikes birds from the air (cf. also *Geor.* 3.546-7, where the plague causes birds to fall from the air). Apollonius seems to have had the heat from the steam in mind, not the stench of the burning corpse, but the place is later characterized by its sickening odor (619-23) as well. Green 2007 *ad loc.* suggests that Apollonius’ description of the vapor “may be used simply to explain an old tradition about “birdless” lakes.” On Virgil’s topography of Cumae, see Hitchcock 1933, Austin 1986 *ad Aen.* 6.201, and Clark 1991.

⁵⁵ 12.110-157. Scholars have deemed this his failed *nekyia*. Cf. Kennedy-Klaassen (2010) 107-12. On Hannibal as a failed hero, see von Albrecht 1964, Hardie (1989) 14-15, Tipping (2010) Chr. 3, esp. 70-80 and 83-9.

⁵⁶ Hannibal’s guides go on to describe swamps, sulphur- and fire-breathing fields, and Vesuvius. For the transformation of Avernus from deadly lake to healing spring, cf. Servius at *Aen.* 3.442: *Sane hic lacus ante silvarum densitate sic ambiebatur ut exhalans inde per angustias aquae sulphureae odor gravissimus supervolantes aves necaret; unde et Avernus dictus est, quasi aornos. Quam rem Augustus Caesar intellegens deictis silvis ex pestilentibus amoena reddidit loca.*

⁵⁷ For additional passages, see *Punica* 13.424-6, and *Aen.* 7.563-71.

In both epics the geography of the areas described is meant to be a reflection of the underworld over which it stands, particularly with regard to the sensory qualities exhibited by each grove, cavern, or fissure. They are dark (*tenebris; umbris nigrantibus; opaca*), sometimes noisy (*sacro / fonte sonat*),⁵⁸ and most especially, foul-smelling. In each passage the poet pauses to describe the breath (*talis...halitus; tabe adflatus; exhalat*) of the landscape or the (lack of) quality of the air surrounding the place (*letale.../suffuso virus caelo*). The suggestion that some aspect of the natural world “breathes forth” an odor is particularly common in descriptions of smells in epic, to the point that the true source or nature of the scents is often left unstated. Below we will see how this idea suggests the unavoidability of plague and the all-encompassing guilt of civil war; here, it adds an air of the unknown which only heightens the ominous mood. The point is not to describe a specific type of odor (sulphur, for instance), but to characterize the locations as both tainted by death and deadly in and of themselves.⁵⁹ The emphasis on the emission of deadly fumes serves to suggest the threat of death for the living rather than simply the presence of the already dead.⁶⁰ Proximity to the underworld is potentially dangerous because stench has so much power to reach out and contaminate everything around it, hence descriptions of birds flying over and meeting untimely ends: for these creatures which are capable of flying so high—capable, that is, of getting the closest of any living creature to the heavens—to be struck down by the breath of Avernus suggests both the power of the lower world and the extent of its reach into the world of the living.⁶¹ Just as Aeneas contaminates the underworld by descending

⁵⁸ At *Aen.* 7.83-4. On disgusting sound effects in Virgil, see Adkin 2005 and 2006.

⁵⁹ Servius takes an entirely different and more practical approach at *Aen.* 7.81-84, where he suggests that a foul smell is stronger in groves because of the density of trees: *MEPHITIN mephitis proprie est terrae putor, qui de aquis nascitur sulphuratis, et est in nemoribus gravior ex densitate silvarum*. Cf. his remark at note 55 above.

⁶⁰ Lucretius, of course, takes a pragmatic approach at *DRN* 6.760-6 and 818-39; all of the supposedly supernatural effects these “Avernian” lakes have on passing creatures, he claims, can be explained by natural causes.

⁶¹ The idea that noxious fumes killed birds which flew over continued long after the classical period. Cf. Brydone’s 1774 *Tour Sicily & Malta* (ed. 2) I. xi. 250: “So mephitic a vapour, that birds were suffocated in flying over it.” Cf. also el-Khoury (2006) 22-3.

to the place of the dead while still alive,⁶² so the underworld contaminates the upper. Yet while a hero cannot transfer his life to those already dead, the underworld is able to bring death to the living through the stench which crosses this supposedly impassable boundary and seeps upward into the sky.⁶³

All of this would lead one to expect that the underworld itself is a dark, noisy, and above all foul-smelling place. Yet in neither epic is there much suggestion of the sort of noxious, death-dealing smell which the characters (and birds) experience at *entrances* to the world of the dead.⁶⁴ Poets readily describe the underworld as a foul and dirty place. The Styx of the *Punica*'s underworld, for instance, roils with mud and sulphur (*fumiferum volvit...inter sulphura limum*, 13.570), and Charon in the *Aeneid* is described as filthy (*horrendous.../terribili squalore*, 6.298-9). Either of these could suggest odor, but ultimately such descriptions echo much more strongly the physical filth of the Harpies, and disgust, not fear, seems to be the goal. On the contrary, explicit references to stench occur predominantly once it has reached the upper world, for odor, as I have suggested, does not indicate the dead but rather the possibility of death, the terrible and unseen menace which stalks these locations and makes them such effective settings. By crossing the threshold between hell and earth and then extending up into the sky, odor provides a vivid reminder of how easily death can come to anyone, even those furthest from reach. There is thus

⁶² See for instance Charon's speech to Aeneas at *Aen* 6.388-91, where he declares it *nefas* for his boat to carry the living across the river. If odors in epic are frequently linked to the unheroic, we might say that a hero is meant to travel to the underworld, but the underworld is not meant to travel to the world of the living.

⁶³ One additional passage, *Aen* 6.201-3, plays on the theme of birds flying over a strong-smelling place, but in this case the birds actually play a role in the narrative, being sent by Venus to aid her son: *Inde ubi venere ad fauces grave olentis Averni, / tollunt se celeres, liquidumque per aëra lapsae / sedibus optatis geminae super arbore sidunt*. Venus' doves fly *ad fauces* but no further, and therefore do not suffer any harm. As in the other passages the stench of, in this case, Lake Avernus, indicates the presence and threat of death owing to the lake's proximity to the underworld. Here there may be an additional, implicit contrast between heaven and the underworld, and between foul and fragrant, for Venus herself was earlier described as having a pleasant fragrance (1.403-4). Cf. Paratore 1979 *ad loc.*: "E si noti ad ogni modo come, essendo addette alla dea, le colombe riescano ad evitare miracolosamente gli effetti funesti che la mefitica atmosfera delle bocche d'Averno produce sugli uccelli." For the phrase *grave olentis*, see Clausen (1994) 79 *ad* 48 and Austin (1986) 99 *ad* 201.

⁶⁴ See also note 50 above for other *nekyiai*.

no sense in describing smell *in* the underworld, for once someone reaches it, the *threat* of death is moot.⁶⁵

This section has demonstrated the various ways in which two epic poets, Virgil and Silius, represent the power and sinister nature of death through descriptions of stench. Because it is linked both to the air and to a physical ability to contaminate, odor can, as we have seen, suggest the threat of death in multiple ways. The passages on the Harpies present death as something repulsive and disgusting, a mess of sensory detail which forces the reader to confront the physicality of a rotting corpse in the form of both the monsters themselves and the decay which they spread. In the case of the underworld caves, death is instead an ominous and powerful force with unlimited reach, evidenced by the way the mephitic exhalations of the earth strike birds from the sky. In the next section we will also see scents crossing boundaries and causing contamination, but in such a way as to depict the horrors of plague and civil war and the stark reality of death which accompanies them.

2. Plague and war

In the previous section odor brought the loathsome characteristics and terrifying idea of death before the characters and audience, suggesting its nearness, pervasiveness, and threat. This section transitions away from mythological creatures and locations and instead moves into the

⁶⁵ Strangely, the only explicit reference to an odor in the underworld is at Aeneid 6.656-9, where Aeneas encounters inhabitants of the Elysian Fields singing paeans *inter odoratum lauris nemus* ("in a grove fragrant with laurel"). Certainly laurel is not the scent wafting up from the various *fauces* of southern Italy. It is, instead, appropriate to the peaceful and non-threatening Fields as Virgil describes them. The fragrant grove, which Horsfall (1993) 157 suggests may be linked to the theme of poetry, also suggests a place where things flourish rather than decay.

gruesome reality of human warfare and sickness, both of which lead to equally gruesome, unheroic deaths.⁶⁶ Lucan's *Bellum Civile* and Silius' *Punica* are based on historical wars, but even Statius' *Thebaid*, which tells the myth of the Seven Against Thebes, brings the horrors and crimes of civil war to the forefront in such a way as to resonate strongly with Roman anxieties about this type of warfare.⁶⁷ Because plague and war death are far more "real" than Harpies, it is perhaps not surprising that the odors described in these passages also shift away from suggesting the *threat* of death to instead signaling *actual* death, particularly in battlefield descriptions. These scenes recall human experiences and (collective) memories rather than playing upon an abstract fear of death. As such, while odor functions similarly here—breaking boundaries and spreading contagion—it also bears upon issues such as anxiety about civil war, concern with moral injustice and the treatment of the dead, and the ignobility of death itself. The fact that many of these ideas are expressed by first-person narrators or accompanied by internal character responses also suggests how an external audience might read and react to such disgusting descriptions.⁶⁸

I begin this section with the plagues of Lucan (Book 6) and Silius (Book 14), where odor both threatens and carries death, and then turn to battle aftermaths as described by Lucan (Book

⁶⁶ Plague narratives are not uncommon in ancient literature, some inspired by actual sicknesses and others invented. Thucydides' plague narrative, discussed briefly below, depicts the actual Athenian plague in 430 BC and strongly influenced later depictions, such as that of Lucretius at *DRN* 6.1138-1286. In contrast, there is no historical record of a plague at Aegina, leading Fratantuono (2011) 196-7 to suggest that Ovid invented it for *Met.* 7.523-613. Pomeroy (2010) 37 n.38 notes that Thucydides' narrative "had already long been accepted into the Latin epic." For plague in the ancient world, see Grmek 1989, Sallares (1991) 221-293, Hope and Marshall 2000, Jouanna 2006, Little (ed.) 2007.

⁶⁷ "Wie üblich, kommt kriegenschen Greueln erhebliches Gewicht zu," notes Fuhrmann (1968) of Lucan (50). On the "poetics of civil war" see McNelis 2007 and Henderson (1998) Chr. 6 for Statius; and Masters 1992, Bartsch 1997 Dinter 2012 for Lucan. On Roman civil war generally, Syme 1939, Jal 1963, Henderson 1998, Osgood 2006, Breed et al. (eds.) 2010. Pollmann (2004) 30 suggests that the Theban myth was first combined with the political theme of civil war by Ovid at *Met.* 3.117 (*nec te civilibus insere bellis*). Cf. Jal (1963) 402-6.

⁶⁸ On narrative voices in Roman epic, see Block 1986, Fowler 1990, D'Alessandro Behr (2007) s.v. "narrator" (for Lucan specifically), Walter 2014. Erler 2012 traces elements of Lucan's narrative voice—"dass vage Darstellung der Göttersphäre und Betonung menschlicher Verantwortung im Kontext einer Erzählhaltung" (138)—all the way back to Homer.

7) and Statius (Book 12), where the stench of rotting corpses and the polluted environment force the living to confront lingering death even after the battle has concluded.⁶⁹ The passages on plague draw on descriptions of the underworld, and once again the environment is a source of dangerous emanations which seep up from the earth and hover in the sky. Unlike the underworld pollutants, however, the plague causes human deaths which are not only gruesome in and of themselves, but which also contribute to the harmful pollution and therefore cause further death. Lucan and Silius, I will show, contrast the experience of plague with that of dying in war, but whereas in Lucan plague is ultimately little different than civil war, in Silius plague is the opposite of war, delaying or even eliminating the honor of dying in battle.⁷⁰

Book 6 of Lucan's *BC* prepares both the reader and the armies of Caesar and Pompey for the battle of Pharsalus which will take place in Book 7. At the beginning of the book, the two armies face off at Dyrrachium, where Pompey's forces are struck by a plague which begins with the deaths of their undernourished horses. Lucan displays throughout his poem a keen interest in the physicality of death, describing the dismemberment of Roman soldiers and the seeming automatism of their limbs *ad nauseam*.⁷¹ During the plague scene he similarly investigates the physical effects of the sickness in gruesome detail, beginning with the process of decay that initiates it:

corpora dum solvit tabes, et digerit artus,
 traxit iners caelum fluidae contagia pestis
 obscuram in nubem. Tali spiramine Nesis
 emittit Stygium nebulosis aera saxis,
 antraque letiferi rabiem Typhonis anhelant.

⁶⁹ Cf. McHugh (2012) 7 on odor's reach through both time and space.

⁷⁰ See Hope (2009) Chr 2, especially 54-63, on good versus bad deaths in Roman history and literature.

⁷¹ See, for example, the naval battle at 3.509ff. See also Most 1992, Bartsch 1997, Edwards (2007) Chr. 1, Dinter (2012) Chr 1, esp. 37-9. On the agency of the dead more generally, see H. Williams (2004) esp. 265-69, Erasmo (2008) 7, Graham 2011.

While putrefaction dissolved their bodies and dissolved their limbs, the stagnant air gathered up the infection of that fluid plague into a thick cloud. With such a breath Nesis exhales a Stygian air from her misty rocks, and the caverns of death-dealing Typhon breathe forth madness.⁷²

The simile recalls the underworld emanations discussed in the previous section and suggests a similarly ominous approach of death on the air, as well as the meaninglessness of boundaries in the face of airborne sickness. The ability of death to reach out from the earth and spread in murky clouds points once again to a sinister threat beyond human control because it is unavoidable.⁷³ Lucan highlights this spread by drawing a parallel between the plague-infested air on the one hand and volcanic fumes, the “breath” of the mountains, on the other (*iners caelum, obscuram...nubem, spiramine Nesis, stygium...aera, rabiem...anhelant*).⁷⁴ What begins in stillness (*iners*) leads to a cloud and then breath, first in *spiramine* and then *anhelant*, suggesting the increasing spread of the air and, as a result, of the deadly plague. Lucan’s depiction of a hostile and death-dealing landscape also capitalizes on the imagery of the gigantomachy, recalling another set of hostile forces threatening to break through from the underworld and wreak havoc on those above.⁷⁵ The volcanic fumes, with their origins in the depths of so violent an earth, cross from the abode of the dead and into the world of the living, carrying with them

⁷² BC 6.88-94.

⁷³ Cf. Ovid *Met.* 7.550-1: [*corpora*] *dilapsa liquescent / adflatuque nocent et agunt contagia late.*

⁷⁴ Cf. *De Rerum Natura* 6.1128-30, where plague settles on water or food, *aut etiam suspensa manet vis aere in ipso, / et, cum spirantes mixtas hinc ducimus auras, / illa quoque in corpus pariter sorbere necessest.* In Virgil’s description of Etna as the Trojans approach the Cyclops’ island, the volcano not only spews forth dark clouds, it also emits flame, lava, and boulders (3.570-82).

⁷⁵ Cf. Dinter (2012) 2: “For the cosmic body Lucan uses gigantomachic imagery and personification to invest earth and heaven, most prominently the sun, with bodily presences, which enable them to take an active part in crafting his world of civil war.” In Lucan, he goes on to note, the elements wage a war of their own; the participation of the earth and air in the dissemination of odors fits closely with this idea. See 11-16 for his discussion of the cosmic body. Barkan (1975) 8-27 discusses the origin and rise of the bodily image of the cosmos. For Lucan’s use of the gigantomachy, see Mayer 1981 *ad* 8.551, Narducci (2002) 309, Dinter (2012) 11-16, and Fratantuono (2012) s.v. “gigantomachy.” Fratantuono notes that the gigantomachic imagery is associated with Caesar, the “would-be Jovian usurper” (229). For the gigantomachy in epic, Hardie (1986) 85–156 and Hardie (1993) s.v. “gigantomachy.”

the essence of death on the air. The description of the plague conveys this same sense of pervasive foulness and threat: the stench of death knows no boundaries, and therefore no one is safe. In a scene in which no battle takes place, the poet nevertheless provides a dangerous and unavoidable enemy, one which almost seems to be living and breathing.

Lucan's epic is rife with the idea that civil war is inevitable and self-perpetuating, and that it makes everyone guilty and no one a hero.⁷⁶ The plague depicted here, threatening as it is, is in many ways no more than an extension of civil war, where the pervasiveness of deadly sickness which rises from the earth and lingers in the air parallels the equally unavoidable civil strife between Caesar and Pompey. Indeed, the *rabies* which Typhon's caverns breathe forth could just as easily be the *praeceps rabies* of Caesar: both infect the soldiers and lead to indiscriminate death.⁷⁷ In other ancient narratives, the behavior displayed during plagues illustrates the breakdown of civil relations, morality, and law as base human nature and the desire for survival take precedence.⁷⁸ Traditional customs are abandoned and bonds of family and friendship become meaningless as each serves his own interests. Yet in Lucan's war, there is little if any of this left as it is, so torn apart is Rome by both past and present civil war. Pompey's soldiers, in fact, do almost nothing during the course of the plague, but the one action they do take strongly suggests a similar disregard for relationships engendered by civil war: they cast the bodies of their dead kin outside the camp rather than bury them (*miseros ultra tentoria cives /*

⁷⁶ Already in 1940 Getty (xxiv-xxix) had questioned the need for a hero (cf. also Ahl (1976) 150), but many later scholars continue to cast their votes, usually in favor of either Pompey or Cato; Narducci (2002) 186 also suggests "[la] personificazione di un concetto astratto come la *Libertas* repubblicana." For extended analyses of Caesar, Pompey, and Cato, see Ahl (1976) Chrs. 5-7, W.R. Johnson 1987, Narducci (2002) 187-432, Sklenár (2003) Chrs. 3 and 4. Gorman 2001 argues that the true hero is Cato but has a useful discussion of the ways in which Lucan denies all other opportunities for heroism (266-80).

⁷⁷ *BC* 7.474. Cf. 2.544. *O rabies miseranda ducis!* and 7.551: *hic furor, hic rabies, hic sunt tua crimina, Caesar.* Cf. Hershkowitz (1998) Chr. 5 on madness in Lucan.

⁷⁸ Famous plague descriptions include Thuc. 2.47-54, Lucr. 6.1138-1286, Virg. *Geor.* 3.478-566 and *Aen.* 3.137-42, and Ovid *Met.* 7.523-613. Cf. Bartsch (1997) 3 on the bodies of soldiers in the *BC*: Lucan "seems intent on exposing [them] to our view as a metaphor for the collapse of the self in civil war."

spargere funus erat 6.102-3).⁷⁹ The soldiers' failure to bury their kin, which leads to an increase in the strength of the plague (*aucta lues*, 101), also hints at their failure to withdraw support from Caesar and Pompey, which allows the dishonorable war to continue and its own form of corruption to spread.⁸⁰

Furthermore, the vividly gruesome way in which the poet describes violence throughout the poem leaves little room for shock when it comes to the symptoms and effects of the plague.⁸¹ Though dying of disease is of course different than dying in battle, Lucan's brief four-line description of tight skin, bulging eyes, and erysipelas hardly stands out amongst protruding entrails, stab wounds, and streaming gore.⁸² *Corpora dum solvit tabes et digerit artus* could just as easily describe the corpses of fallen soldiers as the putrefying bodies of dead horses. Moreover, the worsening of the plague creates a scene much like a battlefield: *turbaque cadentum / aucta lues, dum mixta iacent incondita vivis / corpora* ("the pestilence was increased by the mass of the fallen as long as unburied bodies lay amongst the living," 6.100-2).

Gruesome, but heaps of corpses are nothing new at this point. Jamie Masters, in fact, even

⁷⁹ The collapse of burial customs is typical in ancient plague narratives, but an attempt to bury or cremate the victims' bodies is almost always mentioned, often attended by violence as people fight over pyres. Cf. *DRN* 6.1282-86, Thuc. 2.52.4-5 and Ovid *Met.* 7.610. Lucan's plague scene, in contrast, lacks this element, and no pyres are even mentioned. While we might expect this element of civil war—fellow-citizens fighting over pyres—in Lucan, instead the violence seems to be between the living, who neglect to bury the dead, and the dead, who become a source of pollution which attacks the living. Cf. Lucretius *DRN* 6.1154-5, where he draws a poignant connection between the stench of the plague victims' breath and the smell of discarded rotting corpses: the odor which is a sign of their gruesome and lamentable fate is the same as that which will emanate from their unburied corpses—another gruesome and lamentable fate which will also cause further suffering for the living. Nichols (1976) 178 calls this plague "a test for the piety of the reader." Those who have truly internalized his teachings on Epicureanism will be able to read it without being affected. See also Commager, Jr. 1957, Müller 1977, and Godwin (1991) 8-11.

⁸⁰ Cf. *BC* 4.182-187, where Lucan apostrophizes the soldiers in the midst of an unusual reunion: *quid pectora pulsas? / quid, vaesane, gemis? fletus quid fundis inanes / nec te sponte tua sceleri parere fateris? / usque adeone times, quen tu facis ipse timendum? / classica det bello, saevos tu neglege cantus; / signa ferat, cessa...* Here the poet advises inaction as a response to the call to war, while in the plague passage, it is the soldier's lack of action that causes the sensory assault to continue. For recent work on apostrophe in Lucan see Bartsch (1997) esp. 93-100, Narducci (2002) s.v. "Apostrophe", Faber 2005, D'Alessandro Behr 2007, Asso 2009.

⁸¹ Cf. Herz (2012) 218: "Surprise, as the flip side to preparation, is the great augments of disgust. Without surprise, many things are much less revolting."

⁸² E.g. 4.566-8: *iam latis viscera lapsa / semianimes traxere foris multumque cruorem / infudere mari.* 6.176-9: *caput obterit ossaque saxo / ac male defensum fragili conpage cerebrum / dissipat; alterius flamma crinesque genasque / succendit, strident oculis ardentibus ignes.*

identifies what he calls “the ‘heap’ motif” in Lucan: “Piles, heaps, masses, of dead bodies, wood and earth...these proliferate in the *Bellum Civile* as in no other epic...”⁸³ And just as the crowd of the dead worsens the plague by contributing to the foulness, so too the epic contains multiple examples of corpses of soldiers slain in battle fighting back even in death.⁸⁴ Thus the unavailability of airborne plague, the behavior of the soldiers towards the dead, and the descriptions of decay and death all point to an overlap between plague and war in the *BC*. While Lucan notes that the plague prevents Caesar and Pompey from engaging in battle, (*duces miscendis abstrahit armis*, 6.80), it ultimately provides little respite from the evils of civil war.⁸⁵

Unlike Lucan’s characters, Silius’ Romans are fighting an external threat—Hannibal—and therefore a war that is altogether more noble.⁸⁶ Because of this, the plague of the *Punica* is presented not as a parallel to war but instead as a derailment, a gruesome but also entirely shameful way to die. Silius’ plague narrative in *Punica* Book 12 comes as the general Marcellus is blockading Syracuse; the sickness rears its head unexpectedly in the midst of a naval battle, forcing both sides to delay their operations until it has passed. Silius too begins with a description surrounding the circumstances of the plague’s origins:

Nec mora tum trepidos hac clade inrumpere muros 580
 signaque ferre deum templis iam iamque fuisset,
 ni subito importuna lues inimicaque pestis,

⁸³ Masters (1992) 145. See n.119 for a select list of examples. Perhaps the memorable is at 6.180, less than 100 lines after the plague, where a pile of corpses rises so high that it equals the height of the Pompeian’s wall; a soldier named Scaeva uses this to his advantage and climbs up the heap in order to leap over the wall.

⁸⁴ For examples, 2.205-6, 3.719-21, 6.170-2.

⁸⁵ The idea of delay is prominent in both Lucan and Statius as the characters even the narrators themselves all seem to be working to prevent the actual occurrence of civil war, especially engagement in battle. For Lucan, see Masters (1992) 3-10 and 119-22, Henderson (1998) 183, Ganiban 2011, Myers (2011) 407. For this theme in Statius, Schetter (1960) 70-1, 115-6, Vessey (1973) 165-7, Feeney (1991) 339, McNelis (2007) s.v. “Delay, narrative.” For Lucan’s influence on Statius regarding the idea of delay, Venini 1965a, 1965b, Micozzi (1999) 353-7.

⁸⁶ Cf. Hardie (1993) 118: “Silius’ *Punica* has been described as an anti-*Pharsalia*, restoring the positive Roman values savaged by Lucan rather as Virgil restores the traditional values that had been inverted by Lucretius.” Tipping 2010 provides a useful introduction to and bibliography on Silius’ engagement with his predecessors, including Homer (4n.8), Ennius (3n.3), Livy (2n.2), Virgil (2n.2), Lucan (4n.7), and Statius (5n.11).

manner of death along with it (*eadem leti versatur imago*, 617). Yet while there is undoubtedly a focus on air, some of the physicality discussed above can also be seen here. The air is dark and dirty (*polluto, ater*), the sun has fouled everything (*foedavit, squalebat*), and an oppressive heat hangs over the scene (*aestiferis... feruoribus, accendit... igni, fervida*). Silius' plague is characterized by the pervasiveness of death in the vapor-filled air, but also by a sense of thorough discomfort.

This all-encompassing stench and physical dirtiness support the poet's suggestion, voiced by both his narrator and the soldiers themselves, that plague is a shameful and foul way to die, an anti-war rather than a continuation of it. The contrast with war is present from the onset: the disease rears its head suddenly (*subito*) mid-battle and prevents the Romans from achieving what is at this point in the fight an assured victory.⁸⁹ While the delay in the *BC* may have caused a glimmer of hope that Pharsalus might be prevented, the *Punica*'s plague instead invites frustration, and the Romans are miserable (*miseris*) not only because they have been struck by sickness, but because they have been temporarily robbed of their martial glory (*rapuisset gaudia*). The narrator explicitly contrasts the two types of death by emphasizing how terrible it is to die of the plague: *heu dolor! insignis notis bellator in armis / ignavo rapitur leto* ("How awful! The warrior renowned in glorious war is snatched away by cowardly death," 606-7).⁹⁰ Finally, when the plague has lifted and the battle resumes, Silius presents the "moral" from the perspective of the survivors:

respirant laeti... itur in hostem,
 et, si fata ferant, iuuat inter proelia ferro
 posse mori. socium miseret, qui sorte pudenda 630
 in morem pecudum effudere cubilibus atris
 inlaudatam animam. tumulos inhonoraque busta

⁸⁹ Compare *Aen.* 3.135ff, where a plague falls *subito* upon Aeneas' men as they are founding a new city.

⁹⁰ *Punica* 14.606-7.

respiciunt, vel nullo iacuisse sepulcro
quam debellari morbis placet.⁹¹

They breathe gladly... The battle begins, and they are happy to die by the sword in battle if the fates should will it. They pity their comrades, who by a shameful lot breathed forth their unhonored spirits like sheep, lying on their black beds. They survey the mounds and unrenowned pyres: it is better even to lie unburied than to be conquered by disease.

The poet connects the dishonorable fate of the dead with the foul qualities of the plague through the references to air and breath which recall his initial description of the gathering sickness. While the soldiers breathe gladly (*respirant laeti*) because the air is clean once again, the plague victims emit their last breaths without any glory (*effudere.../ inlaudatam animam*), a phrase which reminds the reader that this fate is not only ignoble (*pudenda*), it is unheroic. Even the dishonorable fate of becoming an unburied corpse on the battlefield is preferable to being utterly conquered by disease (*debellari morbis*). For Silius, the pervasive stench and tactile dirtiness of the plague are part of its shamefulness as much as of its gruesomeness, indications of its widespread quality but also of the sorry, un-warlike nature of death suffered by the victims. The reactions of the narrator and soldiers thus take the reader's gut feelings of disgust in the face of plague and direct them also against the idea of *dying* of the plague, an altogether repulsive fate.

Even an honorable war death, however, can leave a reeking corpse. The next passages I discuss feature gruesome scenes of post-war carnage, and it is perhaps not surprising that they come from the *Bellum Civile* and Statius' *Thebaid*, the two Roman epics featuring the most lurid depictions of civil war, where burial of the dead becomes an important and contested issue which suggests the enduring *nefas* of this type of warfare. The passages I will look at deal with the inability to fix a clear line between the body of a fallen soldier, the stench and putrefaction of his

⁹¹ *Punica* 14.628-34.

rotting corpse, and the environment which both absorbs and intensifies that pollution.⁹² Odor, like civil war, muddles both physical and moral boundaries,⁹³ and the blurring of the line between human and environmental pollution suggests the impossibility of determining a single guilty party when in fact everyone is both victim and culprit, just as everything is both polluted and polluting.⁹⁴ Moreover, the lingering presence of death in the earth and air suggests the continuing injustice of civil war even after the battle has ended. It is important to note, in fact, that these scenes of carnage follow the decisive battles of each epic, Pharsalus in the *BC* and in the *Thebaid* the battle of the Seven, concluded by the duel between Eteocles and Polynices. In the wake of these decisive battles, the sensory assault launched by the ill-treated dead against the living is a vivid and gruesome reminder of the horrors of civil war which linger both on the battlefield and in the memory of the Roman reader.

At the end of *Bellum Civile* Book 7, the battle of Pharsalus is over, Pompey has fled, and Caesar is victorious.⁹⁵ He is so victorious, in fact, that his triumphant soldiers have gone to sleep

⁹² For the landscapes of (civil) war, see Masters (1992) 43-70, 106-18, 150-78, O’Gorman 1995, Keith (2000) 36-34, Newlands 2004, Bexley 2014. Of the *Aeneid*, Hardie (1993) 26 argues, “The problem of discriminating between the actors has its narrative correlative in the way in which the landscape itself is stripped of the marks of religious and legal distinctiveness...” (citing 12.770-1 and 12.897-8). In Lucan and Statius, in contrast, the landscape is stripped of its ability to create distinctions at all.

⁹³ Bartsch (1997) 12: “In some ways [Lucan’s] epic seems the prolonged expression of a crisis around the body, or rather the boundary that separates men from what is pointedly not-man, from the inanimate and the environment – a boundary which the weapons of civil war physically violate...” On boundaries in Lucan, see Bourgery 1928, Most 1992, Masters (1992) 1-5 and 64 (where he also notes the *creation* of boundaries through civil war), O’Gorman (1995) 122, Bartsch (1997) 10-48 and 153n.19, Henderson (1998) 191-2 and 205, Pogorzelski 2011, Myers (2011) 399-415, Bexley (2014) esp. 394 on moral versus geographical boundaries.

⁹⁴ *BC* 2.143-4: *periere nocentes, / sed cum iam soli possent superesse nocentes. BC* 7.122-3: *omne malum uicti, quod sors feret ultima rerum, omne nefas uictoris erit.* Cf. Brutus’ assertion at 2.258-9 that war will make Cato guilty, and the narrator’s claim that “to win was worse” (*vincere peius erat*) at 7.706. At 7.260, however, Caesar expresses the conviction that the battle of Pharsalus will pin guilt on the defeated, rather than the victor. On the inevitability and perpetuation of civil war, see Ganiban (2011) 330, Augoustakis (2011) 187. For the idea that civil war makes everyone guilty, see Edwards (2007) 40, Franchet d’Espèrey 2009, Bernstein (2011) 268, Myers (2011) 401. Masters (1992) Chapter 7 brings the theme of the endlessness of civil war to bear in his argument that Lucan’s epic is complete as we have it.

⁹⁵ One mention of odor intervenes between the aftermath of Pharsalus and the plague. This describes the practices of the witch Erichtho, who haunts graveyards and exhumes bodies for use in her ghastly rites; one of the

upon the beds of the defeated Pompeians, their former friends and relatives. While asleep they experience what Lucan calls “a night of madness” inspired by the previous day’s battle and the devastation it has caused:

ingemuisse putem campos, terramque nocentem
inspirasse animas, infectumque aera totum
manibus et superam Stygia formidine noctem.
exigit a miseris tristes victoria poenas,
sibilaque et flammam infert sopor: umbra peremti
civis adest: sua quemque premit terroris imago.
Ille senum vultus, iuvenum videt ille figuras...⁹⁶

I can well believe that the battlefield sent forth a groan, and that the guilty earth breathed its airs upon them; that all the sky was tainted by the dead, and the night of the upper world darkened with the terrors of Hell. Their victory justly demands grim retribution; sleep brings flames and hissing of serpents against them. The ghost of a slain countryman stands by the bed; each man has a different shape of terror to haunt him: one sees the faces of old men, another the forms of youths...

The narrator imagines the post-Pharsalian world as a sensory assault of sound, smell, sight, and touch, which is noteworthy for its fullness in a generally visual narrative. The battlefield moans; the soil seeps forth the stench of death; the flames and hissing of the Furies disturb their sleep; and the shades of the dead seem to stand present at their bedsides.⁹⁷ The individual senses do not remain discrete but overlap as they did in the descriptions of the Harpy attacks, and as each sense

items she collects from pyres is “ashes reeking of limbs” (*olentes membra favillas*, 6.537). This phrase is unusual in that it is one out of very few which actually attribute a smell directly to a body (or in this case, part of one) as opposed to the corrupted earth or air. The *favillas* may be unusual because the passage is not about civil war, but unnatural witchcraft. While other sections stress the widespread harm which human warfare has caused not only to others, but also to the larger world, this phrase suggests the injustice which Erictho commits against a fellow human by reminding the reader what the ember used to be.

⁹⁶ *BC* 7.768-74.

⁹⁷ For Furies and re-embodiment in epic after Virgil, see Hardie (1993) Chr 3. On ghosts in Lucan, see Esposito (2010) esp. 149-54 on this scene specifically, Bernstein 2011, Easton 2011 (for Pompey’s ghost). Bernstein notes that in Lucan’s predecessors, “agency, choice, and justification for action are shared between the living and the dead. In some cases, ghosts exert tangible physical effects on the living” (259). Lucan’s own ghosts, he suggests, have “much more limited capacities” (259) and therefore the living bear more responsibility for their actions. This passage suggests that the “tangible physical effects” the Pompeian ghosts have on the Caesarians are in fact the *result* of their actions.

comes into play the scene becomes not only aesthetically fuller, but more and more horrific. The reader is encouraged to react just as strongly to this post-battle scene as to the fighting itself.

The scene and all its sensory details, Lucan tells us, are a reflection of the crime of civil war and its severity, but they are also a sign of the contaminating guilt which civil war confers equally upon all,⁹⁸ as evidenced by the fact that even the landscape is depicted as both victim and culprit. The battlefield itself is an aggressor, groaning eerily (*ingemuisse...campos*) while the harmful (*nocentem*) earth breathes forth *animas*.⁹⁹ The civil strife which caused the Caesarians to kill their kin has seeped into the land itself and now rises up against them. But while the land becomes an aggressor, the air is depicted as a victim, tainted (*infectum*) by a host of the dead. The air is a casualty of war, yet at the same time the earth is somehow guilty despite also having been polluted by human warfare. On top of this, the dead become antagonists though victims of the war. As spirits they rise up against the living psychologically, while as rotting corpses they assault the senses, prolonging the conflict by refusing to leave the Caesarians in peace. Meanwhile the *animae* hover between the earth and the sky, an ambiguous transition point linking the upper and lower worlds. On one reading, the harmful earth is breathing forth shades of the dead, picked up in *manibus* a line further. But on another, these *animae* may be polluting vapors which taint the air and the night sky.¹⁰⁰ The two interpretations, however, are linked, for whether this is stench or angry ghost, the result is the same: death crosses to the upper world and

⁹⁸ Even, perhaps, upon the disturbed reader? One wonders whether a Roman reader whose ancestors had fought in the civil war may have felt a particularly strong sense of guilt here.

⁹⁹ Cf. Newlands (2004) 138 of Statius' landscape: "But the land is not often complicit with evil. Rather...its very lack of deception marks it as an innocent victim of the infernal madness of human beings. Warring humans...do most of the damage to the land." While the land is certainly not always guilty as it is here in the *BC*, human damage does have the unfortunate tendency of causing the landscape to redouble the pollution whether it means to or not.

¹⁰⁰ Dilke 1960 *ad loc.* notes the two possible readings of *animas*.

spreads fear and contagion widely.¹⁰¹ As Hardie succinctly summarizes, “War, the traditional epic theme, produces a Hell on Earth.”¹⁰² Civil war all the more so.

By killing their countrymen and then leaving them unburied, Caesar’s soldiers have allowed the horrors of the battle to spread to the earth and air, then back to them again through the foulness rising up against them. They are guilty, but have made the world around them, as well as the dead, guilty aggressors as well.¹⁰³ A similar idea is expressed when Caesar surveys the battlefield the next morning.¹⁰⁴ In a direct address the narrator asks why Caesar, who denied burial to the dead, is fleeing the slaughter (*hanc cladem*) and reeking plains (*olentes agros*) which are, the implicit suggestion is, his fault.¹⁰⁵ Odor once again signals the spread of contagion, serving as “a vivid picture of the action of the rotting corpses on the local environment.”¹⁰⁶ It also, however, suggests the confusion of guilt, the muddling of boundaries between the dead and the environment: does the stench come from the fields themselves, or the corpses? Is there a difference any longer? The narrator challenges:

Has trahe, Caesar, aquas: hoc, si potes, utere coelo.
Sed tibi tabentes populi Pharsalica rura
Eripiunt, camposque tenent victore fugato.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰¹ Bernstein (2011) 264-5 observes that Lucan is the first author to suggest that the actions of the living also have consequences for the configuration of the underworld and the relationships of its inhabitants. “These indications that the disruption of society extends also to the underworld show *the universal consequences of civil war*” (265, emphasis mine).

¹⁰² Hardie (1993) 79.

¹⁰³ Cf. O’Gorman (1995) 125, of Tacitus’ *Batavi*: “In the domain of water boundaries lose their distinction, reflecting the loss of self-other identity in the conflict of civil war.” So too in the domain of air and odor.

¹⁰⁴ *BC* 7.786-799. Cf. Plato’s *Republic* 4.439e-440, where Leontius is inexplicably fascinated by the corpses in the road but also disgusted by his desire to look at them. Galtier 2009 compares Caesar’s survey of Pharsalia to Vitellius’ survey of Bedracium in Tacitus’ *Hist.* 2.70, noting how the two battlefields function as *spectacula*. On the “aftermath narrative” see Pagán (2000) 424ff, esp. 431-3.

¹⁰⁵ *BC* 7.820-1: *Tu, cui dant poenas inhumato funere gentes, / Quid fugis hanc cladem? quid olentes deseris agros?* These and the following line (822) are absent from most manuscript traditions and receive no mention in the scholia, causing some scholars to mark them as spurious. See Dilke (1960) 173 *ad loc.* and Fraenkel (1926) 522ff.

¹⁰⁶ Fratantuono (2012) 304-5, of the stench which draws wild animals to the battlefield shortly after Caesar’s departure. The arrival of the animals at 7.825 resumes Lucan’s long passage on the futility of Caesar’s determination not to bury the dead begun at 809: the corpses will decompose, the earth will receive them, fire will ultimately consume them (in the Stoic *ekpyrosis*), and (backtracking somewhat) animals will consume them.

¹⁰⁷ *BC* 7.822-4.

Drink this water, Caesar, and breathe this air if you can. But the rotting crowds
have stolen the Pharsalian lands from you; they claim the fields, the victor routed.

The pattern is similar: though Caesar is the victor and has denied the defeated burial,¹⁰⁸ he is ultimately himself robbed of that victory by the *tabentes populi* who repel him from Pharsalus because of the pollution they have wrought upon the land. The fields are reeking, the air unbreathable, the water unpotable. Though Caesar is depicted as unnatural because he revels excessively in the *sight* of the dead, he is driven off because other sensory aspects of the scene are too much for him.¹⁰⁹ Once again the dead, through the stain they have left on the environment, take action against the “official” victor who caused the stain in the first place. Thus the conflict and assignment of blame—or, indeed, of victory—does not end with the death of one side or the other.¹¹⁰ On the contrary, the war between the Pompeians and Caesarians continues throughout these scenes, and Lucan’s emphasis on the pervasive, stinking infection of death ensures that the reader will continue to feel *fastidium* in the face of civil war even after the fighting has concluded.¹¹¹

In Statius’ *Thebaid*, a poem in which crime runs rampant,¹¹² descriptions of the polluted battlefield call attention to the injustice being perpetrated against the dead. Moreover, because

¹⁰⁸ Lucan remarks that even Hannibal provided the Roman general Aemilius Paullus a proper burial, but that nothing will compel Caesar “to preserve human rites on behalf of the enemy” (*hominum ritus ut servet in hoste*), 7.801.

¹⁰⁹ 7.786-799. This distinction recalls Regulus’ soldiers at *Punica* 6.244-6, whose mental capacities are diminished by the sight of the giant serpent while their physical strength wanes because of its stench.

¹¹⁰ Cf. Gorman (2001) 280: “Victory is pollution and even the act of dying serves to infect the killer with an unholy virtue.”

¹¹¹ The Pompeians, of course, have not lost the war yet, only the battle of Pharsalus. Thus the endurance of pollution and the fact that the environment itself manifests the hostility of Pompey’s troops may also suggest that the war itself is not over. As such, its pollution will continue to spread.

¹¹² Cf. Ganiban (2011) 330: “In Statius, crime is hereditary and therefore inevitable, just as civil war seems to be in Lucan.” The epic begins with the wickedness of Thebes, and lists her past crimes at 1.227-39. On crime and morality in Statius, see Fantham 1995, Pollmann (2008) 361-5, Parkes 2011, Ganiban 2007 s.v. “*nefas*” and 2011. For Statius’ epic models for Book 12, including the *Iliad*, *Aeneid*, and Callimachus’ *Hecale*, see McNelis (2007) Chr. 6.

these scenes are focalized through internal characters who pity the dead, the disgusting depictions of rot and gore ultimately suggest the need to take action in order to right this wrong, and an end to civil strife suddenly seems possible after all. In Book 12, after the battle is over and Creon has denied burial to Polynices and his Argive allies, Evadne, the widow of the warrior Capaneus, leads a group of women to Athens to seek aid from Theseus.¹¹³ She begins her speech by noting that the death of her husband and his comrades was fair according to the laws of war, but insists that Creon is behaving cruelly by denying them burial now that the battle has concluded. Where, she asks, are the gods to avenge this crime?¹¹⁴

septima iam surgens trepidis Aurora iacentes
aversatur equis; radios declinat et horret
stelligeri iubar omne poli; iam comminus ipsae 565
pabula dira ferae campumque odere volucres
spirantem tabo et caelum ventosque gravantem.
quantum etenim superesse rear? nuda ossa putremque
verrere permittat saniem...¹¹⁵

Now a seventh Dawn rising turns her frightened horses from them lying there. Every heavenly beam slants its light away in horror. The very wild beasts and birds as they come close abhor the horrid feasts and the field breathing corruption, tainting sky and breeze. For how little I suppose must remain! Let [Creon] permit us to sweep up the bare bones, the rotting gore.

Creon's vendetta against the Argive dead finds expression in the increasingly disgusting state of the battlefield as the days pass and the dead remain unburied. Like Lucan, Evadne widens the sensory scope of her description to incorporate not just sight, but smell and perhaps even taste (in *pabula dira*). Her initial visual image (*iacentes*) is mild and nondescript, but a sense of disgust is

¹¹³ On the problematic role of Book 12, see Kabsch 1968, Kissel (2004) 73-77, Pollmann (2004) 21-25, Ganiban (2007) Chr. 9, McNelis (2007) Chr. 6, Bessone (2011) Chrs. 3 and 4.

¹¹⁴ On the godlessness of Lucan's *BC* in contrast to this and other Roman epics, see Feeney (1991) 270-301, Hardie (1993) 25 and 62-68 (for Caesar as both beast and god), Bartsch (1997) Chr. 4, Fratantuono (2012) *passim*, Dinter (2012) 74-5. Cf. also Baier (ed.) 2012 on the gods and men in later Roman epic.

¹¹⁵ *Theb.* 12.563-9. This constitutes an instance of "Staius' use of relatively minor figures to reflect upon the poem's criminal content" (Ganiban (2011) 333).

aroused by her description of the earth breathing corruption, the tainted sky, and rotting gore. As in the *BC*, the land actively seethes with gore (*tabo*) while the sky is a victim corrupted by its stench. The fact that *tabo* must be taken with both *campum.../spirantem* and *caelum ventosque gravantem* suggests how widespread the contagion is and the extent to which the injustice against the dead has been allowed to continue.¹¹⁶

Evadne goes on to contrast the lingering odors of death and decay which signal Creon's crime with the smoking pyres of the Amazons, one of the "correct" scents of death.¹¹⁷ If the king had followed Theseus' example and allowed his enemies a proper burial, this pollution of earth and air would not have happened, nor would it continue to exert a negative effect on the living—civil war continues, as in Lucan. Indeed, even the birds and beasts, usually so ready to prowl the battlefield, cannot endure the stench and stay well away from Thebes.¹¹⁸ For Evadne, smell functions as a marker of the severity of Creon's moral injustice against the dead, the endurance of his hatred despite the fact that the war is over. Her objection is not to war itself: on the contrary, she is asking Theseus to march on Thebes in order to *force* Creon to grant burial to the dead. What she fights against is the king's excessive cruelty, the continuation of *civil* strife. She remarks that though the Argives made war, death has brought an end to hate and wrath (*bellavimus, esto; / sed cecidere odia et tristes mors obruit iras*, 573-4). The lingering stench of the battlefield which she has just described, however, is a vivid reminder that this is not actually

¹¹⁶ Parkes (2011) 89 notes: "Now it is true that the Argives are the wronged party on this occasion. However, it is not clear that they have previously been superior in their treatment of the corpses of their enemies." This being the case, the lingering stench of decay might also take on a sinister aspect, a sign of the enduring hostility of the Argives. On the denial of burial in the *Theb.*, see Pagán 2000, Pollmann (2004) 32-6, Parkes (2011) 88-9.

¹¹⁷ *Theb.* 12.578: *credo et Amazoniis Tanain fumasse sepulcris*.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Ornytus' words to the women earlier in the book (12.153-4): *solis aibusque ferisque / ire licet*. The idea that corpses were so foul that even animals avoided them is not new to Statius. It is especially common in plague narratives, where the severity of the contagion is showcased through the refusal of birds and beasts to go near the dead. Cf. Thucydides 2.50; Lucretius 6.1215-21; and Ovid *Met.* 7.548. Whereas the plague creates a sort of civil war between the dead and the survivors, Creon's wrath has replicated the effects of plague on the natural world despite the fact that the soldiers died in battle.

the case. Creon's hatred persists, but so does death, hovering in the air even though the warriors are long since dead.

The battlefield evinces similar characteristics earlier in Book 12, when Argia sneaks towards Thebes in order to find and bury the body of her husband Polynices. Her servant Menoetes accompanies her and speaks out when he senses they are close to their destination:

‘haud procul, exacti si spes non blanda laboris,
Ogygias, Argia, domos et egena sepulcri
busta iacere reor; grave comminus aestuat aer
sordidus, et magnae redeunt per inane volucres,
haec illa est crudelis humus, nec moenia longe. 250
cernis, ut ingentes murorum porrigat umbras
campus, et e speculis moriens intermicet ignis?’¹¹⁹

“Argia, I sense that Ogygian homes and corpses in need of burial lie not far away, unless the hope of completing our task be false; nearby a foul air hangs heavily, and huge birds return through the void. Here is that cruel earth, and the walls are not far off. Do you see how the great shadows of the walls extend along the field, and a dying fire glimmers from the watchtowers?”

In the dark, Menoetes identifies the presence of the battlefield through his senses, no doubt picking up on the lingering presence of death filling the air. Yet again the earth is the enemy, *crudelis* here, perhaps as much because it is Theban land as because it has absorbed the poison of the rotting dead. The air, meanwhile, is polluted (*sordidus*), and this time wild animals *do* approach. Statius capitalizes on this contrast between human and animal, civilized and uncivilized, responses to the dead by drawing attention to the close proximity of Thebes to the fields of slain. In the same line Menoetes indicates both homes (*Ogygias...domos*) and bodies in need of burial (*egena sepulcri / busta*); one can imagine him indicating first the *polis*, then the

¹¹⁹ *Theb.* 12.246-52.

adjacent would-be *necropolis*. The opposition is jarring, for the people who could perform the proper rituals for the dead are so nearby, yet forbidden to act.

These two speeches, in fact, seem designed to inspire action both because of and despite the gruesome descriptions that accompany them. Disgust is, through the fervor of the characters through whose eyes we see these scenes,¹²⁰ transformed into a sense of indignation, a moral disgust directed at the crime rather than a physical reaction to the foulness.¹²¹ We see here something of Robert Kaster's distinction between per se *fastidium* and deliberative *fastidium*, an innate reaction to something foul versus a reasoned conclusion that something is odious.¹²² Both Evadne and Menoetes describe scenes which would make a typical reader recoil automatically with disgust, but then go on to declare their resolution to bury the dead. The battlefield does not disgust them as much as the continued suffering of their loved ones, just as the plague was as much a dishonorable frustration to Silius' soldiers as a source of revulsion.¹²³ Evadne, who wants Theseus' aid in securing the burial of the Argive dead, couches her grisly description of the battlefield amidst lines designed to evoke pity and even to cause guilt.¹²⁴ She laments, for instance, that the gods have abandoned the dead, and stresses Theseus' connection with them:

¹²⁰ Herz (2012) 72 notes that science suggests that we (or at least our brains) respond the same way whether we see someone sniffing a gross odor or smell it ourselves. Statius seems to be capitalizing on a similar phenomenon here, manipulating the reader's disgust by depicting his characters' reactions to it.

¹²¹ On physical versus moral disgust, see Miller (1997) 179-205, Nussbaum 1999 and 2004, Kolnai (2004) 62-72 and 81-86, Herz (2012) 204ff and Strohminger (2014) 484-5. Herz's analysis suggests that "we only feel "grossed out" by moral transgressions when they involve the body" (207), which would most certainly apply in Statius.

¹²² Kaster (2005) Chapter 5. Kaster's deliberative *fastidium* relates more to systems of ranking, preferring X to Y and therefore feeling *fastidium* for Y. Many of his examples deal with culinary and literary connoisseurship or snobbery, which is certainly a far cry from what is happening on Statius' battlefield. Nevertheless, the shift from "this is repulsive because it is gross" to "this is repulsive because it represents unfair treatment of the dead and the denial of traditional burial customs" does involve the "conscious exercise of thought and will" (112) required of deliberative *fastidium*.

¹²³ Cf. D'Alessandro Behr (2007) 72: "The "mise en scene of spectatorship" enhanced by a narrator telling his audience how to judge "the spectacle" of his fiction and by the portrayal of the reactions of different internal audiences, invites the external audience's crucial reflection." Cf. also Bernstein 2004, Rolim De Moura 2010.

¹²⁴ Herz (2012) 215 points to studies which have shown that displays of squalor and disgusting things do not arouse pity or charity in the viewer, which would suggest that Evadne's approach here is unlikely to succeed. Tullet and Inzlicht 2011, however, argue the opposite.

“they were human blood, . . . men, created to the same stars, the same living lot, the same nurture as yourselves.”¹²⁵ At the same time, she lays some of the blame for the situation upon the Athenians, suggesting that Athens, like the gods, has abandoned the dead and played its part in allowing the situation to deteriorate.¹²⁶ Far from being merely gruesome, the rotting gore and smells issuing from the battlefield reflect this negligence and guide feelings of disgust to become those of guilt: any revulsion Theseus may be feeling is, at least in part, his fault. Evadne’s description, which emphasizes pollution and the endurance of the conflict even seven days after the battle, shames the Athenians and attempts, by harnessing and transforming feelings of disgust, to stir them to action, the same action she herself is so ready to take.

In the same way, Menoetes’ battlefield points to a chance to rectify a wrong situation and to provide the treatment the dead deserve. His oddly chosen *busta* for the corpses of the dead, rather than *corpora* or even *cadavera*, is placed near a second burial-related word, *sepulcri*, and also begins its own line.¹²⁷ The result is an emphasis both on what the dead currently lack and on the goal of Argia’s nighttime journey. Menoetes’ indication of the foul air not only suggests their proximity to the battlefield, but, like Evadne’s description, serves as a reminder of the continuing outrage against the dead and therefore the need for the service the two are about to provide. Argia, however, need not be shamed into burying her husband. Menoetes does not have to resort to pity or laments to the gods, and instead everything that might be sinister about this scene to the reader—the stench, the darkness, the approach of the carrion birds, the shadows cast by the

¹²⁵ *Theb.* 12.555-7.

¹²⁶ *Theb.* 12.561-2 and 569-70. For the gods’ ignorance of the *nefas* of the war and their inability to counter the forces of hell, see Ganiban (2007) *passim*.

¹²⁷ *Bustum* is typically used of either the funeral pyre or the grave itself, but rarely of the body. Both of the OLD’s exempla for this definition derive from the *Thebaid* (3.144 and 12.247), plus *Priapea* 57.1 which uses the word as an insult. On the distinction between *corpus* and *cadaver* in Lucan, see Calonne 2008.

towering walls, and the flickering torchlight—becomes instead a source of *spes* to the pair. For these characters, disgust paradoxically suggests that civil conflict might finally be at an end.¹²⁸

Conclusion

Not even epic, a high and serious genre, was above including elements of the foul and gruesome, particularly the stench of death and decay. In this chapter I have argued that, far from somehow “lowering” the tone of these works, the presence of loathsome stench instead resonates with some of the most serious human (and Roman) concerns: the fear of death and the ways in which it comes about. At the same time, foul odors feature especially prominently in places where traditional epic ideas are overthrown or threatened, so that death-related stench ultimately serve to suggest the frightening, shameful and unheroic.

The odors discussed in this chapter range from the foul and physical to the invisible and ominous, suggesting a threat to the body even as they simultaneously signal the dissolution of other bodies. By playing on the revulsion inspired by bad smells and the conception of odors as transgressive and defiling, the epic poets link the innate response to the foulness of odor to anxieties about death and dying, especially in a gruesome or dishonorable manner. The mythological and supernatural is a particularly fertile area for inspiring this kind of fear and disgust because it also incorporates elements of the unknown or “other.” The Harpies, as frightful bird-woman hybrids, are able to embody the idea of decay, and the odors of these

¹²⁸ Pollmann (2004) 46 notes that the reconciliation of Antigone and Argia over the burial of Polynices “anticipates the eventual reconciliation of the two cities as a whole.” Whether conflict as a whole will end seems less likely, given that Theseus has to duel and kill Creon to secure burial for the Argives, and that the previous set of funerals in the *Thebaid*, in Book 7, led paradoxically to renewed military action (see Pollmann 34). Cf. also Keith (2000) 100: “Statius’ closing lines [likening the women to Maenads] hint that no occasion is immune from women’s violent summons to war.” On the role of the women and the end of violence in the *Thebaid*, see also Franchet D’Espèrey (1999) Chr. 6. On Argia specifically, Kabsch (1968) 14-22, Frings (1991) 140-54, Pollmann (2004) 44-8 and (2008) 364-5.

monsters are emblematic of their connection with the world of the dead and the threat that it entails, both to the lives of the characters and the success of their mission from god. The underworld, too, seeps forth a threatening power which strikes birds from the sky, bridging the divide between the world of the dead and that of the living using nothing more than a mephitic vapor loosed from a dangerous earth. Tactile, vaporous, and polluting, the stench of the underworld both signals and carries death, threatening those who come too near.

If mythology suggests the dangers of death, history points out that it is all too real, especially for the senses. Plague functions like another underworld emanation, rising from the earth and filling the air, striking down animals but also humans whose unburied bodies become the very pollution feared by those still living. For Lucan, plague only provides an extension of already-unheroic civil war as the living neglect to bury the dead and the rotting dead infect the living. So, too, the poet seems to suggest, do the deaths caused by civil war lead only to more deaths and further pollution, whether of the earth and air or of the minds and wills of the soldiers who blindly follow Caesar and Pompey. Silius' plague, meanwhile, capitalizes on the idea mentioned above, that smell is somehow shameful, embarrassing, or low. The very quality which might make odor inappropriate for epic serves to suggest that dying of the plague is also inappropriate for epic characters, especially when they are fighting a not civil, and therefore not horrific, war against Hannibal.

Shadi Bartsch remarks that Lucan “likes to dwell on the abject, the by-product of transgression, such as the ligaments and bowels that trail upon the ground...”¹²⁹ In the *Bellum Civile* and *Thebaid*, odor functions as yet another “by-product of transgression,” a lingering sign of the perpetration but also the pervasiveness of civil strife and crime. As human and

¹²⁹ Bartsch (1997) 21. On the abject, Kristeva 1982 is fundamental, and see also Grosz 1990.

environmental pollution bleed together, an idea hinted at in Lucan's plague passage, the assignment of guilt becomes more and more difficult: just as both the Pompeians and Caesarians, both the Thebans and the Argives, are guilty, so are the dead corpses and even the environment itself sources of pollution which extend the war when the battle has already been fought. For Lucan, this lingering and ever-increasing pollution strikes the Roman conscience and questions whether the effects of civil war can ever truly fade. For Statius, or at least his characters, the worsening pollution instead fires a determination to end Creon's crime, bury the dead, and finally erase the reeking signs of conflict.

Chapter 3

Scent of a Roman: The Poet and his Readers in Martial's *Epigrammata*¹

And by the same reason, it is no good maner, when a man chaunceth to see, as he passeth the waye (as many times it happeneth) a lothesome thing, y^t wil make a man to cast his stomacke, to tourne vnto the company, & shewe it them. And much worse I like it, to reache some stynking thing vnto a man to smell vnto it: as it is many a mans fashion to do, w^t importunate meanes, yea, thrusting it vnto their nose, saying: *Foh, feele I pray you, how this doth stink:*

—Giovanni Della Casa²

Introduction

Giovanni Della Casa would not have approved of Martial. The inhabitant of Flavian Rome is all too fond of thrusting odors under the noses of his readers and remarking *how this doth stink*. Martial's ability to write both sharp, witty epigrams and fulsome encomia is enhanced, in fact, by his senses: as epigrammatist he is intimately involved in the world he creates, not only guiding the reader through it but interacting with and being acted upon by it. Because his poetic persona is so integrated into the world of his poetry, any sight, sound, smell, touch, taste, or combination of experiences might give rise to an epigram.³ Just as a rumor about what happened at last night's dinner can reach Martial's ear and inspire a poem (2.72), so an

¹ My thanks to Claudia Arno for suggesting this title.

² *Galateo* 6. Accessed via EEBO 10/7/2014.

³ My references here to "Martial" as he appears in the *Epigrams* refer to his poetic persona, not the historical poet. On persona-theory in Martial, see Sullivan (1991) 147-155, Obermayer (1998) 9ff, Holzberg (2002) 13-18, Nauta (2002) 39-58, Watson and Watson (2003) 5-7, Fitzgerald (2007) 7-13. As Holzberg (2002) 15 notes, the same caution must be exercised when considering Martial's Rome-persona, as it were: "Wie man sieht, ist es nicht die Realität des Lebens im Rom der frühen Kaiserzeit und ebensowenig die Realität der eigenen Lebenserfahrung, die Martial in seinen Epigrammen beschreibt, sondern eine fiktive Welt."

odor emanating from a passerby on the street can also feed the poet's muse. Smells are, in fact, very like the *fama* which fuels so many of Martial's epigrams, and the poet is only too ready to share with the reader what his nose has told him.¹

This final chapter examines the smells and noses of Martial's *Epigrams* and their use—as both revelatory *indices* and boundary-crossing contaminants—by a poet who is concerned with genre, poetics, literary sophistication, and his own role as an epigrammatic poet. At the same time, however, he also evinces an intimately thorough interest in the physical, contaminating, and often unsophisticated realities of the world which he inhabits. Since Sullivan's 1991 *Martial: The Unexpected Classic* inspired a resurgence of interest in Martial as a poet, scholarship has highlighted both the tension and the interplay between these two concerns. Victoria Rimell, for instance, notes that without a single, rich patron like Maecenas to act as an intermediary between the poet and his reading public, Martial himself becomes immersed in the realities of everyday Rome, “in which physical integrity and originality are threatened.”² She emphasizes the prominent role of touching and contagion in Martial's poetry, compounded by the rampant crossing of boundaries between poet and audience, individuals, and epigrams themselves.³ Luke Roman, examining the Rome of the epigrams and its relationship to both the cities of Martial's predecessors and the Flavian building program, remarks similarly that “[t]he opposition between book (as integral aesthetic object) and city (that tarnishes and corrupts it) collapses as Martial's

¹ On *fama* in Martial, see Anderson (2003) Chr. 4, Hardie (2012) Chr. 8. Cf. also Rimell (2008) 22: “One can never be too cautious in a world in which gossip and invective stain and linger like bad smells.” In 3.28, rumor and odor are combined: Marius' ear stinks because Nestor has been whispering in it, suggesting not only that Nestor has bad breath, but also that the content of his whisperings is of a foul nature (my thanks to Msgr. Daniel Gallagher for the latter suggestion).

² Rimell (2008) 9. Martial not only willingly portrays himself as susceptible to the criticism and influence of others, at times he even calls unnecessary attention to the fact: at 6.65, for instance, he accuses a man of writing poems against him *quos nullus noverit* (22)—except Martial has just told us about them!

³ Chr. 1; see esp. 20-28 for contagion and 28-32 for touching, where she also highlights the “paradox of contiguity *without* touching” (29, emphasis original). Rimell contrasts the traditionally self-contained epigram with the impossibility of maintaining any such boundaries, much like, she suggests, the city of Rome itself.

restlessly mobile book merges with the city through its insertion into vividly imagined contexts of reception and social use.”⁴

Recent scholarship has thus recognized both Martial’s poetic sophistication and his integration into his often sordid world, and has explored what happens when these two collide. No one, however, has yet examined the part odor and noses play in both illustrating and complicating these key aspects of Martial’s poetics. His emphasis on the olfactory provides an ideal perspective from which to investigate these ideas because smells, as we saw in the previous chapter, are linked with contagion and physical boundaries, while the nose in Roman thought is tied to ideas of sophistication, snobbery, and literary criticism. Through olfactory epigrams Martial looks upon and criticizes his world, defines himself and his poetry in the face of an array of critical-nosed readers,⁵ and engages so vividly with his subject-matter that his own boundaries, too, are threatened. Martial may in fact be just as dirty, sickly, flawed, or even foul-smelling as anyone else we might meet in the *Epigrams*.⁶

⁴ Roman (2010) 102. William Fitzgerald’s *Martial* (2007) “masters his world by exploiting epigram’s facility for slicing it into manageable chunks; epigram is emphatically ‘the art of survival’ in the naked city (12)” (Gideon Nisbet, review in *JRS* 98, pg. 246). See also Rodríguez Almeida 2003 for Martial and Rome’s urban topography. On “writing the city,” Edwards 1996, Fowler 2000, Welch 2005, Barchiesi 2005. Philip Hardie 2012, meanwhile, recognizes a similar tension when he discusses Martial’s bid for poetic fame alongside a need to “dirt[y] his hands with the materialities of distribution and readership” (323).

⁵ Unlike some of his predecessors, Martial claims to attack flaws but not individuals, and if the victim is real, his name has been changed. See for example 5.15, where Martial claims no one has complained that s/he has been harmed by his poems, and 2.23, where the readers’ demand to know Postumus’ true identity implies the use of a pseudonym. On the other hand, notes Sullivan 1991, “One must, however, wonder whether there was more than one rich cobbler in Bononia who put on public spectacles (3.16, 3.59, 3.99)” (64). For Martial’s participation in the iambic, satiric, invective, and epigrammatic traditions, see Richlin (1983) Chr. 5, Hawkins (2014) 82-6, Sullivan (1991) 78-114, Laurens 1965.

⁶ Rimell (2008) 21 notes how Martial takes the romantic or snobbish idea (inherited from the elegists and Persius) of the ‘pale poet’ who stays indoors and shuns the light and transforms it into a stereotype such that having some sort of ailment almost becomes a prerequisite for being a poet in Martial’s Rome. Martial is certainly not the only Roman poet to have portrayed himself in an unflattering light. Love elegy thrives on the trials and tribulations experienced by the poet and his mistress (or more often, by the poet *because of* his mistress). Horace *Ep.* 8 and 12 depict the poet’s sexual encounters with old, ugly women, and poets from the Greek epigrammatists to Ovid depict themselves suffering sexual impotence (e.g. *AP* 11.30, Ovid *Am.* 3.7.69-72). Thus in one sense Martial’s vulnerable persona is not at all new, but in another, being subject to contamination links him more closely with sexual deviance than some of the earlier poets.

What is significant, however, is that this potentially dirty Martial does not always remain separate from the Martial who is concerned with poetry and criticism. His attempts to establish his authority instead come face to face with the stain of the things he is writing about,⁷ making it impossible for him to keep these two worlds entirely distinct. The poet's use of smell places him in a position of increased vulnerability to his subject-matter precisely because of the contaminating and boundary-crossing powers of scents. This integration into his world and susceptibility to the olfactory influences of others drives home the point that he is writing in a low genre filled with "dirty" and "inappropriate" content, and the reader may well wonder whether his attitude of superiority is actually justified. With Martial we might contrast his contemporary Juvenal, who distances himself from his subject matter enough that there is little sense that the satirist feels contaminated by any of the vices he decries. Indeed, as moralizer and chastiser he witnesses the faults and follies of others and feels indignant at them, but not personally threatened. Martial, meanwhile, is driven by an opportunism which views everything as poetic fodder, and he therefore maintains neither his distance nor, as a result, his purity. At the same time, however, he also uses these encounters with foul smells and contagion, and with haughty and critical noses, to emphasize the degree to which he is superior to his dirty subjects and literary critics.⁸ Paradoxically, one of the most effective ways for the poet to do so is to stage the very encounters he claims he would just as soon avoid. Around a cycle of epigrams about the *basiator* Postumus we will see the complete collapse of the boundaries between Martial the sophisticate and Martial the down-and-dirty denizen of Rome. Postumus' perfumed kisses follow

⁷ Following upon the recent epics of Statius, Valerius Flaccus, and Silius Italicus, Martial is unusual in choosing to dedicate himself entirely to epigram, the lowest of the low genres, appreciated by the elite as an amusing diversion but hardly something one ought to make a career of. Cf. Pliny 4.3, 4.14. In Martial see *Praef.* 8, 10.64, 11.20.

⁸ "If morality is generally about choice, then olfaction is a paradoxical moral sense, in that daily life is full of odors we do not choose to inhale, but we do so all the same" (Tuzin (2006) 61). Tuzin goes on to show how the Iahita Arapesh of Papua New Guinea, aware of this dilemma, "have used it to further their cultural purposes."

Martial through a series of epigrams in Book 2, giving the poet ample opportunity to remind the audience of his own superiority, but at the same time threatening both his purity and his ability to continue writing epigrams at all. As Emily Gowers notes of satirists, “the main irony...is that one cannot purge a city of its dirt except by staining one's own writing...in the process.”⁹ As epigrammatist, Martial expresses little interest in purging the city of its flaws, but on his quest to point out as many as possible, the stain of Roman smells threatens both the poet himself and his epigrams.

For a poet so concerned both with legitimizing his poetic endeavors despite epigram’s trivialness, and with insisting upon his own integrity despite the content of his poetry and his integration into the world,¹⁰ smell thus provides a similarly multifaceted means of exploring the contradictions and dangers inherent in the world of the epigrammatic poet. Additionally, odor offers a parallel to Martial’s epigrams themselves. Both are short-lived but enduring: epigrams may be written for a specific occasion and then discarded,¹¹ scents fade quickly, and yet both leave lingering traces, whether in the nose or on the published page. They are trifles that nevertheless pack a punch, trivial items with enough power to cause the recipient to reel back at a sharp insult or sensory assault. Finally they claim to be truth-telling and yet are open to multiple interpretations, so that the audience can never be sure of the “correct” answer, if indeed there is one.¹² Furthermore, like the poet who encounters odors, epigrams may absorb, deflect, or reproduce and even intensify the contagion that runs rampant through Martial’s poetic world. Odor therefore not only has a meaningful place *within* the *Epigrams*, it is also redolent of

⁹ Gowers (1995) 31.

¹⁰ For the “life versus page” theme, see 1.4, 3.69, 5.2, 5.40, 6.64, 6.82, *Praef.* 8, 10.2, 10.35, 10.64, 11.15, 11.16, 11.20, 11.90, 11.94, and 12.4.

¹¹ The specific occasion Martial has in mind for much of his poetry is the Saturnalia, for which see Citroni 1989, Hennig (2003) Chr. 10, Nauta (2002) 166-89, and Rimell (2008) Chr. 4

¹² On ambiguity as a source of wit which places the onus of bad taste on the listener or reader, see Cicero *de Or.* 2.255 and Quintilian 6.3.96.

Martial's style of epigram itself. Those audience members who are attuned to the poet's treatment of odors not only become more astute readers of epigram, but even critics in their own right.

I begin this chapter with a focus on Martial in his role as critic before turning to an instance of Martial and his poetry as victims of olfactory contagion.¹³ The first section examines the odors of Martial's Rome and the foul and fragrant scents he encounters, often unwillingly, as a denizen of the city about which he writes. The second section leaves the odors of Rome behind and explores the relationship between noses and literary sophistication as it plays out in the *Epigrams* and a few of Martial's predecessors. In these two sections Martial's critical persona is more dominant, but we will see hints of vulnerability which in turn becomes prominent in the third section. Here I provide an extended look at the Postumus cycle, where Martial's literary concerns and his engagement with the world of Rome come into conflict as his attempts to criticize Postumus turn both him and his poetry into victims of one of the *Epigrams'* most relentless olfactory offenders.

¹³ The poems in this chapter are drawn widely from the corpus of twelve books of epigrams plus the *Xenia* and *Apophoreta*, all published roughly between 86 and 102 according to the most widely accepted theory (for an estimation of publication dates for each book, see Citroni 1989). No poems have been taken from the *Liber de Spectaculis*. The corpus contains approximately two dozen epigrams devoted to smell or noses and another forty which refer to them in passing. A number of other epigrams suggest a scent without actually saying so: for instance, the Postumus cycle, which I discuss below, consists of five epigrams about the man's offensive kisses, but only one of them actually deals directly with odor. Martial's corpus includes over fifteen hundred epigrams, meaning around 4% are olfactory in some way or another. Compare Catullus, whose 116-poem corpus contains nine poems on or mentioning odors or noses (7.7%), and two more which strongly imply a foul odor (9.5% total).

1. Martial's world of odors

In this section I look at some of the powerful stench and suspicious fragrances which Martial is unfortunate enough to encounter in Rome. These smells, which assault the poet everywhere from the grungy city streets to the bathhouses where people *ought* to be getting clean, I divide broadly into two groups: foul odors, the result of apparent body odor, and pleasant odors meant to conceal or distract from a hidden flaw such as sexual deviance. Here I examine how Martial interacts with, characterizes, and criticizes the *olentes* of Rome. We will see how the poet, as Rome's Nose Number One, can either reveal an olfactory offender hiding behind a pleasant-smelling disguise, or put a poetic veneer over something disgusting and offensive. Throughout the corpus, Martial documents his encounters with thieves, sexual deviants, plagiarizers, *captatores*, the physically repulsive, demanding patrons, and much more by immortalizing them in poetry, taking content unfit for polite conversation and placing it in verse for all, even the upstanding, to read. So, too, he also rises above his olfactory subject-matter, controlling even something as ephemeral as odor by preserving it in poetry, documenting and thus spreading his *fastidium* rather than running from it. These olfactory poems thus depict Martial in a position of both moral and poetic power over his scented subjects despite his integration into this world of odors, but at the same time they suggest ways both he and his poetry could be corrupted by such encounters.

My first two examples are, for all intents and purposes, lists of foul smells and substances which pile up, growing worse with each new line. A poem on Bassa contains 11 lines describing repulsive odors before Bassa herself even makes an appearance, while the epigram on Thais not only describes comparanda for the woman's odor but also provides a repellent, not to mention rather voyeuristic, look at her attempts to improve it. Martial orients himself differently towards

the subject and her odor in these two poems, and each interaction suggests a unique combination of exposure and imperviousness to foul smells. And while these epigrams are representative of Martial's ability to turn even the most nauseating subject into a poetic composition, they at the same time recall the very lowness which characterizes the genre of epigram and the poet who chooses to focus on it so exclusively. After all, the longer the lists go on, the dirtier the reader feels, and the dirtier the epigrammatist and his compositions seem.

When we cross paths with Thais in epigram 6.93,¹⁴ there is no doubt about the reason for her inclusion in Martial's book of epigrams: she stinks, and so badly that the poet spends the first half of the epigram suggesting approximate parallels for her odor:

Tam male Thais olet quam non fullonis auari
 testa uetus, media sed modo fracta uia,
 non ab amore recens hircus, non ora leonis,
 non detracta cani transtiberina cutis,
 pullus abortiuo nec cum putrescit in ouo, 5
 amphora corrupto nec uitata garo.
 Virus ut hoc alio fallax permutet odore,
 deposita quotiens balnea ueste petit,
 psilothro uiret aut acida latet oblita creta
 aut tegitur pingui terque quaterque faba. 10
 Cum bene se tutam per fraudes mille putauit,
 omnia cum fecit, Thaida Thais olet.¹⁵

Thais smells worse than the old jar of a miserly fuller
 just shattered in the middle of the road,
 than a billy goat fresh from his amours, a lion's mouth,
 a hide from across the Tiber, torn from a dog,

¹⁴ A *fellatrix* called Thais is a recurring character throughout Book 4 at epigrams 12, 50, and 84. Galán Vioque 2002 *ad Epigrams* 7.94 claims that "...in 6.93, the prostitute Thais is unable to rid herself of her bad breath", but the emphasis in this epigram on plasters, pastes, and chinks suggests to me that this Thais' problem is body odor rather than bad breath. On women in Martial who have body odor, including Thais and Bassa, see Lilja (1972a) 135-7.

¹⁵ For the themes of bad breath and body odor in Greek epigram, see *AP* 11.239 (on a woman with breath so bad it reaches epic proportions), 240 (a woman whose breath is terrible and who causes people who smell her to also have bad breath), 241, 242, 415 (all three on a man whose mouth and ass both smell so bad they are indistinguishable, likely the models for Catullus 97), and 427 (on an exorcist who casts out demons using his own bad breath). On Martial and Greek epigram, see Prinz 1911.

assault: the woman’s efforts are almost as repulsive as her original odor and suggest both stench and a sticky, grimy (*oblita, pingui*) mess.¹⁷ Martial insults her in part because she has a flaw, but also because she tries to use scents to solve her problem and instead simply makes the situation worse: Thais is unsophisticated when it comes to odors, subscribing to a “more is better,”¹⁸ mentality. This, incidentally, also applies to the epigram itself, prompting the question, is piling it on any better in poetry than it is in person?

Bassa and her distinctive stench receive similar poetic treatment at 4.4:

Quod siccae redolet palus lacunae,¹⁹
 crudarum nebulae quod Albularum,
 piscinae uetus aura quod marinae,
 quod pressa piger hircus in capella,
 lassi uardaicus quod euocati, 5
 quod bis murice uellus inquinatum,
 quod ieiunia sabbatariarum,
 maestorum quod anhelitus reorum,
 quod spurcae moriens lucerna Ledae,
 quod ceromata faece de Sabina, 10
 quod uolpis fuga, uipera cubile,
 mallet quam quod oles olere, Bassa.

The odor given off by a swamp from its dry pit,
 or the fogs of raw Albulae,
 or the ancient vapor of a seawater fishpond,
 or a lazy billygoat on top of his she-goat,
 or a worn-out veteran’s boot, 5
 or a fleece dyed twice with murex,

55. On nature scents in the ancient world, see Draycott 2015. On the erotic ideal in Latin poetry, Richlin (1983) Chr. 2.

¹⁷ The poem on Thais is framed by two epigrams which treat the theme of incongruity between exterior and interior: 92 contrasts bad quality wine with the high quality *patera* containing it, and 94 presents a man who appears wealthy but is in fact poor. So too is Thais unable to hide her true nature from the poet or to improve it through external trappings.

¹⁸ In this way she resembles Fescennia of 1.87, who eats pastilles in the hopes that they will mask the scent of wine on her breath but instead makes the resulting belches smell worse and carry further. “Her name itself alludes to a certain kind of ‘drunken’ poetry: *versus fescenninus* was a ribald verse apparently sung at weddings (see Sen. *Con* 7.6.12, Sen. *Med.* 113, Plin. *NH* 15.86)” Rimell (2008) 39n.43. Cf. also 5.4 on Myrtale, who chews laurel and mixes it with her wine to conceal the smell, and 1.28 on Acerra, who does not reek of last night’s wine—because she’s still drinking at sunrise! Horace *Epist.* 1.19.1-11 remarks that the Muses and poets (Homer and Ennius) stink of wine in the mornings.

¹⁹ I follow Lindsay’s 1903 *siccae...lacunae* rather than Shackleton Bailey’s 1990 *sicca...lacuna*.

or the fastings of Jewish women on the Sabbath,
or the sighs of miserable men on trial,
or foul Leda's flickering lamp,
or wrestling-mud from Sabine dirt, 10
or a fleeing fox, or a viper's hole—
I would rather give off any of these odors,
Bassa, than smell like *you*.

This poem too begins with Martial at a remove; in fact, the reader does not even meet a character until the final line, in which the reason for all of these terrible stenches is finally revealed: they are all preferable to the singular odor of Bassa, so preferable that Martial himself would not mind smelling of them so long as it means *not* smelling like Bassa.²⁰

In this poem Martial places foul odors within a microcosm of his epigrammatic world: nature and civilization, human and animal, men and women, religion, profession, and status all come under fire for their connection with various stenches.²¹ Such people, places, and things are undesirable not only for their bad smells, but in many cases for other reasons as well. For instance, the Jewish women have bad breath, but they are also the target of both a misogynistic and an anti-Semitic jab.²² Goats are notoriously malodorous but are also emblematic of sexual profligacy. The prostitute Leda suggests low status, dirtiness, and both the shame of being sexually available and a probable willingness to engage in even the foulest sexual acts. In all of these cases, scent is only one factor contributing to an overall loathsomeness which would have resonated with the cultural sensibilities of a Roman reader. These poems, however, also suggest how Martial's lists of scents go beyond cultural predilections and take into account the

²⁰ Bassa returns at 4.87 with a similar problem: *pedere Bassa solet* (4). A Bassa also appears at 6.69 as a *fellatrix*.

²¹ See Moreno Soldevila 2006 *ad loc.* for the progression of odor-types in this poem, and Lilja (1972a) 80 for the ointment *ceroma*, which Martial compares to Bassa's scent.

²² For anti-Semitism in the ancient world, see Sherwin-White (1967) 86-99, Sevenster 1975. For women in Martial, Bruno 1965, Chaney 1971, Kurmally 1971, Sullivan (1991) 197-207, Vidén (1993) 160-173, Watson 1983. Moreno Soldevila 2006 *ad* 4.4.11 notes that the fox and viper, both with feminine grammatical gender and negative associations, ought to be taken as misogynistic references. Cf. Semonides fr. 7 for an extended comparison of women and animal types.

subjectivity of odors.²³ In both of these poems, Martial provides entire lists of foul things rather than choosing one scent and trusting that his readers will all find it equally disgusting owing to a culturally specific dislike for certain odors.²⁴ In doing so he makes effective use of the heightened olfactory affront presented by a large quantity of odors, increasing both his criticism and the reader's disgust by neglecting to name a single, specific parallel for Thais' and Bassa's odors. The same holds true in reverse: Martial's fulsome and fragrant descriptions of a slave boy's kisses (3.65, 11.8) are all the more pleasant to read because he does not associate the kisses with one specific scent but instead lists a variety which combine in the reader's mind to suggest the ideal fragrance. In the case of Thais and Bassa, the audience gets the pinnacle of stench. The fact that odors are so difficult to pin down and describe in specific detail ultimately becomes a poetic asset, and this lack of specificity in turn increases our sense of Thais and Bassa as hazardous to the nose.

By tacking odor after odor onto each poem, Martial makes effective use of Robert Kaster's "per se *fastidium*," the sort of disgust which rises naturally in the face of something offensive rather than that which comes after reasoned deliberation.²⁵ But these poems do not rely entirely on gut-reaction disgust to make their point. The very fact that Martial takes the time to consider parallels for each woman's stench, and the idea that he can draw a comparison between all of these undesirables and the peculiar scents of the two women, suggests a slowing down of the judgment process more akin to 'deliberative *fastidium*': we might imagine the poet preparing to write these epigrams and considering which of the foul smells he has encountered would fit

²³ That ancient writers were aware of the subjectivity of scents is evidenced by, for example, Theophrastus *De Caus. Plant.* 5.5.

²⁴ Here we might recall Dr. Rachel Herz who likes the smell of skunk (Introduction p.2). A poem comparing Thais or Bassa to a skunk would therefore fall flat on Herz's nostrils, but a poem comparing their stench to a skunk as well as the numerous other items mentioned in the two epigrams would be far more effective.

²⁵ Cf. Introduction pp.15-16.

best in his poems.²⁶ His close-up of Thais at the bathhouse likewise increases our disgust but also inspires a moment of reflection: consider, the poet says, what goes into crafting such an exquisitely foul odor. While the reader may not consciously think about any of this while reading, distracted as he is by being repulsed, the fact remains that Martial took the time to compose epigrams which thrive on loathsome odors, and in this regard the poet, his epigrams, and contaminating stench are linked in an uncomfortably close way.

By the end of the poem on Thais, the woman and her odor are clinging to the reader's mind just as the bean paste and depilatories stick to Thais herself (*psilotro viret...faba*). We get the impression that Martial's insult can do nothing more than defame her, for any attempt to shame Thais into improving her odor has already been proven doomed to fail by the epigram itself, which documents just such an attempt and pronounces the outcome: *Thaida Thais olet*.²⁷ In order to make this judgment, Martial's narrator must have caught a whiff of her scent, not to mention a rather voyeuristic glance of her at the baths; more than likely he has also been on the receiving end of the other odors mentioned in the poem, as I just suggested. Yet the epigram's final clause ensures that Thais herself, and not Martial, remains the grammatical subject and therefore the olfactory focus of the epigram: Thais stinks, and this is the idea that sticks in the reader's mind.

The end of the Bassa epigram, in contrast, takes a rather unexpected turn, for Martial gets directly involved by imagining a scenario in which *he*, too, might stink. After eleven lines of horrible odors ranging from the stench of a fishpond (3) to Tyrian purple garments (6), the poet declares, *malle[m] quam quod oles olere, Bassa* ("I'd rather smell like any of these things than like

²⁶ Even if Martial himself has not had personal experience with some of these scents, he has chosen ones which a Roman reader may well have encountered, or at least considered stereotypically noisome: the fuller's pot, Tyrian purple dye, goat, the breath of people fasting.

²⁷ Cf. Martial's advice to Fescennia at 1.87 to give up her efforts altogether and simply be an open drunkard.

you, Bassa,” 12).²⁸ The poem is similar in its approach to the one on Thais, but while the Thais epigram, as just noted, ends with the poet declaring that her odor has not improved, suggesting both *her* failure and *her* continuing stench, the poem on Bassa ends with Martial declaring that *he* would rather *smell like* any of the other options listed than like Bassa. Here the poet refuses to take on the role of *olfaciens*, the deliberate sniffer. Doing so would not only suggest willing exposure to contaminating stench like Bassa’s, but also association with the dregs of society and other unappealing places and things, including Bassa herself: “I’d rather sniff out any of these things than you, Bassa.” Instead Martial opts to put himself in Bassa’s shoes, taking on the powerful role of *olens*, someone who offends and assaults with his smell. In doing so, however, the poet simultaneously opens himself to criticism like that which he is leveling against Bassa, all the more so because he has just finished listing a whole host of awful options for his personal stench. It would seem, then, that Martial’s choices are to depict himself either approaching sources of contagion or else giving it off himself. Yet the epigrammatist manages to have his cake and eat it too: the situation he describes is only hypothetical (*malem*). Given the choice, he would rather smell like anything other than Bassa—but, the implication is, he actually smells like nothing at all, a claim he in fact makes at 6.55, as we will see. His willingness to portray himself in an unflattering light in the end gives him the opportunity to reassert his superiority in a situation where the contagion of odors hovers over both those who smell them and those who give them off.²⁹

²⁸ *malles* is also present in the manuscript tradition (β and γ), but *malem* is preferred by both Lindsay 1903 and Shackleton Bailey 1990. Not only does *malem* correspond to Martial’s approach at 6.55.5, which I discuss below, it also makes more sense, since in Martial characters who are aware of their odor problems tend to take measures to correct them (Thais, for instance).

²⁹ Cf. 7.95, where Martial also suggests possible vulnerability at the end of a poem—he’d rather kiss *cunnilingui* and *galli* than Linus and his freezing-cold kisses.

Thais and Bassa are two women whose terrible stench prompt Martial to write insulting epigrams against them. In contrast, the remaining poems in this section feature olfactory offenders who have externally *pleasant* odors which, paradoxically, raise Martial's suspicions and give him cause to suggest an underlying flaw.³⁰ As so often, Martial takes a seemingly positive characteristic and hints at the negative beneath, and in the realm of odor, this means that perfumes, while objectively pleasant, are more likely to generate than allay suspicions about someone's moral and social status.³¹ As Dugan observes, "[t]hose who wear perfume "born" on their body...do so "not without cause"—their sweet scents undoubtedly mask other, dangerous bodily conditions."³² In the poems we will examine here, Martial not only censures his targets for their misunderstanding and misuse of odors, he also adds a second layer of critique by assuming the worst, suggesting that an underlying fault has led to these olfactory *faux pas*. These characters are physically or morally flawed, deceptive (or so they think), and olfactorily offensive all at once. Crucially, however, he never actually names these hidden flaws.³³ Instead it

³⁰ Note that Martial is not opposed to all odors, or to perfumes *per se*: at 6.85 Martial's book is characterized as an incense-offering. *Apophoreta* 146 accompanies a pillow which promises to retain the smell of perfumes even after the scent has faded from its owner's hair. 110 describes a flask which formerly contained perfumes and which will therefore spice up any wine poured into it. (For perfumes mixed with wine, see Lilja (1972a) Chr 5, esp. 108-119.) At 59 Martial praises balsam, calling it *unguenta virorum* ("men's perfume," 1) and contrasting it with the perfumer Cosmus' wares, which he assigns to women. But cf. Juvenal 2.40-2, where it is insinuated that a man wearing balsam is effeminate. Here we see a sense of the context that is so crucial in other poems: Martial has nothing against Cosmus' perfumes until, elsewhere in the epigrams, he comes across *men* wearing them. Largey and Watson (1972) 1023 suggest that the stereotypes have persisted: "[M]any males of the labor class associate the odor of cologne on a male with effeminacy—"he smells pretty." Consequently, it would be rare to find a steelworker who dabbed himself with cologne before going off to work. By the same token, a white-collar worker may be heard expressing a repugnance toward those who emit a "stinky sweat" or those who "smell like a farmer"—dirty and unclean. And his before-work ritual is more likely to include odorizing himself with cologne." In this contrast we see a hint of the city/country opposition depicted in Latin literature.

³¹ This unmasking goes only one way; nowhere do we find a character who stinks but nevertheless has a heart of gold and proper morals just waiting to be showcased. The closest Martial comes to this idea is occasional praise of the rustic old Romans from "the good old days." E.g. *Curio...hirsuto* at 6.64.2-3. Meanwhile, only one character raises suspicions for an unpleasant odor: Philaenis of 9.62 wears Tyrian purple not because she is haughty or ostentatious, but because *delectatur odore* (4)—that is, she likes the way the odor masks her own. While the other characters are suspicious because of their too-nice fragrance, Philaenis is suspicious because she enjoys too much a scent that was frequently characterized as foul (e.g. 1.49, 2.16, 4.4).

³² Dugan (2011) 155.

³³ Contrast 11.30, where Martial states outright that a *fellator's* mouth stinks.

is up to the reader to make the final call about the cause of the character's repulsiveness. By not stating the actual reason for the excessive reliance on odors exhibited by these olfactory offenders, the insult against them is compounded: even if there is likely one "correct" answer, the longer the reader considers other possibilities, the worse and more offensive to the nose these characters start to seem. Additionally, several of these poems include Martial as one among a group of 'us', or else ally the poet with an interlocutor against the victim. At 5.4, for example, he points out Myrtale, who stinks of wine and chews laurel leaves *fallat ut nos* ("in order to fool us," 2); at the end of the poem he allows a man called Paulus to speak the punchline rather than deliver it himself: whenever Paulus sees Myrtale coming, *dicas licebit "Myrtale bibit laurum"* ("you can say, "Myrtale has drunk laurel"," 6).³⁴ While Howell (*ad loc.*) remarks that Martial's introduction of an interlocutor is "for dramatic purposes," it also has the effect of creating a sort of alliance between the poet and his readers, "as if both are confirming and checking with each other that they are all right, despite the existence of abnormalities in other people."³⁵ By forging this shield of solidarity out of his association with his readers and leaving the final decision about his characters' flaws to them, Martial invites his readers to become suspicious critics like him while at the same time suggesting a sense of collective intangibility in the face of such foul-smelling characters.

³⁴ Howell 1995 *ad loc* notes that "One ancient remedy for bad breath was to chew 'leaves of Malabar', from which malabrathum was made... This was an expensive scented oil (Hor. *Carm.* II 7.8, with Nisbet and Hubbard's note). The only other Myrtale in Latin is in Horace *Odes* 1.33.14, a freedwoman mistress. Pliny 15 Chr. 37 says myrtle oil causes a marked improvement in wine." Myrtale's name, meanwhile, obviously recalls myrtle, which Howell says was sacred to Venus, though Pausanias 3.22.12 points out a myrtle tree worshipped as sacred to Artemis Soteira.

³⁵ Richlin (1983) 58.

Occasionally Martial's victims are social dissemblers, as in the case of the would-be equestrian at 2.29³⁶: he looks the part and is wearing enough pomade in his hair to stink up the entire theatre, but remove all of the status symbols and cosmetics, and the truth is there to be read (literally) in the form of a brand on the man's forehead identifying him as nothing more than a former slave.³⁷ The eye and the nose are deceived, and Martial suggests that external trappings are only half of the story. The poet plays with the readers' expectations about ostentation: the man's overblown display of rank and wealth turns out to result, not from haughtiness, but disingenuity.³⁸ Here smell forms only a part of the man's image. Elsewhere, however, the epigrammatist focuses specifically on a character's odor and invites us to wonder whether there might be more than meets the nose. In these cases, characters tend to be faking moral probity or cultural sophistication rather than high rank.

Let us take Gellia of 3.55 as an example. Martial describes her as so decked out with *peregrinis...nugis* ("foreign trifles," 3) that *Cosmum migrare putamus* ("we think Cosmus is relocating," 1), warning her not to be too pleased with herself for smelling so good:

Quod, quacumque uenis, Cosmum migrare putamus
 et fluere excusso cinnama fusa uitro,
 nolo peregrinis placeas tibi, Gellia, nugis.
 Scis, puto, posse meum sic bene olere canem.

Just because, whenever you pass by, we think Cosmus is relocating
 and cinnamon is streaming from a shaken vial,
 I don't want you to be too pleased by those foreign trifles.
 You know, I imagine, that my dog can also smell good in this way.

³⁶ There is disagreement over whether the man is pretending to be a senator (Shackleton Bailey 1993) or an equestrian (Williams 2004), arising from confusion over whether *subsellia prima* refers to orchestra seating, or the 14 rows reserved for the *equites*.

³⁷ Or current slave, even. The brand would identify him as having been punished, while a slave, for a crime such as trying to run away or stealing. Cf. Williams 2004 *ad loc*.

³⁸ Cf. 2.57, where another ostentatious man turns out to be in dire financial straits.

Martial's overt objection is not that Gellia is bothering everyone else while indulging her love of perfumes, but that she has overestimated their value; the woman is pleased with her self-presentation, but the poet reminds her that anyone could achieve a similar effect—even a dog! And not just a dog, but an epigrammatist as well: *nugae* (line 3) is also the word Martial uses of his poetry, especially when he is feeling self-deprecating.³⁹ In fact, this is the only place in the corpus where Martial uses *nugae* of something other than epigrams, suggesting a link between perfumes and poetry.⁴⁰ Both are trivial, cheap items hardly worth mentioning, destined to be thrown away or fade with time.⁴¹ But both are also tied to the idea of appearances. With this in mind, we might read the *sic* (“in this way”) of line 4 in two ways: a dog can appear to smell good because it is doused in perfumes, but alternately because someone has written a pleasant-smelling dog into a poem.⁴² Martial has as much control over appearances as Gellia, and he can choose as it suits him either to point out the artificiality of epigram as compared to real life, or to claim that his poems in fact *represent* real life.⁴³ The poet hints that Gellia is similarly aware of the power of her *nugae* either to distract or enhance (*scis, puto*, 4), and so he criticizes her because she is so enthusiastic about her artificiality.⁴⁴ When a dog can easily smell just as nice, why the excessive zeal for something that is foreign (*peregrinis*, 3) because it originates not only outside of Rome but also outside of Gellia herself? The woman's passion for perfumes is not only noticeable, it is suspicious, and Gellia thus becomes an object of both derision and further scrutiny.

³⁹ E.g. 1.113, 2.1.

⁴⁰ The reference to *nugae* at 7.14.7 may be to the poetry of other poets, rather than Martial himself.

⁴¹ For Martial's poems as material commodities, see Roman 2001 and Seo 2009.

⁴² 1.109, in fact.

⁴³ For Martial's own life versus the content of his epigrams cf. 1.4.8: *lasciva est novis pagina, vita proba*. Yet the *Epigrams* also claim to describe life as it is: at 10.4, Martial contrasts the reality of epigram with the absurdity of epic myth: *hoc lege, quod possit dicere vita 'meum est' ...hominem pagina nostra sapit* (8-10).

⁴⁴ Cf. Seneca *Epist.* 86.13: *parum est sumere unguentum nisi bis die terque renovatur, ne evanescat in corpore. quid quod hoc odore tamquam suo gloriatur?*

Coracinus at 6.55 has a similar problem:

Quod semper casiaque cinnamoque
et nido niger alitis superbae
fragras plumbea Nicerotiana,
rides nos, Coracine, nil olentis,
malo quam bene olere nil olere.

Because you're always darkened with
cinnamon and cassia and the nest of the proud bird,
smelling of Niceros' boxes,
you laugh at us, Coracinus, who give off no odor.
I'd rather smell like nothing than smell good!

Like Gellia, Coracinus is proud of his artificial fragrance, even to the point that he thinks himself superior to others who do not smell as nice as he does. His laughter prompts Martial's retort in the final line: *malo quam bene olere nil olere*, which echoes Scapha's remark to Philematium, seen in Chapter 1, that a woman is better off smelling like nothing. Coracinus functions, like Gellia and Thais, as a failed arbiter of scent: he laughs at Martial and Company for smelling like nothing, judging based on the pleasantness of a person's scent just as Gellia placed too much stock in her pleasing aroma. When it comes to what smell reveals about someone, both characters seem to take a rather naïve line: a good fragrance is cause for pride and, in Coracinus' case, haughtiness.

Martial, of course, disagrees. His comeback to Coracinus recalls his response to Postumus at 2.12 (on whom more below): a man who always smells good does not *really* smell good.⁴⁵ These remarks to Coracinus and Postumus operate on a very similar principle, and the insults suggest that there is some inherent problem with smelling *good*, such that Martial's lack of odor is preferable if the alternative is to smell pleasant. The poet's commentary points to something potentially sinister about these characters and their odors. On the surface, these poems

⁴⁵ *Postume, non bene olet qui bene semper olet*, 4. Compare Largey and Watson (1972) 1028: "Instead, [the wearing of perfumes by African Americans] may reinforce the white racist's belief that Negroes stink: If they didn't stink, they wouldn't have to cover themselves with perfume."

attack excessiveness: the characters have gone beyond what is reasonable, wearing so much perfume that it is impossible not to notice, and Martial therefore claims license, as poet describing the world of Rome, to call them out on it. Yet “you have no moderation” is not the only insult here, and I do not believe, as Lilja does, that “Martial adopted a negative attitude to [odors] as it were for aesthetic reasons, because he disliked strong odours.”⁴⁶ By telling Gellia that a dog could smell just as nice as she does, by assuring Coracinus and Postumus that good smells are somehow undesirable, Martial is hinting that there is a dissonance between these characters’ pleasant aromas and their actual natures and behavior. It is not simply that they have gone overboard, but that they have gone overboard in a way that suggests guilt. Martial would not want to smell good all the time because, in his eyes, people who do so clearly have something *bad* to hide.⁴⁷ While fragrance in a young slave is praiseworthy,⁴⁸ in anyone else it is too good to be true.

Apart from poem 2.12 to Postumus, Martial never says this explicitly. Instead he frames his epigrams in such a way that his readership is invited to take on the role of critic, making the final connection and then “filling in the fault(s),” as it were. Fitzgerald rightly points out that “[m]odern disagreements about the interpretation of particular epigrams do not always stem from

⁴⁶ Lilja (1972a) 80. She contrasts this with Persius and Juvenal, who “attacked the excessive use of odorants from a moral point of view as a sign of effeminacy and loose morals” (80).

⁴⁷ Juvenal’s character Laronia draws a similar connection between perfumes and dissembling: confronted by a moralizer, she first praises him as a third Cato, then slyly asks where he bought his perfumes (2.38-42). Here the balsam acts as a telltale sign of effeminacy, belying the man’s supposed morals. He wears it not to hide something, but instead hopes that his loud preaching will distract others from his effeminate qualities.

⁴⁸ As Fitzgerald (2007) 127 observes, “if slavery provides the terms in which to cast everything that has gone wrong with relations between the free, slaves themselves often provide Martial with an arena of unsullied relations that are idealized as purely emotional, and of pleasures that are uncontaminated.” Martial praises the fragrance of three slaves, Earinos, Diadumenos, and Erotion. For Earinos, Domitian’s eunuch and cup-bearer, cf. poems 11, 12, 13, 16, 17, and 36 of Book 9. Martial’s slave-boy Diadumenos appears at 3.65, 5.46, 6.34, and (presumably, but he is not named) 11.8. On Diadumenos’ kisses, see Hennig (2003) Chr. 22. On 11.8 and its allusions to Catullus 99 and Ovid *Amores* 1.5, see Rimell (2008) 170-2. For Erotion, Martial’s 5-year-old slave girl, see 5.34 and 37, with Watson 1992 and Bell, Jr. 1984. For fragrant kisses, see Lilja (1972a) 120-4. Cf. Horace *Odes* 1.13.15, Catullus 99.2, Statius *Silv.* 2.1.46, and *AP* 5.118, 5.305, 12.68, 12.123. The gods’ breath was also depicted as fragrant, smelling especially ambrosia and nectar, for which see Lilja (1972a) 19-30.

insufficient information about the ancient context. Many of the epigrams leave us struggling to articulate the point: secondary points may lie beneath primary ones; double entendres may be featured, or their presence merely insinuated.”⁴⁹ I suspect many ancient readers had just as much difficulty articulating the point or trying to decide whether a double entendre was actually present or not. The poems just discussed illustrate this well: they are satisfying in their insulting nature yet vague enough that the culturally aware reader, picking up on the “suspicious odor” theme, could nevertheless interpret them in several ways. Martial could easily have said “Coracinus, the reason you smell so good is that you’re trying to hide the fact that you’re a *fellator*,” or “Gellia is so fond of perfumes because she has horrible body odor,” but he did not. The result is that one reader might assume Gellia has body odor, while another might guess that her stench is related to deviant sexuality. The mention of a dog at the end of the poem might even suggest filthy habits or poor personal hygiene.⁵⁰ Coracinus likewise could be a *fellator*, a *cinaedus*, cursed with bad body odor, or have some other problem entirely. Odors, like the poems themselves, are ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations, and Martial uses this to his advantage. By giving the final say to the reader rather than making the choice himself, he has not only avoided directly admitting interaction with certain types of people, he has also effectively compounded the insults against these characters by neglecting to specify exactly how extreme their flaws are. In his own words, *quod tegitur maius creditor esse malum* (“trouble covered up is believed to be worse than it is,” 3.42.4). Just so, the more we consider the multiple possibilities underlying someone’s odor, the worse that character, and his or her imagined scent, seems to become. The same applied, as we saw above, to the individual odors listed in the poems on Thais and Bassa, which piled up to create the sensation of an even more terrible stench.

⁴⁹ Fitzgerald (2007) 94.

⁵⁰ Cf. 1.83.

In these olfactory epigrams, then, Martial distracts from his own assessment of, and interactions with, characters like Gellia and Coracinus by insinuating rather than criticizing outright. In doing so he opens his olfactory world to a wider range of critics: his readers, who are asked to sniff for themselves and then produce their own punch lines. Indeed, in the Coracinus poem Martial not only declines to state explicitly the hidden cause of the man's perfume obsession, he also declares himself to be olfactorily neutral, smelling of nothing: *malo quam bene olere nil olere*. In this way Martial denies that he has been contaminated by exposure to Coracinus, a denial which is then confirmed by Coracinus' behavior: he laughs at Martial and others *nil olentis*.

If the reader, meanwhile, congratulates himself on his ability to participate in the invective by allying himself with the poet against the target,⁵¹ the fact remains that Martial's frequent use of open-ended and unexpected endings, combined with his use of pseudonyms, suggests that in the end, *anyone* could become a target.⁵² Throughout the epigrams, Martial illustrates his ability to see a completely different side to things, even to misinterpret deliberately someone's meaning to suit his own agenda.⁵³ This is consistent with his general practice of attributing to his characters ulterior motives rather than incompetence (though the two are not mutually exclusive, as the drunkard Fescennia proves at 1.87). It does, however, beg the question, "Just how suspicious should we be?"⁵⁴ It is possible that someone passing Gellia in the street may not have even given her a second thought, and that Martial is suggesting that people

⁵¹ Cf. Rimell (2008) 40: "In a sense, we've seen, Martial *invites* readers to play the *malignus interpres* [Book 1 *Praef.*], while reprimanding us in advance for 'over-interpreting'..."

⁵² Cf. Fitzgerald (2007) 104: "However, it is one of the distinguishing marks of epigrams that they can be attached to people for whom they were not intended..." He goes on to suggest that epigrams can acquire not only a new target, but also a new author.

⁵³ E.g. 2.71, where Martial deliberately misinterprets Caecilianus' motive for reciting Marsus or Catullus after Martial has recited his own work: no doubt Caecilianus is trying to make Martial look good by comparison!

⁵⁴ Fitzgerald (2007) 112.

whose only actual fault is being overly fond of perfumes are guilty of something worse. Perhaps Martial's olfactory Rome is not as terrible, or at least not as sinister, as he has led us to believe. As readers we must determine, when an epigram ends on an unexpected note, whether to question the poet's assumptions about smell or our own. And if we *do* choose to accept Martial's interpretations, we must ask, what sort of message is *our* odor sending, not only to Martial but to the reader-critics he has created?

In this section we have toured Martial's epigrammatic Rome by way of olfactory landmarks, passing some characters, like Thais and Bassa, who offend for smelling bad and others, such as Gellia and Coracinus, for smelling good. Throughout Martial acts as both guide and critic, pointing out and casting judgment upon olfactory phenomena while simultaneously maintaining his distance from them whenever he can. Poems about such offensive characters, especially the list poems on Thais and Bassa, may remind the reader of the low status of the epigrammatic genre and call into question Martial's own status due to his contact with such people. The poet, as we have seen, nevertheless manages to distract us from thinking too hard about how these olfactory encounters may have compromised both his poetic and moral authority. Whether it is through pure, distracting disgust; Martial's absence from the poem; reader involvement; or even, paradoxically, self-deprecation, Martial comes out on top, preserving himself and his poetry from the taint of Rome's smells. In the next section we will see similar interplay between Martial's superiority and vulnerability, but instead of the world of odors we will be examining the world of poetry and literary criticism, where Martial faces off against the noses of readers and detractors while wielding his own critical *nasus*.

2. Noses, criticism, and literary sophistication

Given Martial's interest in actual odors as a means of engaging with the everyday realities of his epigrammatic Rome, it will come as no surprise that he also makes effective use of the nose itself. He does so, however, not to facilitate further encounters with olfactory offenders, but instead to consider his status as a poet facing the noses of his literary critics. In this section we thus turn our attention from down-and-dirty Rome to Martial's interest in poetics and literary sophistication, and we will see how the epigrammatist interacts with his characters in their capacities as readers and critics—some better than others. Though Martial's focus here is different, his *status* in these epigrams is in fact similar to that which we saw in the previous section: a sophisticated poet and critic who is nevertheless potentially vulnerable to the influences of the people he is writing about. As we will see, while Martial expresses apprehension in the face of some of his more formidable readers, he also possesses a nose of his own, such that he is once again able not only to criticize, but even to turn potentially unflattering situations to his benefit.

Martial participates in an established tradition whereby the sense of smell, and especially the nose itself, function as markers of cultural sophistication and literary discernment, but also feature as targets of satire, where the nose can be a sign of boorishness.⁵⁵ Among Martial's predecessors, Catullus is particularly noteworthy for the nose imagery he employs in poem 13.⁵⁶ Catullus has no qualms about asking Fabullus to supply almost everything necessary for the dinner the poet is supposed to be hosting, for Catullus himself has something of equal or greater

⁵⁵ See Stevens (2008) 168-71. Lilja (1972a) 212-13 characterizes Horace as "the most interested of the Roman poets in the imagery pertaining to the sphere of odour" (212).

⁵⁶ For Catullus and Martial see Ferguson 1963, Swann 1994, Watson 2003, Fitzgerald (2007) 78-9 and *passim*, Neger (2012) 54-73, Mindt (2013) Chr 2.

value to offer in return: an *unguentum* given to his *puella* by the gods which will make Fabullus wish to become *totum...nasum* (“all nose,” 14).⁵⁷ Though the exact nature of the unguent and its significance within the poem have been much debated,⁵⁸ one prevailing interpretation is that it is representative of Catullus’ and his guest’s sophistication, their appreciation of *venustas* and fine erotic poetry. To say that Fabullus would wish to become *totum...nasum* is therefore a compliment: he is the sort of man who will recognize the value of the things Catullus has to offer.⁵⁹

Linked to discernment and taste, the nose can function both positively and negatively, indicating snobbery but also class, knowledge but also criticism. Both Horace and Pliny the Elder mention the nose in conjunction with Lucilius, Horace to praise his cleverness and ability to sniff out vice,⁶⁰ and Pliny to single him out for being the first to censure others: *qui primus condidit stili nasum* (“who first gave the stylus its [critical] nose,” *Praef.* 8).⁶¹ In these instances the poet himself possesses a *nasum* which fuels and shapes his poetry, but elsewhere the critical nose is attributed to a particularly harsh or discerning reader. The freedman poet Phaedrus (c. 15 BC–50 AD), for example, addresses a potential reader as *nasute*, requesting that he give the poet a chance even though the addressee generally scorns (*fastidis*, 2) such literature.⁶² Similarly, in

⁵⁷ On the tradition of invitation poems, see Gowers (1993) 220-8 and Edmunds 1982.

⁵⁸ Stevens (unpublished) 12 suggests that the ambiguity surrounding the scent is “exact to Catullus’ purposes,” “suggestive and therefore tastefully witty.” For interpretations of this poem, see, among many, Vessey 1971, Littman 1977, Hallett 1978, Witke 1980, Edmunds 1982, Bernstein 1985, Dettmer 1986, Nappa 1998, Butler 2015. For Martial’s reception of this poem, see Fitzgerald (2007) 173-4.

⁵⁹ Martial parodies this poem at 3.12, demonstrating how poorly the values of Catullus and his friends translate into the world of patronage and clientship. What for Catullus was a sign of taste and sophistication becomes in Martial a sign that Fabullus, who has now taken on the role of host, misunderstands the proper social conventions of Domitian’s Rome. Cf. Fitzgerald (2007) 169-70. In contrast, Catullus 69 and 71 feature a man named Rufus whose gout and stench are, on Christopher Nappa’s interpretation (1999), signs of his inelegance and distance from Catullus’ neoteric circle. Cf. Kutzko 2008 on the same series of poems.

⁶⁰ *Serm.* 1.4.6-8: *hinc omnis pendet Lucilius, hosce secutus, / mutatis tantum pedibus numerisque, facetus, / emunctae naris, durus componere versus.*

⁶¹ Cf. Persius 1.118, also of Lucilius: *callidus excusso populum suspendere naso*. Persius employs the image of the snobbish nose also at 3.86-7 and 5.91.

⁶² 4.7.1.

Persius' first satire, the poet's interlocutor accuses him of being overly critical of poetic recitation with the phrase *nimis uncis / naribus indulges* ("you're overindulging your hooked nose," 41-1). A raised nose may also indicate snobbishness or elitism: Horace praises Maecenas because he does not turn his nose up at men of inferior birth, like the poet himself.⁶³ As Quintilian summarizes, *naribus labrisque non fere quicquam decenter ostendimus, tametsi derisus contemptus fastidium significari solet* ("we express almost nothing becomingly with the nose and lips, but it's typical to show derision, contempt, and scorn in this way," *Inst.* 11.3.80).

The nose as an organ of taste contrasts with the ugly nose, a common target of invective which is "always too long."⁶⁴ A disfigured or extra-long nose is frequently an indication of boorishness. For example, Martial mocks a man called Papyrus whose nose and penis are both so long *ut possis, quotiens arrigis, olfacere* ("that you can sniff it whenever you have an erection," 6.36.2). Here the image is primarily an instance of the comic excess which Martial is so fond of mocking and so eager to avoid,⁶⁵ but we cannot help but also think of Papyrus as a dullard, for the idea of the man sniffing at his penis every time he has an erection does not inspire much confidence in Papyrus' intelligence.⁶⁶ At Horace's *Epodes* 12.3, meanwhile, a physically prominent nose paradoxically suggests a *lack* of perception: the poet assures a woman that he can easily pick out her flaws because he does not have *naris obesae* (literally "a pudgy nose"). Bigger is not always better, and the discerning nose is depicted as upturned but not oversized.⁶⁷

⁶³ *Serm.* 1.6.1-6. See also *Serm.* 1.2.26-30, and Rudd (1982) 5 on Horace's response to such social judgments.

⁶⁴ Richlin (1983) 26.

⁶⁵ Rimell (2008) 153: "...guarding against excess is a basic (unsaturnalian) principle of epigram." For the "nothingness" of epigram, see Rimell (2008) 103-11.

⁶⁶ It is possible this is meant to conjure up an image of Priapus, threatening intruders with his massive phallus but at the same time incompetent.

⁶⁷ In ancient physiognomic thought, those with physical flaws are likely to be represented as defective in other ways as well, such as intellectually or morally. Even where it is not the central focus, an ugly nose can help paint a picture of a ridiculous character. Cf. *Epigrams* 2.11, where the gloomy Silius' ugly nose nearly touches the ground as he wanders around, head hung low as if he were in mourning. The real reason for his dismay? He is

When we return to Martial, we find that his epigrams are filled with noses, some bigger and longer than others, and his characters are at once poetic fodder to be scorned and potential readers with criticism of their own. By pointing to his audience's noses, Martial imagines his role as a poet in the two ways mentioned above. On the one hand, he expresses apprehension in the face of a formidable readership, aware that he and his poetry are susceptible to the criticism even of readers as important as the emperor Domitian.⁶⁸ On the other, he exercises his own nose while deriding others for their lack of taste, mocking those who think they are discerning but in truth fail to make the cut. In this way he neutralizes the threat supposedly posed by his critics and places himself in a position of (poetic) power, much as he did in the olfactory poems discussed in the first section. Yet neither the critical nor the anxious poems are straightforward, as we will see. Martial can slip a quip into an epigram addressed to the emperor just as deftly as he can twist criticism and even unflattering self-characterization into moments of self-aggrandizement.⁶⁹

Martial is already expressing apprehension in the face of Roman noses at epigram 1.3. His personified book is eager to leave its book-box and go off into the world,⁷⁰ but the poet warns it about the trials it might encounter:

crede mihi, nimium Martia turba sapit.
maiores nusquam rhonchi:⁷¹ iuvenesque senesque
et pueri nasum rhinocerotis habent.

dining at home this evening. For physiognomy in the ancient world, see among others Evans 1969, André 1981, Barton 1994, Swain (ed.) 2007. For other examples of large noses, Horace *Serm.* 2.8.64, *Epist.* 1.19.45; Pers. 1.4, 1.118.

⁶⁸ On Martial and Domitian, see Garthwaite 1990, 1993, 1998a, 1998b, Coleman 1998, Darwall-Smith (1996) 271-3, Holzberg (2002) 63-74, Lorenz 2002, Watson and Watson (2003) 9-12, Spisak (2007) 61-71, Neger (2012) 312-321.

⁶⁹ For Martial's self-characterization and defense of his chosen genre, see Sullivan Chr. 2, Banta 1998, and Neger 2012.

⁷⁰ Citroni 1975 *ad loc* discusses the possibility that epigram 1.3 originally opened an earlier collection of epigrams, hence the cautious tone which is so different from the confidence found in epigrams 1 and 2.

⁷¹ Used three times by Martial (here as well as 3.82.30 and 4.86.7), this word is unattested elsewhere. Howell 1980 *ad loc.* points the reader to ῥέγγω, *to snore or snort*.

audieris cum grande sophos, dum basia iactas,
ibis ab excusso missus in astra sago.

Believe me, the Roman crowd knows a bit too much.
Nowhere are the snorts as loud: young men and old men
and boys, they all have noses like a rhino.⁷²
When you've heard a great "huzzah!", while you're still throwing kisses,
you'll be sent into the stars from a shaken-out blanket.

The book may meet approval (line 7), but it will be over even before it is done blowing kisses to its fans (7-8). Here Martial's apprehensions about the longevity of his poetry's fame are balanced against apparent confidence that it will, at least initially, be received favorably by the reading public: it is not so much a matter of failing to win approval as of proving to be more than just a passing fad, succumbing to the "read once and done" nature of the epigrammatic genre itself. With Martial's genre working against him, he instead expresses confidence that his readers, the everyday Roman populace which clamors for Martial's poetry, will not let his work pass into oblivion. The reader is thus once again drawn into the poet's world, this time to act not as critic of others but instead as promoter of Martial.⁷³

In the very next poem, 1.4, the focus shifts from the reading public to more traditional patronage, specifically the most important reader of all: the emperor Domitian, whose reaction will determine the book's fate—and its fame.⁷⁴ As Fitzgerald observes, "as the judging audience of the book shifts from Rome to emperor, *nasum* (nose), the fastidiousness of the Roman

⁷² 1.3.4-8. "In the context of public entertainment, the Roman public's "nose" looks more sinister, for, as we know from Martial's *Liber spectaculorum* (*Spec.* 11; 26), rhinoceroses had tossed bulls and other animals at the games celebrating the opening of the Flavian amphitheater." Fitzgerald (2007) 76. Rimell (2008) 30-1, meanwhile, suggests a more sexual reading of this poem, imagining the slave-book "being speared on the phallic, rhinoceros noses of harsh critics." See also Hennig (2003) Chr. 18. Buttrey 2007 adduces numismatic evidence to argue that the *Liber spectaculorum* does not commemorate the opening of the Flavian Amphitheatre, but should instead be dated to 83-85 AD.

⁷³ Indeed, the reader is assigned this role in the very first epigram of Book 1 (on which see note 70 above):
Hic est quem legis ille, quem requiris, / toto notus in orbe Martialis / argutis epigrammaton libellis: / cui, lector studiose, quod dedisti / uiuenti decus atque sentienti, / rari post cineres habent poetae.

⁷⁴ Book 8 *praef.*: *omnes quidem libelli mei, domine, quibus tu famam, id est vitam, dedisti...*

audience (1.3.6), has become *supercilium* (1.4.2), the divine “nod.”⁷⁵ Domitian’s word and even his nod are law owing to his role both as emperor and *censor perpetuus*, causing Martial to alternately flatter the emperor and assure him that the playful licentiousness of his books is just harmless fun and not at all indicative of Martial’s own morals or lifestyle.⁷⁶ And yet the poet has an impertinent side to show even this most formidable of his readers. In the following epigram he presumes to speak in Domitian’s voice, addressing the poet with the friendly *Marce* and quipping with him about the gross inequality that characterizes their gift-exchange: a book of epigrams for a *naumachia* (“[staged] sea-battle,” 1).⁷⁷ Meanwhile, though poetic content will determine Domitian’s decision, poetic quality will matter more with others. Following directly upon Domitian come two literary patrons, Stella (1.7) and Decianus (1.8), the former of whom is a skillful poet himself and therefore likely to be especially critical of his client’s epigrams.⁷⁸

Martial thus has a daunting list of readers, some snobby, some powerful enough to end any further poetic production then and there, but even so his bolder, more playful side manages to show through. By 1.41 we are given a taste of some of these critical *nasi* in action, and the reality is not nearly as daunting as the initial sequence of epigrams would have us believe.⁷⁹ 1.41 introduces Caecilius, a man who considers himself *urbanus* but who is actually, in everyone

⁷⁵ Fitzgerald (2007) 75.

⁷⁶ Whether Martial’s flattery of Domitian was genuine or ironic, and whether these terms are even appropriate for the context in which he was writing, has been an ongoing source of debate and discussion. For a summary, see Lorenz (2002) 45-50. Prominent contributors include Ahl 1984a and 1984b, Garthwaite 1990, 1993, 1998a, Johnson 1997, Coleman 1998, and Nauta 2002, Henriksén (2012) xx-xxxii.

⁷⁷ *Do tibi naumachiam, tu das epigrammata nobis: / uis, puto, cum libro, Marce, natare tuo.*

⁷⁸ But might he also appreciate the possible sexual innuendo in epigram 1.7? For this sequence of introductory poems, see Fitzgerald (2007) 73-9. For brief biographies of Stella and Decianus, Sullivan (1991) 16-17. On patronage and *amicitia* in Martial, as well as his financial status and role as a client, see Allen et al. (1970) 345, White 1972, 1975, 1978, Saller 1983, Sullivan (1991) 26-8, Kleijwegt 1999, Tennant 2000, Nauta 2002. Though most scholars now read Martial’s patronage poems with persona-theory in mind, Tennant 2000 nevertheless champions an autobiographical reading of the *Epigrams* and argues that Martial’s financial situation is accurately depicted in his epigrams and not an aspect of his persona.

⁷⁹ As Neger 2012 notes, “Nachdem Martial in 1.4 den Princeps in ihrer Eigenschaft als Zensoren angesprochen hatte, präsentiert er sich nun selbst in dieser Rolle...” (60).

else's estimation, a fool.⁸⁰ Not everyone can have a critical nose or be as witty as the comedian Tettius Caballus, Martial tells him. In fact, someone who jokes the way Caecilius does deserves nothing more than the appellation *caballus* ("horse," 20). In referring to this un-funny joker as a horse, the poet denies that Caecilius possesses a critic's nose while at the same time conjuring up an image of the man with a very different type of nose: a long, huge one, the sort of nose targeted by invective.⁸¹ Another huge nose appears at 12.37, where Martial tells the anonymous addressee *nasutum volo, nolo polyposum* ("I like a man with a nose, not a man with a polyp," 2).⁸² Rather than make Martial especially nervous, this overlarge nose simply causes him to roll his eyes: as we saw above, a bulbous nose does not mean a discerning critic. Nor, *pace* Catullus, does being *totum nasum*: at 12.88 Martial admits that Tongilianus *habet nasum* ("has a nose," 1), but then dismisses him as having *nil praeter nasum* ("nothing but a nose," 2). The poet takes the image of Catullus' discerning and sophisticated Fabullus and turns it on its head: Tongilianus and the *polyposum* are not sophisticated, nor even intimidating, but comically excessive and therefore ridiculous.

Martial approaches yet one more large nose with a greater degree of caution, but also a large dose of self-criticism which he still manages to work to his advantage:

Nasutus sis usque licet, sis denique nasus,
 quantum noluerit ferre rogatus Atlans,
 et possis ipsum tu deridere Latinum,

⁸⁰ Martial calls him a *verna*; Lewis and Short *ad loc.* note, "Such slaves were trained up as buffoons or jesters." Cicero at *de Or.* 3.161 remarks on the *odor urbanitatis*, for which see Stevens (unpublished) 5, 16 and Gowers (1993) 226-7. See Ramage 1973 on *urbanitas* generally.

⁸¹ Previous attempts to explain the joke inherent in *caballus* are unsatisfactory. See Howell 1980 *ad loc.*, who states frankly, "It is not clear what the point of the insult is." Cf. Apuleius' *Met.* 3.24, on Lucius' transformation into the ass: *iam facies enormis et os prolixum et nares hiantes et labiae pendulae*; and 9.13, *nares languidas*, of his fellow-animals at the mill. My thanks to Celia Schultz for directing me to these passages.

⁸² See Coleman 1988 on Statius *Silv.* 4.9, where Grypus' name, 'hook-nosed' (γρυπός) appears to be the Greek equivalent of *nasutus* and implies that Grypus is a 'man with a nose' in several different senses. On the physiognomy of noses, see Polemon B25, Adamantius B25, Anonymous 51, 112, 115, 118ff, and Pseudo-Aristotle 811a25-b4, all in Swain (ed.) 2007.

non potes in nugas dicere plura meas
ipse ego quam dixi.⁸³

You may be especially *nasutus*, you could be nothing but nose,
one so big Atlas wouldn't want to carry it if asked,
and you might be able to deride Latinus himself,
but you can't say more against my stuff
than I've already said myself.

Martial is his own worst critic, but even this moment of self-deprecation gives him a simultaneous opportunity for self-aggrandizement. He is the critic *par excellence*, the most sophisticated nose in Rome, even if he happens to be directing his harsh judgments against himself.⁸⁴ The characterization of the unnamed addressee as *denique nasus* (1) seems to suggest an extremely harsh critic, yet given the derision directed at big noses elsewhere, we must wonder whether the Atlas-sized nose in this epigram is not meant to be ridiculous rather than impressive. Either way, Martial comes out on top: his addressee is either nothing but a big-nosed buffoon, or else a critic who nevertheless cannot hope to reach Martial's own level of criticism.

This practice of denigrating himself while slipping in an underhanded compliment or other poetic flourish suggests how Martial can turn even an admission of low status and susceptibility to criticism into an opportunity to promote himself. In 6.82, for example, Martial claims that the poor state of his cloak is a reflection of his poor quality as a poet—then turns the self-derision into an opportunity to ask his patron Rufus for a new cloak.⁸⁵ In 2.8, the poet initially blames the copyist for any mistakes in his book; when confronted by the accusation *ista tamen mala sunt* ("but these things are terrible!" 7), he admits outright that this is true. Yet even so he manages a jab at the reader: *tu non meliora facis* ("you don't make better ones," 8)! In

⁸³ *Xenia* 2.

⁸⁴ But cf. 7.26, where Martial esteems his epigrams and sends them to the care of a friendly critic, Apollinaris.

⁸⁵ Prompting the question, is Martial a bad poet because he's poor, or is he poor because he's a bad poet?

these poems even instances of actual criticism lose some of their edge owing to Martial's ability to work epigram to his greatest advantage, absorbing criticism or even refashioning it into something entirely unexpected, such as a request to a patron for a gift. To be a poet is thus, for Martial, to expose oneself to a picky and outspoken readership, but Martial's stylus has a *nasum* as well. The result is that he can beat these critics at their own game: "you may be especially *nasutus*," he says, "but I am *nasutior*, as evidenced by the fact that I've critiqued myself more than you ever could. You may think I am a bad poet, but even so I can fashion a poem out of our conversation *and* slip in a request for a new cloak." Martial's willingness to expose himself to derision and to admit that he is vulnerable to external influence opens the door for the clever manipulation of seemingly unflattering situations. This practice is, of course, not unique to epigrams about poetry: we saw it also in the previous section, where the poet reworked encounters with contaminating odors into opportunities to criticize, to highlight his olfactory sophistication, and even, in some instances, to compliment himself ("I don't smell like anything!").

This section has briefly surveyed the noses of the *Epigrams* and their relationship with snobbery and literary criticism, both in Martial's predecessors and in the *Epigrams*. In these poems Martial faces not olfactory incompetence and the threat of contagion, but instead critical readers and the threat of rejection or worse. Yet Martial's interactions with his readers' noses and use of his own critical *nasus* in fact closely mirror the manner in which he relates to Rome's smelly denizens. He depicts himself with a forthrightness which nevertheless is aware of the risks that attend these encounters and which attempts to circumvent them through a variety of means. Yet again Martial exhibits varying degrees of confidence and vulnerability and relies on

everything from outright criticism of his detractors to self-deprecation spun into clever self-promotion in order to navigate the world of Roman noses.

3. The poet as victim

As we have just seen, Martial shows no reluctance about describing attacks on his status as a poet;⁸⁶ nor does he make any secret of his wish to avoid certain people entirely.⁸⁷ He is rarely, however, explicit about his desire to escape foul odors. Doing so, after all, may call undue attention to the fact that Martial has encountered, and associated with, some rather seedy people—if Sabidius can blow on a tart to cool it off and in the process turn it to *merda* (“shit,” 3.17.6), what are we to think of the poet, who depicts himself as a guest of Sabidius and who is just as likely as the tart to have been corrupted by proximity to him?

In this final section we return to the odors of Rome, but this time to look at one character whose interactions with Martial collapse more completely the boundaries between his world of everyday Rome and his world of literary concerns. We have already seen suggestions that such a boundary is not particularly stable. The very fact that Martial writes poems about encounters with foul odors, for instance, can suggest that the poet has been contaminated because of his integration into the city of Rome. In addition, it may remind the reader that Martial is writing in a less-than-elevated genre filled with poetry as contaminated as its author. Nevertheless, Martial has so far managed to establish himself as a dominant figure amidst contagion and criticism,

⁸⁶ See also, e.g. 1.53, 6.64.22-3.

⁸⁷ Zoilus, for example, a recurring character who appears sometimes as ostentatious (2.16, 3.82, 5.79, 11.37), sometimes with *os impurum* (2.42, 3.82, 6.91, 11.30, 11.85), sometimes as a *fugitivus* (3.29, 11.12, 11.37), among others.

thereby maintaining his integrity even while he is exposed.⁸⁸ The Postumus cycle instead presents a Martial who is unable to assert his dominance without suffering both physical and poetic repercussions. In this set of five poems,⁸⁹ Martial depicts himself as the perpetual, and increasingly vulnerable, victim of the *basiator* Postumus and openly expresses aversion to the potentially polluting effects of Postumus' perfume-scented kisses. This cycle is particularly appropriate for illustrating the interplay between Martial's concern with poetry and the everyday scents he encounters. By staging a series of interactions with Postumus in which the poet grows ever more desperate to avoid the man's *os impurum*,⁹⁰ Martial also draws a direct connection between the content of his epigrams and Postumus' behavior. The more poems Martial writes about the man, the more of a threat Postumus becomes, not only to Martial but to his poetry as well.⁹¹ In fact, in order to avoid Postumus' corrupting kisses, the poet must in the end stop criticizing, and writing about, them entirely. This cycle shows us the poet in an ongoing position of vulnerability as he attempts to both criticize and avoid Postumus and to maintain his moral

⁸⁸ Amy Richlin 1983 discusses how satirists preserve their integrity amidst the obscene in Chr. 2, especially 66.

⁸⁹ Poems 2.10, 12, 21, 22, 23 comprise the cycle of poems about a Postumus with bad breath who insists on kissing Martial, but 67 and 72 of the same book also contain a character called Postumus. While 67 seems unrelated, there is a possibility that 72, with its final double-entendre, either refers to the same Postumus or at least makes use of the fact that a *fellator* of the same name appeared earlier in the book. For the cycle, see Borgo 2005, esp. 21n.48 for a review of opinions on the subject. Barwick (1958) 300 argues against the inclusion of 67 and 72 in the cycle, evidenced by the fact that "hat Martial ihn offenbar weit von jenen Gedichte abgerückt."

⁹⁰ For *os impurum*, the dirty mouth allegedly resulting from oral sex, see among others Richlin (1983) 26-30 and 69, Obermayer (1998) 214-231, Williams (1999) 197-203.

⁹¹ This fiction that the characters featured in his poems are reading and responding to them is one which Martial employs throughout the corpus. His readers actively shape the course of his books and the content of individual epigrams through their reactions, both good and bad. In poem 3.8, for example, Martial says that a man named Quintus loves a one-eyed woman named Thais. Three epigrams later in 3.11, Martial asks a (presumably different) Quintus, "If your girlfriend is not named Thais and is not one-eyed, why did you think my earlier poem was about the two of you?" To mollify this Quintus, Martial proposes a change to the original epigram: now Sextus loves Thais instead. See also Fitzgerald (2007) 88ff on epigrams 1.44 and 1.45. It is impossible for us, as modern readers, to know what set of circumstances, if any, led to the writing of such poems, but our ignorance does not decrease the humor or the effectiveness of the strategic placement of the epigrams within the book, which creates the illusion that Martial is interacting with and responding to his readers in "real time." Fitzgerald (2007) 3 characterizes the typical Martial epigram as "trailing a context which stubbornly clings to it." For the original context of Martial's epigrams and the different types of reader experience, see also Fitzgerald (2007) 20 and Anderson 2011.

high ground;⁹² unfortunately, the literary conceit of the cycle is that the more Martial writes, the worse the risk to his own integrity.

Martial will spend the Postumus cycle attempting to avoid Postumus and his dangerous kisses. Before turning to this cycle, however, I would like to discuss three poems of Catullus (97-99) which express a surprisingly dismissive attitude towards the contagion of odor, such that they actually *encourage* the audience to think of Catullus as contaminated. While Martial's encounters with Postumus feature the poet constantly on the defensive, Catullus places himself in close proximity to, even willingly interacting with, foul odors. His poetic persona may be disgusted, but he is not afraid of contagion, nor even of suggesting that he himself may be sexually impure, for Catullus, like Martial, can turn an unflattering scenario to his advantage.

Poems 97, 98, and 99 do not form three scenes from the same story, as the poems of Martial's Postumus cycle do, but they are linked by the themes of odor and dirty mouths and therefore follow logically upon one another. 97, one of Catullus' vilest poems, begins with the poet considering, in a reasoned and almost detached manner, whether Aemilius' mouth or ass is fouler: *non (ita me di ament) quicquam referre putavi, / utrumne os an culum olfacerem Aemilio* ("I didn't, gods help me, think it mattered whether I sniffed at Aemilius' mouth or ass," 1-2).⁹³ Catullus then goes on to declare the man's rear cleaner, and tells us why in explicit terms. This poem is a perfect example of the process by which a poet takes what ought to be an immediate,

⁹² "[T]he speaker, by perceiving the victim as stained and utterly loathsome, expresses a fear of contamination by the victim; he not only shuns the victim's touch but even asserts that he can smell or see the victim's stain from a distance." Richlin (1983) 27.

⁹³ O'Bryhim 2012 provides a detailed look at this largely neglected poem, which has otherwise been examined only piecemeal (for bibliography, see O'Bryhim (2012) 150 n.2). Compare Nicarchus' poem on the same theme at *AP* 11.241, in which the role of telling the victim's ass and mouth apart is allocated to doctors rather than taken up by Nicarchus himself. *AP* 11.242 and 415 also treat this theme.

gut-wrenching reaction of disgust and instead “draws attention also to the act of judgment.”⁹⁴ We have seen Martial use this same technique already as he balanced his exposure to scents against his ability to poeticize even something as disgusting as stench. Catullus dwells on Aemilius’ repulsive odor before making his decision, painting an unflattering picture of the poet engaged in a vile sort of empirical experiment. If one of Aemilius’ additional flaws is his lack of sophistication,⁹⁵ we must wonder what this particular poem says about Catullus.

What is especially noteworthy about this poem is Catullus’ use of the verb *olfacere*,⁹⁶ which implies an active *sniffing at* something, the possibility that Catullus might willingly choose to smell either of Aemilius’ orifices, and not only to smell them but to do so analytically. We may also compare Horace’s use of the verb *odoror*, “sniff out,” at *Ep.* 12.4: like Catullus, Horace portrays himself as an active sniffer turning his olfactory prowess against a repulsive woman.⁹⁷ Martial also employs the verb *olfacere* once in reference to himself, but it is merely to sniff at wine. In contrast to his rather braver predecessors, he depicts his olfactory encounters, as we have seen, as happening by chance: his offenders are *olentes* (*spirantes*, etc.) who happen to be giving off foul odors, assaulting the innocent Martial who, meanwhile, just happens to be passing by. Or so he would have us believe.

After Catullus’ encounter with Aemilius comes one with Victius, whose tongue and, presumably, mouth and breath are so foul that he could *culos et crepidas lingere carpatinas*

⁹⁴ Stevens (unpublished) 16.

⁹⁵ He stinks, but he also has sex with *multas* and fancies himself *venustum* (9) despite all evidence to the contrary. O’Byrhim 2012 suggests that this poem targets Aemilius’ literary pretentions, and that the man should be identified with the poet Aemilius Macer.

⁹⁶ 3.49. Galán Vioque 2002 *ad Epigrams* 7.94.2 notes that this prose verb is found in the early comedians as well as Catullus, but is not seen again in the Latin poets until Martial and Juvenal (*Satires* 7.225, of sniffing lamp oil).

⁹⁷ For invective against old women, see Richlin (1983) Chr. 5, esp. 109-116. It is possible that Catullus, as an aristocrat, is also making a point about his social superiority to the various *olentes* in his poems, though the same could not be said for Horace.

(“lick asses and leather sandals,” 5).⁹⁸ Catullus goes on to suggest that if Victius wishes *nos omnino...omnes perdere* (“to destroy us all entirely,” 5), all he has to do is open his mouth and the job will be done. The poet not only presents a character whose mouth is so disgusting that his breath is a veritable weapon, he then goes on to mention the easiest way for Victius to use it. This closing remark, that Victius need only open his mouth to destroy *nos...omnes*, blatantly admits the possibility of contamination but also displays almost a lack of concern about it, as though Catullus were daring him to do it. As in poem 97, Catullus’ disgust is not accompanied by an indication that he is taking pains to avoid it, but instead almost the opposite.

For this reason, when we reach poem 99, it may not come as a surprise that Juventius reacts so negatively to Catullus’ kiss, wiping it from his mouth *tamquam commictae spurca saliva lupae* (“as if it were the disgusting saliva of a filthy whore,” 10). Though Catullus never gives any indication that he engages in the sort of sexual activities that would cause an *os impurum*,⁹⁹ the two previous poems nevertheless depict the poet in close interaction with some disgusting and contaminating odors. The result is that in poem 99, Catullus suffers the same accusation from Juventius that the poet himself has just levelled against Aemilius and Victius. And unlike *Epigrams* 4.4, where Martial imagined himself giving off various loathsome odors, poem 99 carries the suggestion that Catullus is guilty of sexual deviance as well as offensive kisses. Like Martial, however, Catullus manages to turn even this unflattering depiction of himself around. By the end of 99, Juventius’ attempts to punish Catullus have turned the boy’s *saviolum dulci dulcius ambrosia* (“kiss sweeter than sweet ambrosia,” 2) into a *saviolum tristi tristi helleboro* (“kiss more bitter than bitter hellebore,” 14). As a result, the poet has sworn he

⁹⁸ Implying, perhaps, that he is already engaged in similarly (or more) disgusting activities.

⁹⁹ Moreno Soldevila 2006 *ad Epigrams* 4.4.9 notes that “*spurcus* is a colloquial adjective with strong scatological implications. ...In sexual terms, however, *spurcus* is normally applied to prostitutes (1.34.8) and to disreputable practices such as fellatio and cunnilingus (Catul. 78b.2 *spurca saliva*; 99.10 *spurca salivae lupae*; Mart. 2.42.2; Williams 2004 *ad loc.*).”

will never try to steal one of the boy's kisses again. Throughout the poem Catullus becomes more and more the victim of Juventius' wrath and less the foul-mouthed offender, and it is the boy's kiss, in the end, which is to be avoided, not Catullus'. This is the thought that ends the poem, leaving the reader with a more favorable impression of the poet than of Juventius, whose reaction to Catullus' kiss seems, in the end, nothing but overreaction.

Catullus is dismissive of the threat of contagion in a way that more closely reflects the critical and confident Martial we have seen thus far. The neoteric poet, however, is dismissive to the point of willingly exposing himself to contaminating odors, something Martial never does. In the Postumus cycle we instead see Martial on the defensive, stressing the dangers of encountering foul odors and calling attention to his attempts to maintain his purity no matter the cost. Martial introduces Postumus as a snob who does not think the poet merits a proper greeting: the man gives Martial kisses *dimidio...labro* ("with half your lips," 2.10.1), apparently considering Martial worth nothing more owing to the poet's low status. Though indignation seems the proper response—what makes Postumus so high and mighty?—Martial instead responds with approval: *laudo*, says the poet in line 2, and goes on to tell the man that an even greater favor would be for Postumus to keep that half to himself as well (line 4).¹⁰⁰ "The poet," notes Williams, "...turns the tables, here and elsewhere exposing Postumus himself as the one who is truly worthy of being kept at a distance."¹⁰¹ As judge of character and arbiter of scent, Martial demonstrates that he is cultured enough to recognize the source of Postumus' questionable kisses and concerned enough to want to avoid them. Meanwhile the readers are invited to draw the logical conclusion about a man whose kisses should be avoided: while he

¹⁰⁰ For Martial's expression *tibi habe* and its connotations, see Williams 2004 and Borgo 2005 *ad loc.*

¹⁰¹ Williams (2004) 55.

could just be suffering from bad breath, it is more likely that he has *os impurum* and is guilty of some sexual deviance.¹⁰² Martial's praise of Postumus' seemingly rude behavior thus becomes a mark in his favor: the epigrammatist knows what lies behind those kisses and is taking measures to avoid it, measures he shares in verse to ensure we know about them, too. The audience is invited not only to infer Postumus' likely offense, but also to confirm Martial in his behavior towards the man.

At 2.12 Postumus is back, and the readers are given more information about the kisses Martial was so keen to shun in epigram 2.10. It may come as a surprise that they are not foul-smelling at all, but redolent of perfumes:

Esse quid hoc dicam quod olent tua basia murrum¹⁰³
quodque tibi est numquam non alienus odor?
Hoc mihi suspectum est, quod oles bene, Postume, semper:
Postume, non bene olet qui bene semper olet.

What can I say about the fact that your kisses smell like myrrh
and that you never smell like yourself?
This is suspicious to me, Postumus, that you always smell good:
Postumus, the man who always smells good doesn't really smell good.¹⁰⁴

First Postumus was rude and Martial praised him for it; now his breath turns out to be fragrant and yet the poet is complaining and lecturing. At this point in the corpus of *Epigrams*, Martial has already insulted several people for their scent (Acerra at 1.28 and Fescennia at 1.87), but this poem marks the first time he has read through a pleasant olfactory façade to the truth underneath.¹⁰⁵ As such, 2.12 constitutes a manifesto of sorts for the poet and a sign of epigrams

¹⁰² As Williams 2004 notes at 2.10, "an experienced reader of Martial, and perhaps any Roman reader, will guess at the possibility that Postumus has befouled his mouth by means of oral sex."

¹⁰³ Cf. Ovid *Amores* 1.2.1. For other Ovidian first lines in Martial, see Siedschlag 1972 and (1977) 116-7. On this parallel specifically, see Hinds (2007) 119.

¹⁰⁴ For the sentiment, see also 6.55; Cicero *Att.* 2.1.1; Plautus *Most.* 273, and Seneca *Epist.* 108.16.

¹⁰⁵ Both women are drunks who smell of last night's wine. While Martial merely comments on this behavior in Acerra, Fescennia earns a nauseating epigram detailing her attempts to improve the scent of her breath. She does so using perfumes, but the fact that her efforts make her odor even worse than before means that Martial's job at getting to the bottom of things is rather easier.

to come: excess, even of something good, *suspectum est* and suggests an attempt to dissemble rather than a simple lack of taste. Martial not only establishes himself as a morally superior judge, he also refuses to accept what is presented to him at face value and instead claims license to dig deeper. He is careful, however, not to suggest that he is “sniffing around” out of some perverse desire to interact with suspicious characters. Postumus’ kisses *olent*: they *give off* a fragrance, one that is noticeable and therefore merits further consideration before Martial can pronounce judgment. And Postumus, though presumably *socially* superior to Martial, is not up to sniff when judged by the poet’s standards of sexual and moral purity. The epigrammatist, concerned to maintain his own purity, is thus wary of the man’s perfumed breath and has no complaints about his rude kiss in 2.10. Additionally, when offered the option of kissing Postumus or shaking his hand in 2.21, he makes no mistake about which he prefers: *malo manum* (“I’ll take the hand[shake],” 2).

Unfortunately, Postumus’ rudeness does not last, and in epigram 2.22, the relationship between Martial’s poetry and the behavior of his characters is brought into play; with it comes the suggestion that Martial is now more than ever a victim of the *basiator*’s contaminating kisses:

Quid mihi uobiscum est, o Phoebe nouemque sorores?
 ecce nocet uati Musa iocosa suo.
Dimidio nobis dare Postumus ante solebat
 basia, nunc labro coepit utroque dare.

What have you got against me, Phoebus and the Nine Sisters?
 Look! The Muse, that comedian, harms her bard.
Before, Postumus kissed me with half his lips,
 but now, he’s begun to use both.

Neither shaming and lecturing Postumus nor electing to shake his hand has done Martial any good in the end: the poet is now even more at risk than he was when he began to complain,

“punished by his own poetic wit.”¹⁰⁶ We are not told specifically why Postumus has upgraded his greeting,¹⁰⁷ but the relationship between poetry and action within the poetic fiction is clear: Postumus has become aware of the poems Martial has been writing about him, and has taken action. The epigrammatist calls direct attention to the influence of poetry here through his mention of the Muses (1-2) and Apollo (1), echoing Ovid at *Tristia* 2.1.¹⁰⁸ As Holzberg notes, Martial equates his punishment at the hands (rather, the lips) of Postumus to Ovid’s exile by Augustus.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, the Flavian poet not only draws a parallel between their punishments, he even suggests that they are similar in their intensity. Just as Ovid mourns the multiplication of punishments against him (*an semel est poenam commeruisse parum?* 4), so too Martial is faced with the doubling of Postumus’ affront as the man begins to kiss him with both lips instead of half. Ovid’s remark that “my poetry made men and women want to know me” (*carmina fecerunt, ut me cognoscere vellet / ...femina virque*, 6-7) thus takes on a new and possibly sexual meaning in Martial, where Postumus’ fuller kiss suggests a greater intimacy with the poet. At this point in the cycle there is a distinct possibility that Martial, unlike his predecessor, would welcome a one-way ticket to Tomis.

With this epigram the poet reaches a new level of both indignation and vulnerability, having become even more exposed to the man’s dirty kisses than before. Despite Martial’s protests, his credibility as our morally superior guide through Rome begins to waver: not only do

¹⁰⁶ Rimell (2008) 134.

¹⁰⁷ Borgo 2005 argues that Postumus is a former lover of Martial whose haughtiness the poet criticizes, but then, in passing, suggests that Postumus’ change of behavior halfway through the cycle is an attempt at revenge for Martial’s previous poems (102). Nobili, in his review of Borgo’s book (*BMCR* 2006), suggests that Postumus may be thanking Martial for the degree of fame he has achieved thanks to Martial’s epigrams, or else that Postumus is changing his behavior so as not to be identified as the target of Martial’s poetry. Williams (2004) 94-5 posits that Martial himself has become a more famous poet in the intervening time and is therefore deserving, in Postumus’ estimation, of a proper kiss. I find Borgo’s passing suggestion of revenge the most likely, but ultimately the fiction of a developing relationship between Martial and Postumus exists no matter the reason for that development.

¹⁰⁸ On this echo, see Holzberg (2002) 98-99, Hinds (2007) 119, and Williams 2004 *ad loc.*

¹⁰⁹ Holzberg (2002) 99: “Im Hinblick auf den Prätext darf man Martial so verstehen, daß er seine “Bestrafung” durch einen Fellator scherzhaft mit der Bestrafung Ovids durch Augustus gleichsetzt.”

we see Martial being kissed by Postumus for the first time since epigram 2.10, we also learn that our poet is *twice* as open to contamination as he used to be thanks to Postumus' doubled kiss. Martial thus seizes upon yet another opportunity to remind the reader, via Ovid, that he is offended by this whole scenario and frustrated that all of his efforts have not only failed but backfired. But even as the poet turns yet another moment of exposure into the chance to denounce Postumus' behavior and promote his own integrity, we note that the epigrammatist has also *reminded* his readers of his continued susceptibility to the man, whose fragrant-but-dangerous kisses follow him from poem to poem. Just as Ovid cannot lament that his poetry has landed him in exile without yielding to the Muses and taking up his stylus again, Martial cannot be superior without first making clear the danger of what he is up against.

In the process of wrestling with this paradox, Martial also heaps yet another insult onto the *basiator*; if epigrams 10, 12, and 21 caused Postumus to begin kissing Martial *labro... utroque*, what will Postumus do *now*? By the following poem (2.23), we have still not found out, but Martial has introduced a new element into the story: the general readership:

Non dicam, licet usque me rogetis,
qui sit Postumus in meo libello,
non dicam: quid enim mihi necesse est
has offendere basiationes,¹¹⁰
quae se tam bene vindicare possunt?

I won't tell you, though you keep asking and asking,
who "Postumus" is in my little book.
Not telling. For why should I
offend these kisses which can
avenge themselves so well?

¹¹⁰ This word appears only here and at 7.95, but first at Catullus 7 in the context of counting kisses. Its use here may suggest a similarly innumerable amount of kisses coming from Postumus, though his are decidedly undesirable and un-Catullan. Cf. Catullus 48.6, *osculationis*.

Faced with supposed requests from readers to reveal Postumus' true identity, Martial refuses, reminding them clearly in the last two lines what he has been dealing with so far, and what his future may hold if he gives Postumus any more reasons to be offended.¹¹¹ The readers, perhaps wishing to learn Postumus' identity so that they can steer clear of him, are on their own, for Martial's refusal to provide them with the information not only closes the matter, it closes the cycle as well. After this, there are no more epigrams about a Postumus with fragrant-but-foul kisses. Martial at last asserts his poetic authority not only to deny his readers the information they want, but also to deny production of any more chapters to this story at all—the readers want more information, Postumus wants either more notoriety or none at all, and Martial is putting his foot, and his stylus, down.

The cycle thus presents us with a paradox which we see often in the *Epigrams*: in order to look good in the end, Martial must be willing to make himself look bad in the process, just as Catullus could turn the tide against Juventius by first imagining himself as possessing an *os impurum*. On the one hand, writing about a person with a fault allows Martial to assert his own standards, to make judgments and jokes which leave him looking good (morally, socially, even economically) in comparison. On the other, writing about undesirables comes with a price, the price of admitting that you have encountered such people, sometimes repeatedly.¹¹² Martial may have the moral high ground, but what has he been exposed to along the way up? As the example of Postumus shows, characters who smell are uniquely appropriate in this regard because they are not only undesirable, they are also on the offensive, not simply offending the poet's sensibilities but providing the additional threat of contamination. Moreover, even characters who

¹¹¹ He is not, as Borgo 2005 notes *ad loc.*, driven “per etica professionale...ma per paura di una vendetta da parte di Postumo.”

¹¹² In addition to the five-epigram cycle itself, the words *numquam* (2) and *semper* (3 and 4) in epigram 2.12 suggest repeated encounters with Postumus and his fellator's mouth not recorded on the page. Just how many times are we to imagine Martial has been kissed by Postumus?

do not come at the poet as Postumus does are hazardous, for an olfactory threat is partially outside the control of the *olens*. A person can alter how he or she smells, but not where that scent will travel or who will be exposed to it. In this sense scents are actually more dangerous than other types of affront, for they are out of everyone's hands—and into everyone's nose.

Martial creates the fiction that his poetic production and the responses of his readers are directly linked. After a poem praising Decianus (1.39) he imagines a reader grimacing jealously (1.40). In 11.108, the last poem of the book, he pretends that his readers have asked for a few distichs more, but when he asks that they pay for them, the supposed readers are silent and both poetic production and the book end simultaneously.¹¹³ In such a fictional world, the Postumus cycle raises the question, has Martial actually won out against Postumus? If the legacy of invective poetry was “a legendary verbal efficacy that supposedly impelled the targets of archaic *iambos* to suicide,”¹¹⁴ then Martial has failed spectacularly. And if fear of offending Postumus' vengeful kisses and polluting odor has caused him not only to withhold the man's identity but also to stop writing about him entirely,¹¹⁵ then it could be said that Martial has sacrificed further poetic production in favor of maintaining whatever purity he has left, at least where Postumus is concerned. As a poet intimately involved in his world, Martial's life and his page are, in the end, linked, or so this cycle would suggest. But lest the content of his poetry continue to dictate, rather than simply reflect, his olfactory encounters, Martial eliminates the offending content altogether. Why *should* he continue to write about and offend Postumus' kisses when they can

¹¹³ Taking the poem literally, we could read the last couplet of 108 as the hoped-for extra distich: the readers ask for more, and Martial obliges—with a request for money!

¹¹⁴ Hawkins (2014) 3.

¹¹⁵ As mentioned above (note 90), a Postumus appears later in poems 67 and 72; neither deals directly with the subject of kissing, but 72 may contain the suggestion that Postumus was irrumated by one Caecilius.

avenge themselves so well?¹¹⁶ He should not. After all, Rome is filled with other epigram-worthy denizens who pose less of a threat to the poet and his epigrams, or at least ones who will not keep coming back with more.¹¹⁷

Conclusion

Given the power of odors to corrupt, characterize, inform, and indict, it is not surprising that Martial is able to cull so much poetic material from even such simple ideas as “you stink” and “you smell nice.”¹¹⁸ In this chapter, I have suggested that Martial’s olfactory poems, largely neglected until now, are particularly appropriate for illuminating his participation in everyday life, his concerns as an epigrammatic poet, and what happens when these two interests meet in his poetry.

Martial is a reactionary poet, milder than Juvenal but still driven to respond in verse to what he experiences in the world.¹¹⁹ Between invitations to dinner, trips to the bath house, house calls to pay obeisance to patrons, and everyday walks through the city, the poet has no need to actively seek out subject matter for his epigrams: subjects will come to him. This practice can be viewed in miniature in the corpus of smell poems, where Martial prefers to highlight how others give off smells, not how he has sought them out. The poet reacts to odors he has encountered by chance, most of which he would rather not have experienced, as his protests and insults make clear. While Catullus deliberately sniffs at (*olfacerem*) Aemulius’ mouth and *culus* in 97, Martial

¹¹⁶ Cf. 10.3.11-12, where Martial defends his reputation after another poet spreads malicious verses in his name: *cur ego laborem notus esse tam prave, / constare gratis cum silentium possit?*

¹¹⁷ Not that this will stop him from writing about other sources of pollution. By 2.28, in fact, he is already addressing Sextillus, another sexual deviant who probably also has *os impurum*.

¹¹⁸ Cf. Bradley (2015) 7: “...as much as Martial plays on the simplicity of these extremes [of foul and fragrant], he demonstrates that the educated poet can turn these basic gut instincts – disgust and lust – into complex and diverse metaphorical associations.”

¹¹⁹ Cf. Juvenal 1.30: *difficile est saturam non scribere*.

refrains from putting himself in this position, and his chosen vocabulary subtly hints at his involuntary reception of an onslaught of odors. Poems on characters such as Thais and Gellia show us a Martial, however, who gives as good as he gets, and even when he is acknowledging his characters' power he stands mostly at a remove, exhibiting his olfactory sophistication, casting judgment, and inviting his audience to do the same. We saw, in addition, how Martial carries this same give-and-take into the world of literary criticism and noses. Here he meets the critical noses of Roman readers with a combination of deference and self-deprecation, wit, insult, and insinuation, demonstrating his ability to rise above the lowliness of his epigrammatic genre by employing the very qualities which characterize it. It comes as no surprise that Martial, too, has a *nasus*.

The final section saw the collision of these two worlds in the Postumus cycle, where Martial's integrity and poetic production are directly threatened by a series of everyday encounters with a relentless *basiator*. Martial's run-ins with Postumus first fuel the production of more epigrams; in these the poet documents his resistance, reminding the reader how adept he is at turning even unflattering situations into opportunities to profess his own high standards and superiority. Ultimately, however, repeated meetings with Postumus taint not only Martial himself but also his ability to write further poems at all, at least not without fear of retribution. This section thus highlights what happens when Martial insists on a first-hand look at the olfactory realities of Rome but also demands the privilege of retaining his role as uncontaminated poet. The results are, for Martial, not pretty—at least until we remember that the entire thing is a poetic conceit, fully under Martial's control.

The odors of the *Epigrams*, like the poems themselves, reward attentive readers who are willing to let Martial teach them how to use their noses to the fullest. Ephemeral and lingering,

trivial and powerful, blunt and deceptive, odors suggest the multiplicity of meanings inherent in even the shortest of epigrams. The readers who follow Martial through the world of smells become critics as well, able to either “buy into the official version or expose the unspoken assumption,”¹²⁰ criticize but also question and unmask. Through his treatment of scents Martial teaches his readers not only how to evaluate the characters and situations presented in his poetry, but also how to navigate the *Epigrams* as a whole, provided they follow their noses.

¹²⁰ Fitzgerald (2007) 10.

Conclusion

“Listen! Do you smell something?”

—Dr. Raymond Stantz¹

This dissertation has explored the power and meaning of smell in a select group of Latin literary texts, and the Roman understanding of odor which informs these references. We have seen odors at work in three distinct genres: the comedies of Plautus, five Latin epics, and the *Epigrams* of Martial, texts spanning nearly three hundred years. Despite differences of genre and the passage of time, however, we can nevertheless trace throughout these texts common threads, important aspects of the Roman conception of smells and smelling. I have argued most prominently for two broad ideas about the literary representation of odors: that they function as a source of knowledge on the one hand, and of contamination on the other. In the three preceding chapters I have demonstrated the various ways in which these two ideas can be employed in literary texts. As sources of knowledge, odors speak to anything from someone’s assigned role in a Roman comedy to his or her class, gender, age, or moral status. They also, however, serve as tools of deception and transformation used in deliberate attempts to efface signs of these same identity markers. As contaminants, they resonate with the human emotions of disgust and fear, but also with culturally charged aversions to certain types of people. And both themes bring the physical body to the fore in its permeability, its integrity or lack thereof, its role as a status

¹ *Ghostbusters* (1984).

marker, and more. To read Roman literature with a nose toward scent, then, is to understand both Latin literature and the culture which produced it from a perspective which moves beyond what the eyes can see to the physical, sensuous, and sometimes stomach-churning world beyond.

Scents in Roman literature served as sources of knowledge about identity, character, and behavior, but this was quickly complicated by two factors: first, the fact that context often determined how a scent should be interpreted in a given situation, and second, that odors may tell lies as often as they tell the truth. Many scents did not have objectively good or bad connotations, but might mean different things depending on context. The texts I examined, however, tended towards a negative interpretation of even what we might think of as “positive” odors. Perfumes, for example, frequently represented decadence, artificiality, or even deception because of the circumstances in which they were being used. Martial objects to Postumus’ fragrant kisses because they are actually a sign of his sexual misconduct, and to Cleostrata in the *Casina*, Lysidamus’ perfumes signal his suspicious behavior. Yet the young lover Philolaches in the *Mostellaria* compliments Philematium by referring to her as “myrrh-oil” (*stacta*, 309) during a banquet, and Martial also writes several fulsome epigrams on the aroma of a slave-boy’s kisses (3.65, 11.8). The Romans were thus not altogether anti-fragrance, and writers objected to perfumes only in certain contexts, particularly when their users flaunted or tried to conceal some sort of inappropriate behavior: a man taking the passive sexual role, for instance, or an old woman denying her age. In this way smell functions not only as a source of knowledge, but also as a means of criticism which the audience or reader was expected to understand readily.

Gleaning knowledge from odors is complicated not only by the subjectivity of scents, but also by the fact that odors were not entirely trustworthy sources of information. While natural smells seem to have been thought of as indicative of something fundamental and true—the

dangerous nature of an underworld entrance, for example, or the character of a slave—artificial scents could not always be trusted, hence the need, as we just saw, for awareness of context.¹ For example, though women were expected to employ cosmetics in order to keep themselves well-groomed, these same perfumes, paints, and plasters also came under suspicion because they could mask a person's flaws and instead create a false front. Both Plautus and Martial, as we have seen, suggest that overuse of cosmetics was typical, or at least perceived as such. On the other hand, it seems unlikely that every person, male or female, who went about perfumed came under suspicion of some sort of deviance. Rather, the fact that odors were subjective and so easily connected with flaws and transgressions meant that *olentes* were ideal targets of invective, comedy, and satire.

As odors travelled they carried with them not only culturally charged information but also the essence of their source, which they transferred to whatever they encountered: smells were not merely symbols representing ideas or states of being like desirability, death, and immorality; they could cause actual changes in people and things as well. Chapters 2 and 3 have demonstrated the widely divergent ways in which the concept of contagion and the boundary-transgressing power of scents could be employed in literature. While the epic poets played upon human fears about death and the particularly Roman concern with the crimes of civil war, Martial turns the focus on himself, the poet whose contact with less-than-savory denizens of Rome threatens his poetic and moral integrity. Through both of these runs the Roman understanding of odor as something physical which has as much of a relationship with the people and things it touches as it does with those from which it emanated. Whether it is the miasma of

¹ Cf. Harvey (2006) 127: odor “conveyed identity and revealed the individual’s moral condition.” Even the truth told by a natural odor, however, could be interpreted in multiple ways—recall how Seneca praised the smell of sweat and dirt as that of Roman virtue while others of his day thought of the old Romans as unwashed and uncivilized (*Ep.* 86.12-13, for which see Introduction 24-5).

the plague carrying sickness and death, the stench of the civil war dead breeding further crimes, or the perfumed but impure kisses of a *fellator*, odors have the potential to affect whatever stands in their path. This is not the only new relationship created by odor, however. Just as scents cross boundaries, so too do they also break down the boundaries between things which should be kept apart: the living and dead, the guilty and innocent, Martial and Postumus. In the anxiety about being touched by olfactory contagion we see a deeper fear, that of coming into contact with the original source of the contagion, which is presumably even more potent than its odor. While the eyes allow us to see an object of fear from a safe distance, that space has vanished by the time we encounter an odor: if you can smell it, you are already in danger.

Uniting the themes of knowledge and contagion more broadly is another aspect of physicality, the way in which odors bring to the fore the bodily presence of those who emit them. In Chapter 2 this idea can be seen in the foulness of the Harpies and the ability of their stench to extend their corrupting influence beyond their physical selves, just as the invisible miasmas of the underworld seem to take on physical form when they reach up from the earth and strike birds from the sky. The noisome stink of the civil war victims, meanwhile, offers a vivid reminder of the lingering presence, and malice, of the dead: while their own bodies decay into nothing but gore, the pollution they cause creates a larger corrupting body, the environment. This perpetuation of pollution recalls the lingering presence of civil war and echoes Roman fears about its possible return. In Chapters 1 and 3, meanwhile, the scent of women's bodies was a pervasive concern: the wife in the *Menaechmi* is undesirable precisely because the stench she leaves on her *palla* is too redolent of disgusting female genitalia, while the potential for perfumes to mask undesirable odors creates, as we saw above, a concern about artificial façades. Other women such as Thais and Scapha's *veteres* muddle the use of perfumes and cosmetics so badly

that the result is not a façade but a mess of sweat, dirt, and sticky pastes, all reeking terribly. While vision may be the most straightforward way of assessing someone or something, it is clear that smell could be just as potent a reminder of the bodies and physical influence of others.

In this dissertation I have shown how two dominant characteristics of smell function in a small sample of literary texts, but many more avenues in the study of smells remain open, two of which I suggest here. The first is the role of smell in creating humor, a topic I touched upon in Chapters 1 and 3 while nevertheless focusing more heavily on identity and invective. Recent work on how and why disgust creates humor is particularly relevant; the ease with which disgust is provoked even in hypothetical situations, notes Strohminger, makes it perfect for “the sort of conditions that breed comedy: perceived social or environmental threats which are quickly seen for what they are—false alarms.”² This is especially the case for Martial and the satirists, who are so interested in offensive odors and the threats they pose. Likewise, anti-cosmetic diatribes from Scapha to Ovid and beyond paint images of women (and sometimes men) covered in all manner of viscous, smelly substances, drawing our attention back to the connection between odors and the body. Lucretius even gives the reader a model to follow: a woman’s attendants stand at a distance, giggling surreptitiously (*furtimque cachinnant*) as she covers herself in foul odors (*taetris se suffit odoribus*).³ Beyond disgust, caricatures, outright insults, and puns also featured smell. A passage from the *Pseudolus*, for example, puns on multiple meanings of the verb *sapere* when Charinus turns a question about a slave’s common sense into a joke about his body odor.⁴ The humor derives both from Charinus’ own witty wordplay and from his lowering

² Strohminger (2014) 486. See also Herz (2012) 151-5.

³ *DRN* 4.1175-6. At *Remedia Amoris* 351-5, Ovid compares the stench of a woman’s cosmetics to Phineus’ table, drawing an implicit connection between the woman and a Harpy.

⁴ *Pseud.* 737-42. *sapere* can mean either “to have sense” (OLD 6) or “to smack of” (OLD 2, 3).

of the register of the scene from a discussion about sense to one about goaty armpits and spiced wine. In the realm of politics, Cicero makes effective use of smells not only to indicate (or exaggerate) the character of his opponents, but also to insult them and, perhaps, to raise laughter through descriptions of perfumed ringlets and plucked eyebrows.⁵ The examples of Lucretius and Cicero indicate that comedy and epigram are not the only genres which employ olfactory humor, and in addition to didactic and oratory we might also consider others such as historiography and biography. An investigation into the relationship between smell and humor might also ask how Roman olfactory humor accounted for significant aspects of identity such as gender, status, and age. Further, one could consider how odor-based jokes differed from, or were similar to, those based on the other senses.⁶

Additional emphasis on the interplay between smell and other senses, in fact, could also benefit future work on this project, given that our real world experiences, as well as recent studies of synaesthesia, show us that rarely do we experience anything with only one of our senses.⁷ By discussing both vision and smell in Chapter 1, and the strong connection between smell and touch in Chapters 2 and 3, I have already demonstrated how readily one sense could play off of, or take on attributes of, another, as well as the ways this interplay might manifest itself in literary depictions of the senses and sense objects. Moving forward, the connection between smell and touch, to offer an example, could be expanded: odor's ability to touch was an overwhelmingly negative quality in this dissertation, but further investigation might look for occasions in which it is positive. Love elegy, for instance, would be an ideal place for the physical capabilities of scents to mirror the intimacy of the lovers themselves, such as when

⁵ See, for examples, *Post Red. In Sen.* 16, *In Pis.* 25, *Pro Q. Rosc. Com.* 20.

⁶ See Clarke 2007 and Mitchell 2009 for two recent studies of visual humor in the ancient world.

⁷ Literary authors, of course, have the privilege of creating situations in which this is the case—focusing solely on the visual, for instance, or the sounds of a particular string of words.

Propertius contrasts Arabian incense with the scents Love himself fashions “with his own hands” (*suis...manibus*).⁸ Additional research into odor as a potent magical device could also provide greater insight into a realm where the tactile qualities of odors were both positive and beneficial.⁹ Of course, not every mention of smell will conjure up associations with other senses, but if the Greeks and Romans actually believed that “sensory practices are all “mixed media”,”¹⁰ then we, too, ought to be on the lookout for synaesthetic moments as we read. Indeed, *Synaesthesia and the Ancient Senses* has already uncovered “a remarkable body of ancient material that regularly crosses sensory lines.”¹¹ In reading this way we would not be downplaying the importance of smell as a sense in its own right, but rather recognizing its place alongside the other senses and acknowledging its contribution to a truly Roman way of reading.

⁸ Propertius 2.29a.17-8: *afflabunt tibi non Arabum de gramine odores, sed quos ipse suis fecit Amor manibus.*

⁹ See Introduction p. 20.

¹⁰ Stevens (2014) 221.

¹¹ Butler and Purves (2013) 2. They further note that “the muting of such material in recent humanistic scholarship was the result of methodological limits that needed to be overcome.”

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