

FLOWERS FOR THE BOOK-BINDER'S WIFE:  
AN INVESTIGATION OF *FLORILEGIA* AND EARLY MODERN  
WOMEN'S WRITING

By

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## ABSTRACT

Working under the presumed tutelage of ancient Roman scholars, early modern writers embraced the notion of *florilegia*, passages or quotations, which once deemed pleasing or insightful were extracted for use in the writer's own work. The category of *florilegia*, or flowers, particularly included the subcategory of *sententiae*, or commonplaces, which were considered sources of wisdom and advice. By their chronic recycling of such maxims, Renaissance writers reinforced the prominence of literary imitation rather than encouraging originality. Thus, when early modern authors employed the childbirth metaphor to describe authorship, painting themselves as mothers and their compositions as the child-like fruits of their labor, they attempted to identify a compositional process based on replication with reproduction. Interestingly, in the early modern era, the term, "flowers," also euphemistically denoted a woman's menses, the monthly evidence of her body's ability to bear children. Using this semantic junction as an entry point, this thesis investigates Giambattista Della Porta's demonization of women's menstrual flowers in his books of secrets, Shakespeare's depiction of the danger of patriarchal *sententiae* for women, and finally Isabella's Whitney's entry into authorship, a venture which captured the early modern opposition between the writer's ability to replicate and the female body's capacity to reproduce. By demonstrating the shortcomings of *florilegia*, especially *sententiae*, this thesis makes a feminist intervention for the redemptive potency of female menstruation in early modern literature.

## INTRODUCTION

Literacy education in American primary schools during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries relies on two primary forms of text: the textbook and the workbook. Beginning readers quickly learn the rules for handling each. A textbook, usually a class-set owned by the school or institution, is not to be marked up for any reason beyond adding one's name to a running list inside the front cover. Along with the student names inscribed in a pre-printed chart one will likely find ratings of the book's condition (New, Good, Fair, Poor, etc.). Elsewhere inside the cover can likely be found the school's and/or school district's names and a book identification number. Any other pencil or pen markings are strictly forbidden, and the discovery of such by a teacher results in reprimand for the student and a demotion from "Good" to "Fair" or from "Fair" to "Poor" for the textbook. Ironically, the companion workbook does not contain the same text, nor does it include blank pages for student notes, but instead provides ready-made comprehension and vocabulary lessons. Students are expected to engage and comprehend the stories and lessons in a textbook to which they may do little more than look.

To early modern understanding, this current teaching strategy would appear ludicrous. For people in the sixteenth century, reading was "considered as much the province of the hand as of the other faculties (sight, intellect, and emotion)."<sup>1</sup> In his latest volume, *Used Books*, William Sherman, to whom I am greatly indebted for his work on early modern reading practices, identifies the human hand as a person's "user

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<sup>1</sup> William Sherman *Used Books*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008) 48.

interface”; it is the “go-between” that incorporates sensations and experiences among the mind, the body, and any external stimuli.<sup>2</sup> To an early modern, nothing could be fully learned through a “hands off” approach. Heidi Brayman Hackel corroborates this with her book, *Reading Material*. Critical to early modern thoughts on comprehension was “taking note,” a phrasing that carried the double implication of both noticing and annotating; the latter could include pen-markings or fingernail indentations depending upon which was available to the reader, based on literacy or convenience.<sup>3</sup> Ultimately, the goal was for the reader to make an impression on the page, for the text would, in turn, impress itself upon the reader.

As an early modern person’s literacy improved, the objectives of his or her markings changed accordingly. Whereas beginners were merely permitted to denote marginally a difficult word or critical passage, only the most skilled and trained readers inscribed annotations that refuted, amended, or cross-referenced moments in a text. Between these extremes existed the advanced (but not expert) reader whom Erasmus instructed in his guidelines for literacy education: “[the reader should] begin culling from the authors they read materials that they may use in their own speech or writing.”<sup>4</sup> Another version of this advice offered to Phillip Sidney in personal correspondence rendered Erasmus’s lesson as “cull a few flowers” from other men’s work.<sup>5</sup> First of all, for a skillful and renowned writer like Sidney to be “culling” from others, we see that the practice begun at an intermediate level is not abandoned despite advancement. Secondly, the allusion to notable moments in a text as flowers leads us to a literary trope pervasive

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<sup>2</sup> Sherman 40.

<sup>3</sup> Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005) 62.

<sup>4</sup> Heather Jackson, *Marginalia* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2001) 48.

<sup>5</sup> Harold Ogden White, *Plagiarism and Imitation* (New York, New York: Octagon Books, 1965) 62.

in Renaissance England. Known as the apian metaphor, writers regularly allegorized their practice as that of a bee that collected the choicest pollen from among the loveliest flowers in order to produce quality honey.<sup>6</sup> In his essay, “Metaphors of the Book as Garden in the English Renaissance,” Randall Anderson traces this particular analogy as far back as Isocrates, Plutarch, and Lucian.<sup>7</sup> The comparison was so broadly recognized that authors and editors would title poetry publications after gardens, garlands, and bouquets. By depicting individual beauties synthesized into a coherent display, this metaphor served particularly well as poetry transitioned away from progressive narratives and towards sonnet sequences or collections.<sup>8</sup> Perhaps the most referenced example of this trend is George Gascoigne’s collection of verse, *A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*. Anderson’s article compiles and classifies an exhaustive list of similarly floral-titled works, and though comprised primarily of lists of such literary titles, the length of his publication alone (over ten printed pages) attests to the popularity and pervasiveness of the garden metaphor.

Deviating from allegorical integrity, the excerpted or annotated passages of one author were not termed “pollen” by another but instead called “flower.” Sherman points out that widespread recognition of this analogy made the flower “the conventional symbol for quotability.”<sup>9</sup> In terms of marginalia, flowers, or more specifically trefoils (three-leaved flowers), usually denoted rhetorical devices such as hyperbole and analogies.<sup>10</sup> The origin of the term, “flowers” or *florilegia* in its Latinate version, is

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<sup>6</sup> White 10.

<sup>7</sup> Randall Anderson, “Metaphors of the Book as Garden in the English Renaissance.” (*The Yearbook of English Studies*, Vol. 33, *Medieval and Early Modern Miscellanies and Anthologies*, 2003. 248-261) 249.

<sup>8</sup> Gerald P. Tyson and Sylvia S. Wagonheim, *Print and Culture in the Renaissance* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1986) 250.

<sup>9</sup> Sherman 15.

<sup>10</sup> Sherman 27.



generally attributed to Ovid's phrasing "*florilegae apes*," which approximately translates as "bees out of flowers."<sup>11</sup> Of the various qualities of a text the reader might annotate, *sententiae* were a special favorite among early moderns. While the term, *florilegia* could include any number of lovely, insightful, or cull-worthy moments and their marginal floral markers, "*sententiae*" refers to a unique subgroup of axioms or sayings which can readily be extracted from their original text and applied elsewhere. Also called "commonplaces," these particular flowers frequently offered advice and resurfaced in conversation. While a modern-day example could be "Don't count your chickens before the eggs hatch," one of the most commonly cited dictums, "To thine own self be true," was immortalized during this trend in Polonius' lines in *Hamlet*. To denote this breed of *florilegium*, readers often forewent the marginal flower and chose, instead, a manicule to point out a commonplace.<sup>12</sup> Largely used in editions of the Bible, the manicule, a small and pointing fist with the index finger extended, was also employed for marking any passage a reader found handy. Whether a manicule was a quick sketch or an elaborate illustration, the little hand's anthropomorphism sustained its timeless effectiveness. Some readers took their annotations so far as to transform the manicule's extended finger into a phallus or a stem sprouting leaves and blossoms.<sup>13</sup> In this second example appears an intriguingly cyclical annotation in which the reader spots a literary flower, uses his or her own hand to draw a graphic hand, which then becomes a flower itself. If we recall the early modern appreciation for the hand, this example of marginalia becomes a perfect depiction of the text-annotator relationship. When a reader notes *florilegia*, he or she

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<sup>11</sup> Gerald P. Tyson and Sylvia S. Wagonheim 250.

<sup>12</sup> Sherman 45.

<sup>13</sup> Sherman 37.

makes it a flower by the act of annotation, and the literary flower becomes the property and part of the reader.

Of course, if one wanted to keep his or her collection of culled flowers easily at hand, it was hardly feasible, let alone efficient, to carry about every tome one has read and annotated. Thus enters the commonplace book, small packets of paper purchased blank and sometimes bound in multiples. Into these personal volumes, early moderns recorded various samples of *florilegia*. By providing additional space to note *sententiae*, commonplace books functioned as expanded margins.<sup>14</sup> Using *The Manual of Epictetus* (1567) translated by James Sanford, Sherman glosses two possible understandings of commonplace book usage. Sherman suggests Sanford titled his work “Manual” to emphasize the *handiness* of it.<sup>15</sup> Ready to be drawn at a moment’s notice, the pocket-size notebook verges on weapon-like similitude. Rather like an almanac in function, this depiction supports David Parker’s description of the commonplace book in its ability to “improve a reader’s soul, multiply his accomplishments and increase his stalk of useful, cultural information.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, the lessons, sayings, and learning itself appear to arm the commonplacer. Yet, the contents of Sanford’s book are still innocuously named flowers, literary tidbits, according to Heather Jackson, transcribed “with the prospect of taking part in the construction of a new work eventually.”<sup>17</sup> In Jackson’s explanation, commonplace books appear useful exclusively to aspiring authors; however, since such volumes were kept by countless unpublished commonplacers, their value must have

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<sup>14</sup> Brayman Hackel 137.

<sup>15</sup> Sherman 47.

<sup>16</sup> David Parker, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London: An Examination of BL MSS Egerton 1995, Harley 2252, Lansdowne 762, and Oxford Balliol College MS354* (New York: University Press of America, 1998) 5.

<sup>17</sup> Jackson 184.

reached beyond authorial creativity. Moreover, the commonplace book's dyadic identity as both hand-book and flower-book represents not only the two ways in which it served its composer but also its position between two contemporaneous genres of writing, literature and natural philosophy – a relationship I address at more length in Chapter 1.

Aside from the literary association involving flowers, *sententiae*, and marginalia already introduced, the notion of flowers carried additional meaning beyond its conventional, botanical definition, particularly in regards to the female body. Deflowering, of course, referred to the removal or relinquishing of one's virginity which was frequently depicted as a woman's "flower of chastity" or "flower of virtue." Without the modifiers of chastity and virtue, the word's plural version, "flowers," referred to menstruation. Although explicit discussion of menstruation would have been scarce in literary genres like poetry, drama, and dialogue, references to menstrual flowers are found in various editions of the early modern Bible. Leviticus 15, for example, includes a passage outlining the Mosaic laws of cleanliness surrounding menstruation. Beginning in verse 19, "Yf a womans naturall course of bloude do runne, she shalbe put apart," the Great Bible of 1539 translates this section into the vernacular as follows:

And yf a man lye wt her, and hur vncleennesse come vpon hym, he shalbe vncleane .vij. dayes, and all the couche wheron he lyeth shalbe vncleane. When a womans bloude runneth longe tyme: out of the tyme of her naturall course: or yf it runne beyonde hyr naturall course, let all the dayes of ye yssue be iudged vncleane, euen as ye dayes of hyr naturall disease, And she shalbe vncleane.<sup>18</sup>

The Geneva Bible euphemistically glosses those verses with the floral metaphor common at the time of its 1560 publication:

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<sup>18</sup> *The Bible in English* Leviticus 15:24-25.

And if a man lye with her, and the *flowers of her separation* touch him, he shalbe vncleane seuen dayes, [...] Also when a womans issue of blood runneth long time besides the time of her *floures*, or when she hath an issue, longer then her *floures* all the days of her vncleanesse shee shalbe vncleane, as in the time of her *floures*.<sup>19</sup>

The King James version of 1611 demonstrates the continued use of this terminology, for despite its many semantic redactions, the King James Bible does preserve the term, “flowers,” in verse 24. In addition to illustrating the prevalent early modern use of “flowers” to denote menses, this example also reveals a shift in historical attitude towards menstruation. By moving away from the diction of “vncleanness” and “naturall disease,” these versions of the Bible take a less misogynist tone towards the monthly circumstances of womanhood. Not only was utilization of the word “flowers” perhaps more delicate or polite, but it also presented menstruation as positive and even desirable. This shift in religious perspective, however, was countered by authors of gynecological tracts and natural philosophy who depicted menses as treacherous and terrible instead of merely unclean.

But was there any correlation acknowledged or understood between the textual flowers of *florilegia* and the corporeal flowers of menstruation? I believe there was, although thus far it has gone largely unexplored by scholars. Like Sherman, I will borrow from Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski their description of *florilegia*: “a collection of sayings, maxims, and stories collected from past works... [in which the flowers of (one’s extensive) reading [were] gathered up in some orderly arrangement for the purpose of quick, secure recollection in connection with making a new composition.”<sup>20</sup> Compare this to the historical interpretation of menstrual blood, “a

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<sup>19</sup> *The Bible in English* Leviticus 15:24-25 (*emphasis mine*).

<sup>20</sup> Sherman 48. (his changes)

plethora or leftover of nutrition,” by which “Pregnant women...supposedly transformed otherwise superfluous food into nourishment for the fetus.”<sup>21</sup> If a woman is not pregnant and the accrued menstrual blood therefore not needed, the abundance is released as her “flowers,” a term Patricia Crawford posits likely originated in the idea that flowers indicate the potential to bear future fruit.<sup>22</sup> This is precisely the notion behind *florilegia*: stockpiled materials either nurture a writer’s “new composition,” thus bearing fruit, or remain flowers, either as unused supplies in one’s intellectual arsenal or as decontextualized *sententiae* that cycle in and out of innumerable conversations. Taken with the proposition of Max Black regarding meanings generated by the interrelatedness of metaphors and their subjects, we understand that the “implications evoked by the metaphor transform, filter, and organize our view of the metaphor’s subject.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, to metaphorize is not simply to compare but also to transform. Thus, whenever the early moderns metaphorically named marginalia, *sententiae*, and menstruation “flowers,” they simultaneously increased and summoned a whole network of connotations. For one to employ the word, “flowers,” was to conjure not just the traditionally denoted blossoms but to invoke simultaneously any and all of the aforementioned subjects.

Exploring this correlation more thoroughly in my first chapter, I will discuss the paradox that was early modern women’s literacy. The practice of commonplacing was deemed crucial to both comprehension and composition. Although material artifacts prove readers of both genders kept commonplace books, the social expectations of

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas Laqueur *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999) 36.

<sup>22</sup> Patricia Crawford, “Attitudes to Menstruation in Seventeenth-Century England (*Past and Present* 91 May 1981) 51.

<sup>23</sup> William Eamon, *Science and Secrets of Nature: Books of Secrets in Medieval and Early Modern Culture*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) 351.

feminine silence and modesty which precluded females from print insisted that women's volumes were for strictly personal use. However, commonplace books composed by a male, among other things, were intended to assist in his writing of new compositions; an interesting contradiction in that the literary beliefs of the day held that a man could write the best new works by basing them on the best old works – the emphasis placed on “best” rather than “new.” To illustrate the imitative quality of early modern literary composition, I take a pointed look at natural philosophy, particularly the genre of “the books of secrets.” Adherents to the writer's identity as a bee culling from flowers, these authors collected material from numerous sources including common folklore, alchemists, horticulturalists, manuals, philosophers, and gynecological tracts. Taking *Magiae Naturalis* by Giambattista Della Porta as a case study, I investigate first how Della Porta utilizes the apian metaphor to describe his research and writing processes, an analogy which presents him as a formidable creator of text and authority on “secrets.” Secondly, I discuss passages from Della Porta's text which illustrate his blatant misogyny, particularly his demonization of female menstruation. I propose that by undermining the positive procreative potential of women's menses, Della Porta seeks to reinforce the role of his own literary flowers and to avow the importance of his position and power as the author/creator.

Having considered the oppressive misogyny cultivated by a literary culture based on recycling materials and excluding women, Chapter Two purposefully investigates *sententiae*'s application to and by women. Exploring this dynamic through three Shakespearean heroines (Lavinia, Lucrece, and Ophelia), I will be able to observe both how William Shakespeare applies *sententiae* to them, and how he imagines women

manipulating *sententiae* themselves. Brayman Hackel draws upon Shakespeare's depiction of Lavinia for evidence of a well-read, scholarly-minded woman; taking this concept a step further, I look at Lavinia's use of *sententiae*, particularly as she employs it in her pre-rape appeals to Demetrius and Chiron. Notably, the *sententiae* fail her as a means of defense, and Lavinia is brutally raped and mutilated. Furthermore, I propose that the patriarchal preoccupation with commonplacing is what leads to Lavinia's death. Another rape victim who identifies with Ovid's Philomela, Lucrece serves as my next example. Although she takes her life with her own hands, Shakespeare's application of *sententiae* to her is comparably oppressive. Tarquin uses multiple commonplaces to state his case against the heroine's chastity, and Lucrece's post-assault lamentations are littered with *sententiae*, sayings that do not aid her in forestalling the assault, nor in her recovery. Interestingly, the bee metaphor resurfaces regarding Lucrece, a comparison both the heroine and her attacker acknowledge and one that reinforces the correlation between a chaste maiden and an equally vulnerable text. Associated more with flowers than with bees, Ophelia rounds out my investigation of Shakespeare's leading ladies and their *florilegia*. In her book, *Hamlet Without Hamlet*, Margreta de Grazia deduces that *sententiae* so define Ophelia's character that she quite simply becomes a commonplace book. Unlike de Grazia who concludes by reading Ophelia's flower-centered madness as the heroine's attempt to reestablish family reputation and marks of heraldry, I propose that Ophelia's fall to her watery death illustrates a purging of flowers, both the figurative *florilegia* that allowed her to devolve into madness and her own corporeal ones that exonerate her body. Like Lucrece, Ophelia must bleed and die in order to undo what the *sententiae* has done to her.

Although it may seem to create a predisposed bias against *sententiae* to focus on their function or dysfunction in instances of rape and insanity, I believe this scope works to evaluate these precepts as stringently as possible. If these are the materials upon which boys and girls were being educated, one ought to consider how such maxims serve in real-life. Moreover, if the culled flowers of great literary advice do not sustain one in moments of crisis, and if women continue to be prohibited to compose their own original works, what did *florilegia* actually teach early modern women? To answer this question in terms of a true early modern woman, I turn my third chapter away from fictional females and consider the premier female author of English secular verse.

Chapter Three takes a focused look at the *florilegia* and floral imagery in Isabella Whitney's published volume, *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573). As one of England's first women writers, and particularly as the nation's first female poet of secular verse, Isabella Whitney reveals the female relationship with writing, print, and literature. Styling her first print publication, *A Copy of a Letter* (1567), after the Ovidian complaint,<sup>24</sup> Whitney had already entered the scene of professional writing through utilization of those forms contemporaneously used and upheld by male writers. Whitney presents *A Sweet Nosgay*, on the other hand, as a translation of Hugh Plat's *Philosophicall Flowers*, a verse rendition of his prose compilation of *sententiae*. Not only does her second volume imitate the form of the popular miscellany, but the majority of the work is based upon the same maxims Plat transcribed from Seneca. Although women were known to keep herbals or some version of a commonplace book, they were rarely permitted or inclined

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<sup>24</sup> Ilona Bell, *Elizabethan Women and the Poetry of Courtship* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 100.



to delve into Latin *sententiae*.<sup>25</sup> Of course, Whitney encounters Seneca through Plat's vernacular edition, but her move is still a bold one: Whitney inserts herself into male rhetorical *florilegia*, a realm known for characterizing, classifying, and objectifying women. I argue that Whitney's gendered engagement with the flowers of *sententiae* complicates the conventional apian metaphor by exposing the misogynist fears and vanities that theretofore had precluded women from writing. Parsing out the tense association between infection and insemination in "The maner of Her Wyll," I will demonstrate that the social guidelines that promised to keep Whitney free from moral infection were the same *sententiae* that sought to prevent seeding her mind for fruitful authorship. Following Wendy Wall, I propose that her closing poem, "The maner of her Wyll," deploys the structure of the mother's legacy<sup>26</sup> to discredit the patriarchal structures of London and lays claim to a place in print for women. I add that Whitney's reappropriation of the childbirth metaphor and recuperation of patriarchal *sententiae* into female poetic discourse creates a space not hemmed in by religious writings and translation but one in which women are free to engage in masculine or feminine forms, secular topics, and most importantly original creative works.

Taken as a whole, my aim for this thesis is to illuminate women's relationships to early modern practices of literary imitation, particularly regarding the ideas of *florilegia* and *sententiae*. Discussion throughout will rely on the transitive identity of flowers: women's menstrual flowers, which are indicative of a female's ability to procreate, fundamentally trump the patriarchal establishment of *florilegia* as the only flowers able to bear compositional fruit, much to the dismay early modern misogyny.

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<sup>25</sup> Brayman Hackel 144.

<sup>26</sup> Wendy Wall, "Isabella Whitney and the Female Legacy" (*ELH*. 58.1 Spring 1991. 35-62.) 49.

## CHAPTER ONE

### RECYCLING RELICS AND MASSAGING MIGOGYNY: EARLY MODERN WOMEN'S LITERACY AND THE CHILDBIRTH METAPHOR IN BOOKS OF SECRETS

Although the modern notion of literature was not yet an established discipline in the early modern era, England saw the production of a great deal of writing, much of which falls into genre classifications of poetry, drama, religious writings, medical tracts, and natural philosophy. Particularly during the sixteenth-century, natural philosophy, sometimes also called natural science, produced a subgenre called the “books of secrets,” which blended folklore, medicinal knowledge, horticulture, alchemy, and personal testimony into all-inclusive early modern “how-to” handbooks. Based on this subgenre’s comprehensive display of cultural knowledge and its extensive popularity in its day, I take it as an exemplary sample for my investigation of two fundamental tendencies present in the larger literary world at the time: a system of textual recycling and a concerted opposition towards women. Each branch of literature developed and upheld a protocol for writing new works, the crucial principle in each area being that new texts originate in older works. These “rules of the game” necessitate insider status, for to participate in any kind of authorship one must produce material according to the genre standards – standards one can only know if admitted into and trained by the system initially. Not only did this structure lead to perpetual classical emulation and numerous

imitative works in all fields, but it also served to exclude women who were not generally trained in the field like their male counterparts. To further exacerbate the misogyny inherent in their system, male writers of natural science, as in much of literature, discussed their work with metaphors of procreation, specifically the “childbirth metaphor,” which represents the work of literature an author produces as if it were his own offspring and the efforts of his writing process the labors of childbirth. Precedent texts were considered to be the inspiration that fertilized a writer’s mind, in which he conceived the new work. By presenting the compositional process (and the creation of all art by extension) as a self-sustaining sphere of creative men, these writers effectively depicted authorship as an exclusively male creative arena that denied women.

The mundane repetition of material especially prevalent in imaginative literature (such as poetry, drama, and dialogues) was exacerbated by the monotonous demographics of its contributors. Learning of any academic (non-trade) nature was reserved for male children of the upper-class. Of course, some girls were permitted to attend school, but their education was pointedly different; whereas boys learned to read and write, girls were restricted to needlework and reading.<sup>27</sup> Since early moderns considered writing a sort of textual outspokenness, it was withheld from the female curriculum on the alleged grounds of protecting chastity and upholding virtue.<sup>28</sup> A woman who spoke and wrote freely was subsequently suspected of promiscuity and giving of herself unreservedly. Yet, even if we allow for the occasional open-minded instructor like Sir Thomas More who taught both halves of literacy to children of both genders, it still remained the case that writing instruction was not offered until two to

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<sup>27</sup> Brayman Hackel 199.

<sup>28</sup> Brayman Hackel 200. See Juan Luis Vives’s *A very Frutefull and Pleasant Booke Callyd the Instruction of a Christen Woman* (1529) for the highly influential and regularly cited source of this edict.

three years after reading.<sup>29</sup> In that span of time, innumerable students dropped out of school, especially girls who were more readily expected to forfeit their education to help raise siblings, take on domestic work, or even marry. Therefore, even in the instances in which girls could formally learn to write, the opportunity frequently went unrealized. Furthermore, the material taught to male students was of a biased and misogynist nature. Borrowing from Ralph Hanna, Monica Green observes that the pseudo-Bothian volume, *Discipline of Scholars*, warns young boys against lusty, menstruous women and teaches ““Latin grammar and antifeminism simultaneously.”<sup>30</sup> So while cultural pragmatics were working against the education of girls, the privileged Latin teaching that boys received concurrently reinforced the gender dissimilarities in education. Thus, boys remained possessors of literacy, and girls continued to be marginal participants.

William Eamon counts it an understood and underlying fact that for those able to write, “compilation, translation, and retrieval of past knowledge were considered legitimate literary pursuits” during the Renaissance.<sup>31</sup> Harold White investigates this early modern method of authorship by imitation, a process made possible by the social interpretation of all text as common property, by examining the primary tenets purported by what he judges the literary treatises of the time.<sup>32</sup> Whether in manuscript or print, once a work was captured on paper or vellum, its every quality became public domain. From the five treatises on early modern literary theory considered in his book, *Imitation and Plagiarism*, White discerns that four of the theorists give full sanction to imitation. Although a writer was obligated to transform his or her source material into a new and

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<sup>29</sup> David Parker 5.

<sup>30</sup> Monica Green, *Making Women's Medicine Masculine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008) 230.

<sup>31</sup> Eamon 97.

<sup>32</sup> White 7.

unique work, copying its structure, mimicking the tone, and borrowing plot were all acceptable forms of simulation. The works fit to be emulated, however, were far more selective. Recalling the bee metaphor discussed in the Introduction, writers were expected to choose material from the very best resources. For the early moderns, these would unequivocally have been the classical masterpieces by Aristotle, Homer, and the like. Thus, we find the emergence of the subgenre called Ovidian poetry and Renaissance personalities like Desiderius Erasmus, a sixteenth-century Dutchman who composed all of his public writing in classical Latin. The seeming abundance of reworkings of Lucretia's and Philomela's stories was not just incidental redundancy but evidence of widespread admiration for the originals. Consequently, it is not a stretch for White to assert, "Elizabethans took plots, ideas, and even stylistic ornaments from others more frequently than they invented them."<sup>33</sup> The result, then, was an English literary culture, though speckled with the occasional man or moment of brilliance, which largely sustained itself on the imitation of fallen empires.

If the truly worthwhile literary flowers existed only in Greek and Latin, then a pitifully small percentage of women could ever hope to become proper bees. Of the reading females in Renaissance England, the vast majority were reading in English or French. Only the daughters of progressive fathers could boast a classical education since women were not admitted into the university system. Brayman Hackel illustrates this point with the correspondence regarding the education of young Anne Denton; the girl is determined to gain proficiency in Hebrew, Latin, and Greek while her godfather stubbornly insists on a vernacular education.<sup>34</sup> Although the outcome of this particular

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<sup>33</sup> White vii.

<sup>34</sup> Brayman Hackel 202-203.

debate is not revealed, Brayman Hackel does conclude that the surviving libraries of early modern women appear by their lack of classical texts to support the prevalence of the godfather's view.

The great classicist, Erasmus, surprisingly was not of this mindset. Although Desiderius Erasmus was Dutch and writing in Latin, his works circulated broadly in England and informed many English views on humanist education. In his dialogue, "The Abbot and the Learned Lady," Erasmus pits a lecherous, old misogynist of an abbot against a widely-read and classically literate matron.<sup>35</sup> The abbot, who parrots the cultural indictment against Latin for women and insists on their reading only French fiction, actually invokes cultural consensus as evidence for his argument: "The public agrees with me, because it's a rare and exceptional thing for a woman to know Latin" (Erasmus 177). In translation, this raises the question whether Antronius, the monk, proposes that the scarcity of Latin-reading women means the public holds his view, or if the public opposes the strangeness of anomaly only and agrees with him for the sake of conformity. Regardless, it is this public implicit in the debate that Erasmus rebukes, characterizing them by an ill-learned abbot in whose cell "you won't find a single book" (176). The educated and eloquent character in this scene, as well as the rhetorical victor of the dialogue, is the matron. Magdalia, the matron, unlike the abbot, relishes her time reading Latin "authors so numerous, so eloquent, so learned, so wise" (177). From her unreserved heralding of these writers, we can deduce that this matron discerns the superior skill of the classical authors and positions them accordingly among her reading.

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<sup>35</sup> Citations regarding "The Well-Read Matron: The Abbot and the Learned Lady" are from Craig Thompson's translation of Erasmus' original dialogue as found in Erika Rummel's edition, *Erasmus on Women*.

If she were to cull flowers from another's garden, Magdalia would assuredly pass over French drama and romance for the Latin canon.

But this leads directly to Erasmus's caveat: absent in this exchange is the explicit question of Magdalia as a writer. As the piece closes the matron threatens a usurpation of the church by literate females, to which Antronius mock-piously exclaims, "God forbid!" (178). Although her arguments have been sound thus far and the goal of her rhetoric just, Magdalia's unchecked boldness would have shocked any early modern reader cultured enough to be perusing Erasmus, for this matron's great learning would seem to be all but undone by her quick tongue. Yet, Magdalia prophesies when she counters, "No, it will be up to *you* to forbid" (178). The check against women's classical learning would be their exclusion from authorship since they were permitted to read but not write. Since writing was considered the truly dangerous outcome of female readership, educational and cultural standards that undermined that portion of women's literacy sought to effectively remove the bite from a now barking dog.

Beyond acknowledging the preeminence of Latin and Greek literature in their studies, English readers of the mid and late sixteenth century were also encouraged to read broadly, across language and genre. In fact, the one principle on which all five theorists from White's study agree is the importance of "eclecticism" in one's reading.<sup>36</sup> The varied entries in surviving commonplace books, including excerpts from "pious writings, verse romances, lyrics, proverbial verse, remedies, and recipes," demonstrate widespread compliance with this policy.<sup>37</sup> This diversity, in addition to increasing the reader's general knowledge and conversational skills, was also intended to provide a

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<sup>36</sup> White 78.

<sup>37</sup> David Parker 162.

male reader with a significant supply of material for his own work. Ironically, it seems that more often than not, those reading broadly often commonplaced the same materials. Of the four examples David Parker analyzes in his book, *The Commonplace Book in Tudor London*, several include quotations from *Seven Sages*, *Siege of Rouen*, and *Erthe upon erthe*, and all four contain similar excerpts of proverbs and misogynist *sententiae*. Consistent content overlap among these sample texts does not bode well for Parker's premise that because a commonplace book had "no larger purpose than to be of use and entertainment to its owner," the personal selection of materials made each distinct.<sup>38</sup> Of course, all the commonplacers Parker studies are literate men living in London, which suggests that these men may not only have had similar interests but were also comparably educated. Moreover, since the very purpose of commonplacing was to extract the reusable flowers, readers may have been repeatedly attracted to the same malleable lines, those that appeared to be easily transplantable yet semantically striking. Consequently, commonplace books and the works produced by their respective commonplacers bore striking resemblance not just to the Greek and Latin texts but also to each other, ultimately yielding very little unique material and perpetuating established tropes.

Some excerpts became so standard that those *florilegia* were canonized in printed commonplace books. Such volumes containing solely Latin *sententiae*, such as *Flores Poetarum*, were popular as handy cliff-notes to legendary works and as convenient resources for students in higher academies of education such as Cambridge.<sup>39</sup> The reverence held for Greek and Latin texts protected the production and use of these volumes; however, when compilers began placing vernacular commonplaces alongside

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<sup>38</sup> David Parker 2.

<sup>39</sup> Tyson and Wagonheim 392.



the Greek and Latin, they more quickly came under criticism. On the one hand, collecting flowers from the classics was a respectable pursuit. On the other, compiling a personal commonplace book made one an author of sorts.<sup>40</sup> And while anything one recorded in his or her commonplace book could be employed in a future work, it was not necessarily worthy of canonization; a clever quip or sage advice composed by a contemporary in the vernacular was not held in the same regard as quotations of Ovid, Livy, and Homer. This friction became acutely clear in 1600 when John Bodenham and Nicholas Ling published *Bel-vedère* and *England's Parnassus* respectively. Unlike their previous publications which had contained Latin and Greek as well as English quotations, these volumes were exclusively English commonplace books. Never before had English poetry and drama been compiled and printed in volumes as if they warranted equal treatment.<sup>41</sup> Since imitation and compilation were acceptable practices, we can presume it was the literary blasphemy of treating English writers as if they were the greats of Latin and Greek that provoked Cambridge to rebuke Bodenham and his ilk as “the plagiarists of plagiarists.”<sup>42</sup>

#### A Look at the Subgenre Level: Books of Secrets

Although the modern sciences now pride themselves on meticulous experimentation and original work, research for the professors of secrets looked a great deal more like the work performed by literary authors of their time. Investigations into the fields of alchemy, cookery, or medicine all began with first reading what others, such

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<sup>40</sup> David Parker 3.

<sup>41</sup> Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass, “The First Literary *Hamlet* and the Commonplacing of Professional Plays” (*Shakespeare Quarterly*. 59.4 Winter 2008. 371-420) 384.

<sup>42</sup> Lesser and Stallybrass 392.

as Pliny, said on the topic. Remedies deemed valuable or extraordinary in nature were recorded but only occasionally tested. If a reader of these books found a recipe ineffective, this was not a strike against the book, only the reader, for the professed objective of volumes like Girolamo Ruscelli's *Secreti nuovi* (1550) and Giambattista Della Porta's *Magiae Naturalis* (1558), translated into English as *Natural Magick* (1658), was to divulge "wonders of nature" and "secrets" (Della Porta C2, C3). So whether the best-kept secret remedy of how to cure warts worked or not, the authors kept their promise just by revealing the secret. Efficacy was secondary to gnostic disclosure.

One of the best known professors of secrets, Giambattista Della Porta, describes his investigative strategies in the preface to his book, *Natural Magick*. Della Porta claims to have consulted and corresponded with a great number of "Learned men," "Artificers," "Nobles," and "Potentates," all of whom shared secrets or supported his efforts monetarily (Della Porta C). He also insists on having traveled far and wide, gathering recipes from many lands. But all of this research simply supplements the information he gleaned from his predecessors: "Wherefore such Things as hitherto lay hid in the Bosome of wondrous Nature, shall come to light, from the Store-houses of the most ingenious Men, without fraud, or deceit" (Della Porta Cii). By borrowing all he could from those who came before him like Pliny and Alessio (the presumed pseudonym of Ruscelli), Della Porta engages in the same authorship-by-imitation methodology that the poets and prose writers were employing. *Natural Magick* also claimed to include several secrets from the author's own experiences, but the vast majority of Della Porta's recipes were untested by the author. Girolamo Ruscelli, another natural philosopher of the sixteenth century, put a great deal more emphasis on experimentation. As the head of the

*Academia Segreta*, a secret society whose members researched and experimented with folk remedies, Ruscelli commissioned his cohort to test each secret's veracity.<sup>43</sup> If a remedy could withstand three trials, the Academy approved it for publication. Still, the origin of these remedies was not in experimentation, as it is today, but from preexisting documentation, so despite the flux of natural science publications, most recipes contained in each new volume were, as Eamon demonstrates, "lifted from books of secrets already in circulation or else were fabricated on models from the books of secrets."<sup>44</sup> Only this kind of information recycling could have yielded seventy-four editions of books of secrets between the years 1555 and 1599.<sup>45</sup>

Della Porta's preface also reveals the role of transcription, or bee-like culling, in his research: "For with all my Minde and Power, I have turned over the Monuments of our Ancestors, and if they writ anything that was secret and concealed, that I enrolled in my Catalogue of Rarities" (C). By reading great works and inscribing select passages in his own "catalogue," Della Porta's studies result in an extensive commonplace book of natural science. In commonplacing his materials, Della Porta would be, by literary standards, transforming each recipe and anecdote into a flower, but does this analogy hold up across genres? Indeed, it does, for although the author does not once in his preface refer to his compilation as a bouquet, garden, or gathering of flowers, he describes, "this Work made by me... [as] the first fruits of my Labours" (Della Porta C). Working back from this statement with the knowledge that blossoms precede fruit, we can safely identify each of Della Porta's secrets as flowers. Other natural philosophers played to this comparison like Fioravanti Cortese in his book, *Giardino et fioretto di*

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<sup>43</sup> Eamon 149-150.

<sup>44</sup> Eamon 242.

<sup>45</sup> Eamon 136.

*secreti*, or *Garden and bouquet of secrets*.<sup>46</sup> In place of the poetic bee analogy, William Eamon employs a gardener metaphor to *Natural Magicks*'s Chapter IX in *Of the Production of new Plants*: "How we may have fruits and flowers at all times of the year" (Della Porta 78). Among approximately a dozen recipes for growing fruit out of season, Della Porta includes the growth management of lilies, violets, the "herbe oenanthe," and four entries on roses (78-81). Eamon draws the parallel as follows: "The natural magician is like a gardener, who neither leaves things to nature nor acts contrary to nature, but imitates nature's methods and uses nature to his advantage."<sup>47</sup> Referring to the practitioner of natural magic, Eamon's metaphor, of course, extends to include the professor of secrets who tweaks and twists recipes, grafting them together into a marketable volume of early modern science. The premise of the gardener, however, relies on the autonomous activity of one who plants and therefore emphasizes the occasional expositions which originate in Della Porta's own experience. Since the vast majority of his scholarship is drawn from other authorities, the author of *Natural Magick* far more resembles a bee than a gardener.

The first generation authors of early modern books of secrets created for themselves something of a double-edged sword in their relationship with publication, for they relied on the existence of secrets to make a living off an effort of full-disclosure; this tension required them to reuse material already published by themselves or others and to market each replication as if it were something truly new. Again looking at *Natural Magick*, we find Della Porta's foundational premise justifying his efforts: "The most Majetsick Wonders of Nature are not to be concealed, that in them we may admire the

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<sup>46</sup> Eamon 239.

<sup>47</sup> Eamon 219.

Mighty Power of God, his wisdom, his Bounty, and therein Reverence and Adore him” (C2).<sup>48</sup> By this, Della Porta professes a motivation rooted in piety and apart from financial gain. Assuming this to be at least partly true, in the perceptions of his readers if not in his own mind, we discover that the early modern appreciation for natural magic was not at odds with Christian beliefs. Contrary to the heretical associations of natural science with black magic, which led to the sweeping expulsion of both, the Christian face Della Porta applies to his work (along with evidence of lucrative sales) indicates a widespread understanding of these natural miracles as more science than magic.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, Della Porta asserts a measure of altruism in his work: “Had I withheld these Things from the World, I fear I should have undergone the reproach of a wicked man; for (*Cicero* derives this from *Plato*) *we are not born for ourselves alone*” (C2). Intriguingly, Della Porta does not consider the remedies themselves charitable; he makes no mention of medicinal aid, providing cures, or improving the quality of life for his readers. In actuality, since it is the withholding of information (even allegedly mischievous secrets that could result in harm) that could warrant rebuke, his true goodness or generosity is in the fullness of his disclosure; the author’s primary objective is to pronounce the truths of his field, the magic of natural philosophy. Still invoking classical philosophy, Della Porta insists his publication of *Natural Magick* is a selfless act. Employing a literary flower to endorse his natural ones, Della Porta commonplaces Cicero, who was in turn commonplacing Plato, in the line, “we are not born for ourselves alone.” The font change which offsets this quotation exposes an awareness of the printing trends surrounding

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<sup>48</sup> Ruscelli uses similar language in his preface to *Secreti nuovi*: “In all these things are certaine secreete vertues, which be manifeste signes of goddes loue and fauoure towards man: for he created them to thintent that men should vse them, glorifie him, and geue him thanks for them.”

<sup>49</sup> See Eamon Duffy’s *Stripping of the Altars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005) for more information on this topic.

*sententiae* in the seventeenth century when *Natural Magick* made its English debut.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, when Della Porta introduces the quote as “the sentence,” he utilizes a trademark example of semantic commonplace markers, enumerated by Zachary Lesser and Peter Stallybrass.<sup>51</sup> Not only does Della Porta recycle remedies from other professors of secrets, but he also relies upon classical adages to justify his work. Thus, we see Della Porta place religious reverence, Greek *sententia*, and self-help recipes all together in one volume. This veritable commonplace book of secrets, and others like it, however, soon undermined the nuance that made their genre successful.

Regardless of whether the remedies proved successful, the authors of natural philosophy succeeded at putting a great number of them into print. Succinctly summarizing the point, Eamon states that “by flooding the marketplace with secrets, the professors of secrets made their recipes anything but unique.”<sup>52</sup> Through their print revelation, these recipes became common knowledge much the way publishing literature made a text public property. Unfortunately the professors of secrets were in continual need of more secrets to fill new volumes and turn a profit. In addition to pilfering one another’s texts and any other available resources, these authors would also reorganize their own secrets and print the rearranged compilation under a “new and improved” title. Another challenge for the natural philosopher was his relatively narrow market. Those whom I call the first generation of early modern natural philosophers, the same authors Eamon names “professors of secrets,” include a surgeon, two physicians, a professional writer, and several members of the nobility.<sup>53</sup> This well-to-do crowd wrote primarily for

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<sup>50</sup> Lesser and Stallybrass 401.

<sup>51</sup> Lesser and Stallybrass 403.

<sup>52</sup> Eamon 235.

<sup>53</sup> Eamon 136.

their peer group, an educated middle- to upper-class readership. Della Porta was especially in favor of keeping natural secrets the privileged domain of the wealthy, an end he worked to achieve by writing solely in Latin.<sup>54</sup> Until its translation into the vernacular, which occurred promptly in 1560 in Italian but not until 1658 in English, *Natural Magick*'s readership was not only restricted to those who could afford the book and the costly ingredients its secrets require but also to only those with a classical education. After fifteen Latin editions and three Italian, the contents of *Natural Magick* were bound to lose their novelty. Like the witty adages of Erasmus, Lyly, and Shakespeare, anything given so many printings and such a large audience will become commonplace.

Much to Della Porta's dismay, another wave of professors of secrets amplified the availability of such remedies, a phenomenon which forced Della Porta to portray his own imitative work as innovative, authoritative, and elitist. Gleaning the mysterious highlights from the established professors, the *professorini* (as Eamon terms them) printed affordable octavos in the vernacular.<sup>55</sup> Though one may like to imagine this endeavor to be a charitable attempt at equal early modern health care, the carnival and debauchery that accompanied these writers on their theatrical book tours spoke to the greedy motivation behind their exploitation of the professors. Perhaps to those low-class imitators or perhaps to his colleagues, Della Porta hypocritically casts a disdainful reference to authors who practice imitation (again in the preface to *Natural Magick*):

Many men have written what they never saw, nor did they know the Simples that were the Ingredients, but they set them down from other mens traditions, by an inbred and importunate desire to adde something,

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<sup>54</sup> Eamon 139.

<sup>55</sup> Eamon 235.

so Errors are propagated by succession, and at last grow infinite, that not so much as the Prints of the former remain. (C2).

Similar to the way Cambridge scorned the efforts of John Bodenham, Della Porta sought to undermine those whose work supposedly degraded or devalued his. Determined to set himself apart and safeguard against criticism, Della Porta proactively states:

Yet I am assured there will be many ignorant people, void of all serious Matters, that will Hate and Envy these Things, and will Rashly pronounce, That some of these Experiments are not only false, but impossible to be done; And whilst they strive by Arguments and vain Disputes, to overthrow the Truth, they betray there [sic] own ignorance. (C3-C4)

Foregoing the humble caution with which many early modern writers, especially poets, offered up their work to readers, *Natural Magick* is blatantly hostile towards potential critics and disallows any contestation of the magical flowers found in his book. Presenting the remedies he has culled from far and wide as both original and irrefutable, Della Porta works to secure his position in the scholarship of secrets and the marketplace. By so doing, Della Porta also limits his readership by socioeconomic status and education and defines his audience further as those whom unquestioningly concur with him. Nevertheless, secrets of natural science found their way into the hands of the larger population.

Della Porta's discriminatory tendencies effectively excluded female readers, an interesting phenomenon considering the amount of verbiage concerned with women in his work. Della Porta was not alone in this duplicity; other philosophers like the authors of *Secretis Mulierum* (Albertus Magnus) and *Secreti nuovi* wrote extensively about women's health issues. Pseudo-Albert (as Helen Rodnite LeMay terms him) dedicates significant textual space to explaining the natures of menstruation and pregnancy. Although Pseudo-Albert's work is more of a gynecological tract than a book of remedies,



he did characterize its contents as “Secrets,” a semantic choice that lends a correlative to his successors, the professors of secrets. Panning back momentarily to consider other genres of literature, we also find the early modern field of women’s medicine, also called “women’s secrets.”<sup>56</sup> In her book, *Making Women’s Medicine Masculine*, Monica Green expertly perceives that “‘secrets of generation’ become the ‘secrets of women’ because the ‘hidden’ processes of generation primarily go on inside the recesses of the female body. They are, in other words, *hidden from men*.”<sup>57</sup> Green’s work, which centers primarily on medieval texts, explores the male appropriation of women’s medicine and, in effect, of women’s procreative potential. What we find in the professors of secrets, then, is an expansion of this idea. By playing to the gynecological implications of the term, “secrets,” these authors and their texts suggest the generative and regenerative promises born by their remedies. These writers take for themselves the life-giving ability of secret matters and, also like the medieval gynecologists, pervert the natural occurrence of menses into woman’s fiendish poison. Following Green’s lead, allow me to echo her quotation of *Placides and Timeus*, which she uses to illustrate the “ease with which misogynous rhetoric could fuse onto gynaecological knowledge”:

Galen... does not speak at all of the flowers [menses], for men ought to hear nothing of them in order that they never copulate with women while they have their flowers, for, if a woman conceives during [her period], the infant will be stinking, red, tainted, and mischievous. And the flowers are a venom more evil and dangerous than the venom of a serpent.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> William Eamon includes Isabella Cortese among his list of professors of secrets. According to Eamon, Cortese places extreme emphasis on covert experimentation and complete secrecy in her book, *I Secreti*, which focuses on alchemy and perfumery, presumably due to the rampant pilfering of materials among her colleagues.

<sup>57</sup> Monica Green 218.

<sup>58</sup> Monica Green 219 (sic).

But even though early moderns in England widely held similar perceptions of menstruation, authors of women's secrets and books of secrets alike generally recognized the importance of regular menstruation for women's health. For example, Rucellai's *Secreti nuovi* includes methods for correcting or inducing menses.<sup>59</sup> Eamon posits that one such recipe for bringing on menstruation actually relied on a method for abortion.<sup>60</sup> A woman's flowers were necessary for good health and could be pragmatically achieved through the dissolution of the fruits of pregnancy. Whether the original audience of this remedy recognized its abortive quality, the existence of such an entry demonstrates the cultural concern for naturally recurrent menses, for if menstruation were a strictly evil phenomenon, there would be no reason for its induction.

Della Porta's presentation of gynecology, or women's secrets, converges on two primary themes: aesthetic issues which serve male desires and the demonic potential of women as progenitors. The ninth book in *Natural Magick, Of Beautifying Women*, culminates in gynecological matters, and although he does not address women's menses in this section, Della Porta does focus on the more aesthetic subjects of "How the Matrix over-widened in Child-birth, may be made narrower" and "A woman deflowered made a virgin again" (252). The first of these topics is allegedly critical in assuring a man's continued satisfaction with his wife. The latter, however, would seem a matter for women to keep private in an effort to dupe men unless, of course, fathers were using this strategy to falsify the virginity of their daughters and thus increase their value as a marriage commodity. Della Porta specifically notes the methods midwives employ to imitate a girl's hymeneal rupture as separate from other physicians' or laymen's remedies.

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<sup>59</sup> Eamon 252.

<sup>60</sup> Eamon 144.

This functionally depicts Della Porta as an insider of both the masculine world of natural science and the female-dominated arena of midwifery, a gap that was occasionally and always disdainfully breached by authors of gynecological tracts.

When Della Porta does speak to the role of menstruation, it is in Book Two's *Of the Generation of Animals*, which necessarily recalls the generative connection between women's secrets and books of secrets. Interestingly, the author does not discuss the physiological correlation between a woman's menstrual courses and human fertility; there is no mention of breeding animals at certain times in a menstrual cycle or even much development of the suspicion that conception during menstruation results in abnormal births. Yet in two different recipes menstuousness bears generative properties. One of these formulae asserts, "Serpents are gendred of womens hair," which is more explicitly "the hairs of a menstuous woman" in the recipe's title (Della Porta 29). Serpents, of course, carry the doubly wicked stigma of both the Greek mythological association with Medusa and the biblical depiction of Satan as the infiltrating snake in the Garden of Eden. Similarly, Della Porta explains that "Red Toads are generated of dirt, and of womens flowers" (28). The notion that toads can originate from dirt is easily attributable to their muddy habitat; however, Della Porta's description of their menstrual roots explains that women can actually conceive and birth a variety of amphibians and "vermin." Since Della Porta obligated his audience to agree with every word, the "proper readers" of *Natural Magick* necessarily thought women capable of bearing nonhuman life. More than just sharing folkloric renderings of women as the unnatural mothers of toads, this passage demonizes the otherwise generative potential of women's flowers. In strong contrast to Patricia Crawford's assertion that regular menstruation was a socially

approved indicator of good health, Della Porta paints a dangerously subversive picture of women's menses. From the premise that women's menstrual courses enable them to produce inhuman offspring, it is not a large leap to vilify the female herself.

The auditory similarity of menstuous and monstrous contributed to the close association and easy transition from imagery of the former to the latter.<sup>61</sup> The menstuous maternity depicted in *Natural Magick* points directly towards the monstrous mother archetype, a Renaissance device which Marilyn Francus discusses in her essay, "The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope." Although her attention focuses on these two Restoration authors, Francus includes the early modern mother figure of Error from Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, which provides temporal context to Della Porta's depiction of monstrous women in the sixteenth century. The trajectory more than the specific examples of Francus's argument is what is valuable here; she posits, "the authority that women derive from their reproductive capacity... [inspires] the patriarchal fear of that female power, and the responding strategy of demonization, which looks to justify female containment, as a social and moral imperative."<sup>62</sup> In other words, the female ability to bear life intimidated early modern men who then overcompensated for their insecurity and lashed out against women as a whole. Following Francus, I propose that Della Porta's vilification of women in the "Red Toad" section propagated the continued restraints on women's rights and simultaneously exposed his own apprehension and sense of inferiority. By demonizing a woman's menstrual flows, Della Porta and others like him demoralize women's unique role in

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<sup>61</sup> Richard Dutton and Jean Elizabeth Howard, *A Companion to Shakespeare's Works: The Comedies* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2003) 249.

<sup>62</sup> Marilyn Francus, "The Monstrous Mother: Reproductive Anxiety in Swift and Pope" (*ELH*. 61.4 Winter 1994 Johns Hopkins University. 829-851) 829.

procreation. Insisting that women are capable of birthing monstrous progeny effectively stigmatized women and anything they may produce, whether it be life, material goods, or texts.

By debasing the female connection to reproduction, male writers like Della Porta carve out space for themselves as creators. Equating their authorial efforts with the work of childbirth, male writers appropriate the woman's role in procreation to illustrate metaphorically their own relationship with literary creativity. Though a modernist herself, Susan Stanford Friedman writes her article, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor," without grounding her argument in a particular era and broadly contends that "Women's oppression begins with the control of the body, the fruits of labor."<sup>63</sup> Friedman intentionally puns the double meanings of literary work and childbearing implicated by the phrase "fruits of labor," a fitting expression in her article on the gendered use of childbirth metaphors for authorship. This, of course, was also the diction that Della Porta employed to describe his work. Seemingly coming full circle to this point which I introduced earlier regarding the connection of flowers and fruit with the commonplace book, I would like to follow it just a bit further. If the volume *Natural Magick* is the fruit of Della Porta's "labors," its production or bringing forth correlates to the toils and pains of childbirth. Also used by the translator of *Secreti* to describe Ruscelli's work, the wording, "the fruites of his labours," necessarily presents the male author as a mother in the (idealized and misogynist) woman-less literary world. Stemming from physical and literary senses of inadequacy, Friedman insists, the male deployment of the childbirth/authorship metaphor demonstrates fear and a resultant effort at

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<sup>63</sup> Susan Stanford Friedman, "Creativity and the Childbirth Metaphor: Gender Difference in Literary Discourse" (*Feminist Studies* 13.1 Spring 1987. 49-82) 76.

overcompensation.<sup>64</sup> In this way, envy of female procreative potential led men to impersonate metaphorically the maternity they feared and to imagine themselves the bearers of literary and natural philosophy life.

The concept of men as mothers, however, immediately provokes the question of how a male writer can possess both a “womblike mind and [a] phallic pen.”<sup>65</sup> Friedman states that because both metaphors exist on the backdrop of a patriarchal publishing community, women are safely constrained, and the “brotherhood of artists” is permitted to wield both womb and pen[is].<sup>66</sup> But for the childbirth analogy to work, the male mother must acquire seed from outside himself. I propose that the recycling of commonplaces and natural secrets served as the homosocial means of inseminating the author. Early modern male writers gathered fertile flowers from the publications of other men, with which they bred ideas in their pseudo-uterus minds. When the writer’s pen gave form to these works, the mother/author birthed the product onto paper or vellum. This new work, the fruits of his labors, was also a bouquet of *florilegia* by which other men’s minds could be fertilized. Through their contorted rhetoric and slant metaphor, I propose, men were able to claim both the fertilizing and fertilized sides of creativity, a monopoly that kept women perpetually out and allowed very little new to enter.

Let me return now to John Bodenham and consider again what great crime he committed, which was enough to incur the wrath of the literary community. Surely, he kept examples of excellent male-authored literature at the center of his work. Yet, his offense against the patriarchal system was two-fold. First, by elevating the vernacular, he lowered the privileged barrier of Latin that excluded so many women. Putting English on

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<sup>64</sup> Friedman 63.

<sup>65</sup> Friedman 56.

<sup>66</sup> Friedman 56.

par with Latin was not just an academic insult to the classics, but also opened the door for all English-readers to become students of literature. Now, flowers derived from the previously oppressed mother-tongue began to become legitimate source material for new work. The university could no longer claim exclusive rights to literary study and production. Without the requirement of classical flowers as an author's source material, the female population that had been safely reading English and French were a dangerous step closer to becoming writers. Secondly, Bodenham's failure to create anew from great flowers of English commonplaces revealed the falsity of men's creative self-sufficiency. Since approximately half of *Bel-vedère's* quotations are taken from *The Rape of Lucrece*,<sup>67</sup> Bodenham did not simply capture Shakespeare's talent but inadvertently showcased the poet's heavy reliance on Livy's *Roman History*, the text from which Lucrece's story originates and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which contains Philomela who serves as a critical point of comparison. Despite trying to represent quality work being written by his contemporaries, Bodenham was commonplacing material Shakespeare had already reused. Faced with exposure of their own chronic literary imitation and replication, Cambridge condemned Bodenham as one of the "plagiarists of plagiarists" because his *Garden of Muses* revealed the utter absurdity and inefficacy of a system which subsisted on recycling and their continued expectation of producing new genius out of inbred materials.

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<sup>67</sup> Lesser and Stallybrass 384.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE FAILURES OF *SENTENTIAE*:

#### WHY SHAKESPEARE'S HEROINES ARE A BLOODY MESS

In her book, *Reading Material in Early Modern England*, Heidi Brayman Hackel articulates that the real concern surrounding women's literacy in early modern England was not that women's reading was dangerous but that the writing which would inherently follow would be "disruptive."<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, there existed a distinct separation between learning to read (which came first) and writing instruction (which may or may not follow once reading competence was demonstrated). Two trends emerged: first, a great number of female readers achieved this first level of beginner's literacy but did not learn to write; secondly, those women who were fully literate, able to read and to write both, often contained their writing endeavors to "translations, compilations, refutations, and editions."<sup>69</sup> In other words, women were primarily copying or annotating texts someone else authored. According to Erasmus, the combined practices of reading, writing, and speaking epitomized the essence of the commonplace book, the same three activities about which Hackel claims, "Nowhere are the fluidity and distinctions between these three activities [reading, writing, and speaking] as powerful and fraught as in the negotiations over early modern women's reading and authorship."<sup>70</sup> Thus, it is not too tenuous to posit that early modern women's literacy and the practice of commonplacing,

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<sup>68</sup> Brayman Hackel 54.

<sup>69</sup> Brayman Hackel 55.

<sup>70</sup> Brayman Hackel 53.



as they both relied on a combination of reading, writing, and speaking, were indivisible and codependent. What is more, *florilegia*, especially the *sententiae* one frequently commonplace, were the currency of these three activities, and, as such, also played a crucial role in women's readership. Beginning readers were instructed on how to read and denote these maxims, and more advanced readers recorded them in their commonplace books and/or annotated them in the original. However, the mark of a truly literate and educated reader was not the ability to recall these *sententiae* but to contextualize them or provide cross-references, which relied on extensive prior reading.<sup>71</sup> Exposure to and competence in commonplaces provided an elementary social literacy as well as a literary one. The shortcomings of this basic education, however, become quickly apparent in conflict and crisis.

In the very works in which it appears he endorses such *sententiae*, Shakespeare actually undermines the commonplacing culture by illustrating the inefficacy of such overused maxims. Moreover, by using his heroines to achieve this, Shakespeare demonstrates the acute failure of *sententiae* in the hands of those it disserves. Because women comprised a second-class readership and academic commonplacing was considered a male domain, simple *sententiae* were not sufficient tools in female hands. Perhaps the most learned of Shakespeare's leading ladies, Lavinia must use her extensive reading background to convey what commonplaces cannot. Ophelia, who commonplaces extensively, proves ill-equipped to tackle situations when her sententious flowers fail. She is forced to employ her own symbolic, menstrual flowers, a strictly personal and female domain, to repossess her body and control of her life. Having capitulated to an indecent proposal endorsed by ruefully ambiguous commonplaces, Lucrece incorporates

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<sup>71</sup> Brayman Hackel 22.

*sententiae* into her own post-rape rhetoric and further illustrates the injustices of patriarchal *florilegia*. A disturbingly duplicitous narrator also haunts the poem itself and complicates Lucrece's already tenuous relationship with *sententiae*. Like Ophelia, she relies on her body and menstrual *florilegia* as irrefutable evidence for her personal story, but unlike the other two heroines, Lucrece's body goes to print, simultaneously signifying the vulnerability of text and capturing the precarious position of women so long as society restrains their literacy and prevents equality.

### Lavinia

Brayman Hackel cites, as a fictional example of a learned female reader, Lavinia from William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*. Evidence of Lavinia's literacy is most apparent and poignant in Act IV Scene I in which she uses her nephew's copy of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to convey that the amputation of her own tongue and hands, like Philomela's, coincided with her rape. Brayman Hackel notes that the particular terms Shakespeare gives Titus and Marcus to describe the heroine in this scene, including "turne," "toss," and "quote," demonstrate intellectual dexterity more than Lavinia's physical handicap.<sup>72</sup> Although her uncle has already referred to Philomela's absent tongue when he first discovers Lavinia in Act II Scene III, Lavinia's new gestures towards Ovid force Marcus's empty allusion into context. Lavinia cross-references the text or evidence of her body with a classical work familiar to her. The identities of her attackers still undisclosed, Lavinia "*takes the staff in her mouth, and guides it with her stumps, and writes*" their names (IV.i. stage direction). Without hands or tongue, Lavinia still succeeds in revealing the truth by virtue of her great learning.

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<sup>72</sup> Brayman Hackel 22.

But where are all the invaluable *florilegia* she must have collected during such extensive reading? As a matter of fact, Lavinia's store of *sententiae* is present and tested in Act II Scene II just before she is brutally raped. Pleading with Tamora and then her sons, Lavinia conjures classical, and supposedly valuable, maxims:

'Tis true, the raven doth not hatch a lark.  
Yet have I heard – O, could I find it now –  
The lion, moved with pity, did endure  
To have his princely paws pared all away.  
Some say that ravens foster forlorn children  
The whilst their own birds famish in their nests. (II.ii.149-154).

In these six lines, Lavinia invokes three proverbs, the last of which regarding ravens likely originates from the Biblical tale of Elijah.<sup>73</sup> The other two sayings are a bit tougher to pin down. Lavinia's quotation, "the raven doth not hatch a lark," has roots in *The Civile Conversation of M. Steeven Guazzo* (1574) by George Pettie, or *Philotimus* (1583) by Brian Melbancke, and some variation of "The lion moved with pity..." was available in *De Parabolis sive Similibus* (1514) by Desiderius Erasmus, *Euphues and His England* (1580) by John Lyly, and Greene's *Mamillia* (1583).<sup>74</sup> And though Tamora insists she does not understand Lavinia's sententious pleas, Jonathan Bate especially notes that Tamora's sons "have an unusually high frequency of proverbial language: they talk in clichés"<sup>75</sup> Taking a few lines from Act I Scene I in which Demetrius and Chiron employ the common early modern adage, "All women may be won," we can rather safely assume they are familiar with *sententiae*. Whether their knowledge stems from scholarly study of the original texts or amateur commonplace books, Demetrius and Chiron are familiar in some capacity with one or all of this axiom's source texts, including

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<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Bate Ed., *Titus Andronicus* (New York, New York: Routledge, 1995) 177.

<sup>74</sup> Morris P. Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1950) 178, 383.

<sup>75</sup> Bate 163.

Melbancke's *Philotimus* (1583), Greene's *Perimedes the Black-Smith* (1588), and John Lyly's *Euphues, The Anatomy of Wyt* (1579) and his *Sapho and Phao* (1584). Although their victim invokes the same set of authors that they do, Demetrius and Chiron take no heed of Lavinia's sententious quotes. The heartless wretches recognize that *florilegia* can be extracted and employed at will, which, though sometimes useful, also makes them easy to discount. *Sententiae* are, after all, common and serve poorly as the basis of an argument. Moreover, dictums like "all women may be won" have taught them to generalize about the female sex as a whole, undermining any sense of a woman's worth or individuality and reducing each one to something knowable and attainable.

Presumably after the dual rapes of Lavinia are committed, Demetrius and Chiron work to follow Tamora's edict that they "Let not this wasp outlive, us both to sting" (II.ii.132). To this end, the two rapists remove her tongue and hands, assuming that these losses as nearly silence her as death would. For the audience, the removal of her tongue promptly invokes comparison to the Classical story of Philomela, but that rape victim is able to weave the truth into cloth with her nimble fingers. By severing Lavinia's hands, Demetrius and Chiron reveal their own familiarity with Ovid's tale and use their Classical education to further oppress the vulnerable Lavinia. In truth, if all Lavinia could rely upon was a bit of *florilegia*, the truth may very well have been lost. Yet, if we return to Brayman Hackel and her discussion of Erasmus's trifecta of reading, writing, and speaking, it becomes quite clear that Demetrius and Chiron only account for Lavinia's skill with two of the three: speech and writing. Lavinia's ability to read uncovers the truth of her rape. Furthermore, it is from this moment of reading that Lavinia is able to "play the scribe" (II.iv.4), as her assaulters never imagined, and reveal

their names. By guiding the staff with her injured arms and placing it in her mouth, Lavinia effectively writes and speaks the truth. Although her learnedness in no way saves Lavinia from being raped, her abilities to speak, read, and write are together hazardous to those who have wronged her. As Shakespeare demonstrates, these skills are exceedingly more helpful to women than any amount of *sententiae*.

For Shakespeare, the classics prove to be a source not just for inspirational material and allusions but also for entire frameworks, which he grafts together in his own work. Ovid's story of Philomela provides metaliterary structure for Lavinia's narrative; she, her attackers, and her family all recognize the similarity – a point on which Titus capitalizes in his measures for revenge. In his introduction to the play, Bate notes that although Lavinia's loss of her hands defeats her adoption of Philomela's revelatory weaving strategy, her "new method of disclosure, writing on the ground" is adapted from the character of Io, another raped maiden from Ovid.<sup>76</sup> Even though Lavinia never transforms into a nightingale or a heifer, it seems she very nearly adopts *Metamorphoses* as a handbook on how to cope with rape. Unfortunately, she does not have the luxury of divine intervention, only authorial innovation: Shakespeare invokes not a Roman god but a Roman historian instead.

Since the transformative metamorphic resolutions of Ovid's mythology are not particularly applicable in a realist tragedy, Shakespeare turns to Livy's *The History of Rome* for a model.<sup>77</sup> From Livy's chronicle, Shakespeare draws his idea for Lavinia's end, articulating his plan in the question Titus poses to Saturnine: "Was it well done of rash Virginius/ To slay his daughter with his own right hand,/ Because she was enforced,

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<sup>76</sup> Bate 92.

<sup>77</sup> Bate 92.

stained and deflowered?” (V.iii.36-38). Virginius, according to Livy, slew his daughter, Virginia, to end her shame and his sorrow brought on by her rape. Saturnine cites these two answers as justification for the Roman’s action to Titus, who then replies, “A reason mighty, strong, and effectual;/ A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant/ For me, most wretched, to perform the like” (V.iii.42-45). Titus’s slavish allegiance to codes has already brought him enmity from Tamora, reluctant asylum from Saturnine, and familial mutiny from his sons, and here the weight of precedent forces him to take his daughter’s life. Among the possible interpretations Bate provides for “warrant,” he includes “document or writ licensing execution.”<sup>78</sup> Thus, Titus takes from Livy’s *History of Rome* his approach to life. By extracting Virginius’s historical actions from classical literature and applying them to a similar situation, Titus turns post-rape mercy killing into a commonplace. Similarly, Shakespeare reiterates Roman tales and depicts raped maidens as a common stereotype, one that is more upheld than defeated by the sententious precepts he culls from either Latin or English.

### Lucrece

Significantly more commonplaced and canonized than *Titus Andronicus*, *The Rape of Lucrece* is an important next step in my investigation of Shakespeare’s use of *sententiae*. Drawing the foundational plot from Livy’s *History of Rome* and critical allusions from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, the narrative poem is itself an illustration of Shakespeare’s reliance on *florilegia* and lends support to Gordon Williams’ blunt assertion that “when Shakespeare gets serious about rape, he turns for his pattern...to the

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<sup>78</sup> Bate 267.

classical authors.”<sup>79</sup> Within the poem there also exists a cacophony of established *sententiae*, primarily characterizing the voices of Tarquin, Lucrece, and the narrator. Negotiating their varied deployments of *florilegia*, I argue that through the use of *sententiae*, these three characters reduce Lucrece herself to a commonplace.

Documented and analyzed by an abundance of scholars including Amy Greenstadt and Gordon Williams, Shakespeare’s explicit association of Lucrece with textuality lends support and specificity to Williams’s claim that “Shakespeare uses images of rape to open up serious questions about the role of art in an age of print.”<sup>80</sup> Upon first awaking, Lucrece “o’er the white sheet peers her whiter chin” (472.) Not only does this remind us of the heroine’s renowned fairness and compare it to her bed linens, but it also allows for the polyvalence of “sheet,” which implies paper. Articulating the substance of his nighttime campaign, Tarquin anticipates Lucrece’s objection but dismisses them: “‘I see what crosses my attempt will bring;/ I know what thorns the growing rose defends;/ I think the honey guarded with a sting” (491-493). Although Dent marks only the metaphor of the rose as proverbial,<sup>81</sup> the likening of Lavinia’s chastity to honey, as well as similar comparisons in the biblical Song of Solomon, set a precedent for this line regarding Lucrece as a commonplace.<sup>82</sup> Thus, what would appear in a more ethical context to be lovely insights become sententious reductions of Lucrece to a forbidden sexual core; her sting and thorns are inconsequential, and only the pleasures Tarquin expects to derive from her are relevant. Inserting these commonplaces

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<sup>79</sup> Gordon Williams, *Shakespeare, Sex, and the Print Revolution* (Atlantic Highlands, New Jersey: The Athlone Press Ltd., 1996) 59.

<sup>80</sup> Williams 59.

<sup>81</sup> Colin Burrow, *William Shakespeare: The Complete Sonnets and Poems* (New York, New York: Oxford University Press, 2002) 270.

<sup>82</sup> See *Titus Andronicus* II.ii.123

into Tarquin's perverse speech illustrates the "wrongfooting of moral aphorisms"<sup>83</sup> of which Sasha Roberts and Colin Burrow accuse *Lucrece*'s author. In order to persuade Lucrece's "compliance," Tarquin states her options of rape (forced consensual) or rape (forced nonconsensual) and death – either results in a violent penetration of her pages/labia.<sup>84</sup> For Tarquin, sexual intercourse is the only possible conclusion, and he works to make it appear equally inevitable and less repugnant to Lucrece by insisting it would be:

A little harm done to a great good end,  
For lawful policy remains enacted.  
The pois'nous simple sometime is compacted  
In a pure compound; being so applied  
His venom in effect is purified. (528-532)

Speaking of his proposition in an abstract generality, Tarquin undermines the import of Lucrece's sexual integrity and dares to name his fleeting satisfaction a "good end." Further distancing his rhetoric from the situation at hand, Tarquin relates his own lust to venom, which if applied to a "pure compound," presumably Lucrece, would allegedly be "purified," or in this case purged. Denoted as *sententiae* by the printer of Q,<sup>85</sup> these lines fail to execute their implicit moral duty and functionally temper the toxicity of Tarquin's assault.

In rebuttal, Lucrece attempts to argue by "common troth" (571) or commonplaces, and invokes proverbial allusions to the mighty sea; however, both the narrator's and Tarquin's use of similarly aquatic *sententiae* overturn her argument. In the dialogic lull

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<sup>83</sup> Sasha Roberts, *Reading Shakespeare's Poems in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) 130.

<sup>84</sup> Catharine A. MacKinnon, "Rape: On Coercion and Consent" (*Writing on the Body: Female Embodiment and Feminist Theory*. Ed. Conboy, Medina and Stanbury. New York: Columbia University Press, 1997. 42-58) 43.

<sup>85</sup> Burrow 272.



between Tarquin's proposal and Lucrece's reply, the narrator interjects his omniscient commentary, which he concludes with a recognized *sententia*: "Tears harden lust, though marble wear with raining" (560). Regardless of whether Lucrece "has a sense of herself as fictional character" as Williams posits,<sup>86</sup> her statements appear to demonstrate an awareness of the other voices in the poem, including those lines not expressly directed to her. As if in response to the narrator's commonplace, Lucrece pleads:

My sighs like whirlwinds labour hence to heave thee:  
 If ever man were moved with woman's moans,  
 Be movèd with my tears, my sighs, my groans.

'All which together like a troubled ocean  
 Beat at thy rocky and wreck-threatening heart,  
 To soften it with their continual motion;  
 For stones dissolved to water do convert.  
 O if no harder than a stone thou art,  
 Melt at my tears and be compassionate:  
 Soft pity enters at an iron gate. (586-595)

Ignoring the foreboding clause, which professes the stubbornness of lust, the heroine takes up the theme of water's power to wear away at the most inflexible rocks in the hope that "even the hardest hearts proverbially melt," as Burrow puts it.<sup>87</sup> Tarquin, however, usurps Lucrece's commonplace for his devilish purpose and spins the analogy so that he, not his victim, is the sea: "'My uncontròlled tide/ Turns not, but swells the higher by this let" (645-646). Tarquin's tide of dogged lust metaphorically supplants Lucrece's beseeching tempest and negates her sententious point.

If this were the last of the maritime commonplaces, perhaps we could heap all the blame onto Tarquin's perverse shoulders, but the duplicity of the narrator is equally unsettling and demonstrates the broader failure of *sententiae* in the poem. Seeking

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<sup>86</sup> Williams 64.

<sup>87</sup> Burrow 276.

metafictionally to absolve Lucrece of any accountability in her own rape, the narrator, as Roberts observes, “resorts to the gender-essentialist notion that women, being weaker than men, are not to be held responsible for all their actions.”<sup>88</sup> The passage to which Roberts refers is as follows:

For men have marble, women waxen minds,  
And therefore are they formed as marble will:  
The weak oppressed, th’ impression of strange kinds  
Is formed in them by force, by fraud or skill.  
Then call them not the authors of their ill,  
No more than wax shall be accounted evil  
Wherein is stamped the semblance of a devil. (1240-1246)

The narrator’s reference to marble minds recalls his earlier comment that “Tears harden lust, though marble wear with raining.” If this previous commonplace and his proverbial evaluation of sexed brains were equally reliable, then Lucrece’s tears should have eroded the marble character of Tarquin’s mind. This sort of semantic inconsistency creates the fraudulent ambiguity surrounding and among *sententiae*, and it is this “wriggle room” that fails to support the heroines. But why do these commonplaces seem to let down only Shakespeare’s female characters and not the men? The answer is found in the same narrative passage above: “call them not the authors of their ill” (1244). Women did not likely coin these early modern maxims, nor did most women pen and publish them; the *sententiae* on which Lucrece (and Lavinia) relies are the product of a patriarchal print culture. So not only is Lucrece innocent in the event of her rape, but she is also the victim of the societal misogyny that literally and literarily composed the rhetoric which exploited her.

After the incident of the rape, Lucrece characterizes herself as a honey-less bee, a comparison which when taken with her continual association with text evokes discussion

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<sup>88</sup> Roberts 111.

of her place in the apian metaphor. The writer's method of culling from flowers to produce choice honey was the premise for the ancient and early modern interpretations of the apian metaphor; an author should excerpt select *florilegia* as ingredients for his or her own work. In this analogy, the flowers and gardens are textual, and only the writer-bee is human. In *The Rape of Lucrece*, however, the heroine's constant comparison to a manuscript complicates this distinction. Lucrece's identification by the poet or narrator as a text, one which Tarquin "pens" (681) and "blot[s]" (192), aligns her with the cullable gardens of literary work instead of the writerly bee. In his proverbial anticipation of Lucrece's protestation, Tarquin openly conflates the bee with the flower: "I know what thorns the growing rose defends;/ I think the honey guarded with a sting" (492-493). By equating the honey with the rose and the sting with the thorn, Tarquin reduces Lucrece to subhuman status, and her sexual will becomes something commonplace and attainable. The narrator's arrant correlation of Lucrece to ordinary texts reinforces Tarquin's mistaken sense of entitlement to her pleasures, and thus he takes what he wants from her as if plucking *florilegia* from a literary garden. Lucrece, on the other hand, works to maintain her place in the apian metaphor and argues that though she is robbed of her sexual will, she is still human:

My honey lost, and I, a drone-like bee,  
 Have no perfection of my summer left,  
 But robbed and ransacked by injurious theft.  
     In thy weak hive a wand'ring wasp hath crept,  
     And sucked the honey which thy chaste bee kept. (836-840)

Although Lucrece now feels worthlessly "drone-like," she preserves her position as a bee and thus her place as a human. Though the vulnerability of her body is text-like, her uncorrupted will attests to her agency. Whereas Tarquin diminishes the complexity of

her existence and sees her as body/text only, Lucrece insists that she is more; as the bee-like writer dictates the form and substance of his or her bouquet, this heroine intends to be the author of her will.

Lucrece initially resolves to divulge orally the truth of the assault, but she is in dire need of evidence to corroborate her story in the event that a “he said”/“she said” debate ensues. In the safe space of soliloquy, Lucrece verbalizes her outrage and misery with an assortment of cynical and distrustful precepts, including the following examples: “But no perfection is so absolute/ That some impurity doth not pollute” (853-854) and “Unwholesome weeds take root with precious flowers” (870). Now knowing how poorly *sententiae* will serve in her defense, Lucrece is faced with the problem of effectively articulating her case. Greenstadt’s essay picks up a key issue here regarding the socio-cultural trap awaiting the heroine. In Renaissance court trials (and in the society overall), anyone displaying downcast eyes or a reluctance to speak was suspected of dishonesty, but any woman demonstrating confidence or boldness was considered to be of questionable morals.<sup>89</sup> Either disposition thwarts Lucrece’s decision to make her assault known publicly, and her disenfranchisement from male sententious discourse increasingly exacerbates her inability to dispute any such opposition. Instead, Lucrece determines to absolve herself physically rather than civically:

In vain I rail at Opportunity,  
At Time, at Tarquin, and uncheerful Night;  
In vain I cavail with mine infamy;  
In vain I spurn at my confirmed despite:  
This helpless smoke of words doeth me no right.  
The remedy indeed to do me good  
Is to let forth my foul defilèd blood. (1023-1029)

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<sup>89</sup> Brayman Hackel 63.

Although the phrasing here can reasonably read as foreshadowing Lucrece's suicide (and I agree it does), it also lends itself to other examples of letting blood. Doctors, or leeches, frequently relied on blood-letting to purge allegedly foul blood from an ill person's body. Of course, women were understood to release excess blood all on their own each month through menstruation. If Lucrece is able to effect this sort of bleeding, she will not only purge her body of the blood defiled by Tarquin, but she will also demonstrate that she is not pregnant – a consequence of sex that Renaissance society held could only occur if both parties were consenting. Thus, if Lucrece is able to menstruate, she will at once cleanse her body and reaffirm her chastity.

From her own useless tongue, Lucrece's mind wanders to Philomela's amputated one and begins to see the dilemma facing her more clearly. Since Renaissance writers agreed that identification with a fictional text enabled a reader to express his or her own situation better, it would have been no surprise to Shakespeare's audience that Lucrece's reflection on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* improved her own clarity.<sup>90</sup> Realizing that no oral testimony will amend what happened or her reputation, Lucrece concludes, "My stained blood to Tarquin I'll bequeath,/ Which by him tainted shall for him be spent,/ And as his due writ in my testament" (1181-1183). Inspired by the successful revelation of her rape by Philomela's own artistic composition, Lucrece resolves to amend her situation similarly through the authorship of her "testament." Thus, Lucrece will not be spilling her blood out of shame or despair but in authorial self-assertion. So far, Lucrece's measures have been futile attempts unable to counteract the damage done to her body/mishandled manuscript. In order to guide future readers of her story, Lucrece will

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<sup>90</sup> Amy Greenstadt, "'Read It in Me': The Author's Will in *Lucrece*" (*Shakespeare Quarterly*, 57.1 Spring 2006) 59.

need to annotate her text with clarifying marginalia like many anxious Renaissance authors did.<sup>91</sup> Furthermore, the ink Lucrece will use, according to Olga Valbuena's article, "The dyer's hand," will likely contain the bitter purgative gall, which will synchronously mark her text and expel the pollutants from her body.<sup>92</sup>

At last, Lucrece abandons the spoken word and spells out the truth with her body, exonerating her chaste sexual will and demonstrating the agency of her authorial will. Once Brutus removes the knife that "she sheathed in her harmless breast" (1723), Lucrece's lifeless body is described as follows:

Her blood in poor revenge held it in chase,  
  
And, bubbling from her breast, it doth divide  
In two slow rivers, that the crimson blood  
Circles her body in on every side,  
Who, like a late-sacked island, vastly stood  
Bare and unpeopled in this fearful flood.  
Some of her blood still pure and red remained,  
And some looked black, and that false Tarquin stained.

About the mourning congealèd face  
Of that black blood a wat'ry rigol goes,  
Which seems to weep upon the tainted place,  
And ever since, as pitying Lucrece' woes,  
Corrupted blood some water token shows,  
And blood untainted still doth red abide,  
Blushing at that which is so putrefied. (1736-1750)

In the terms of this passage, Lucrece's body issues both blood blackened by Tarquin's "black lust" (654), and blood that "pure and red remained." For this red blood to be interpreted as pure, it necessarily conveys Lucrece's constant and untarnished chastity, but also the true and undefiled essence of Lucrece herself. Additionally, the image of a

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<sup>91</sup> Brayman Hackel 69.

<sup>92</sup> Olga Valbuena, "'The dyer's hand': The Reproduction of Coercion and Blot in Shakespeare's Sonnets" (*Shakespeare's Sonnets: Critical Essays*. Ed. James Schiffer. New York: Garland Publishing, 2000. 325-345) 338-339.

woman issuing red blood strongly suggests an association with menstruation. Perhaps this correlation is tenuous for some modern readers, but to Shakespeare's audience it would not appear far-fetched, for as Thomas Laqueur explains, in the matter of maintaining corporeal equilibrium through blood-letting, hemorrhoids, nosebleeds, and menses were all interchangeable.<sup>93</sup> In more delicate early modern terms, it can thus be said that Lucrece's red blood illustrates the heroine getting her flowers, the menstrual courses that remove impurities from the female body.

As the variously used term for *sententiae* and marginalia, the word "flowers" returns us to Lucrece's body as text. Along this mode, the "crimson blood [that]/ Circles her body in on every side" exemplifies Lucrece's attempt at authorial assertion; it is her annotations that fill the margins of her manuscript. Additionally, since these markings are intended to declare the story of her chastity they illustrate the author's hope to protect the text of her body from erroneous or alternate readings.<sup>94</sup> Lucrece inscribes her bodily text with annotations in red blood/ink that she hopes will narrow and guide subsequent interpretations of her story. But what of the black blood, the blood "that false Tarquin stained"? This blackened blood, escorted out of her body by the purer red blood, contains the impurity of Tarquin's sexual intrusion, a desecration which was facilitated by fickle, sententious *florilegia*. Therefore, I contend that the blood which Tarquin blackened with his lustful blot is also representative of the patriarchal *sententiae* Lucrece was forced to accept. When Tarquin's proverb-laden threats were realized, the misogyny inherent in his maxims was forced upon Lucrece; in the menstuous purgation

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<sup>93</sup> Thomas Laqueur 37.

<sup>94</sup> Brayman Hackel 127.

accompanying her death, the heroine cleanses herself of these sinister *sententiae* and hopes to find total self-possession.

Despite Lucrece's best efforts to abdicate her place in the exploitative system of *sententiae* and patriarchy, the male characters present in the closing scene co-opt her narrative and relegate her back to the status of mere text. Having taken the vow to kill Lucrece's rapist and having seen her black and red testament, Brutus is fully cognizant of Lucrece's will, yet he determines a different fate for her body/text. Finally finding some courage in this tense scene, Brutus steps up among the men present and "Began to clothe his wit in state and pride,/ Burying in Lucrece' wound his folly's show" (1809-1810). Brutus is only able to assert himself as a man having first inserted himself into Lucrece. The figurative violation of Lucrece's lifeless body advances to outright assault as Brutus proceeds to disregard her wishes:

When they had sworn to this advised doom,  
They did conclude to bear dead Lucrece thence,  
To show her bleeding body through Rome,  
And so to publish Tarquin's foul offence;  
Which being done, with speedy diligence,  
The Romans plausibly did give consent  
To Tarquin's everlasting banishment. (1849-1855)

Choosing to punish Tarquin by a different penalty than Lucrece specified (banishment instead of death), Brutus redefines the terms of his vow to Lucrece and determines to discard her last line of *sententia*, "For sparing justice feeds iniquity" (1687). Patriarchal adages refuse to uphold even Lucrece's dying wish. As an inanimate corpse, the textuality of Lucrece's body is parted from her authorial will, making her evermore vulnerable to anyone who would misuse her or discount her wishes. Consequently, Lucrece's inscribed body becomes a prop for Brutus and his cohort to advance their



political aims, a textual prop to which Brutus effectively adds marginalia of his own. By bearing Lucrece's corpse around Rome, her body would be surrounded on all sides by the hands of those carrying her. In Sherman's terms, then, Lucrece's text is circumscribed with manicules, or little hands, the most common symbol in early modern printed texts used to signify *florilegia*.<sup>95</sup> So while Brutus and the others ignore Lucrece's explicit directions, they also draw elaborate attention to her, the example of her virtue evidenced by her menstrual flowers, and reduce her to a sample of culled *florilegia*. The pomp and circumstance of their procession competes with the story proper of Lucrece's body/text, reflecting the "battle for authority," which Evelyn Tribble proposes exists inherently between any text and its marginal gloss.<sup>96</sup> Despite her best efforts to reclaim her own body and compose the story of her rape, the chronic reduction of her character to textuality and the treachery of *sententiae* undermine Lucrece to the very end.

### Ophelia

Despite disparities in education, Ophelia is strikingly similar to Lavinia and Lucrece in that commonplace quotations also do her no favor in the context of her play. As evidenced by her psychotic break in Act IV, none of the *sententiae* or advice bestowed upon Ophelia by her family has prepared her for the appearance of a haggard and half-naked Hamlet in her closet (reported in II.i.) or the fluctuating affections he renews with provocative solicitousness (Act III), let alone the death of her father at his hand. True to her word, Ophelia has locked in "the table of [her] memory" (to borrow from Hamlet's analogy between the mind and a book I.v.99), all Laertes's advice and

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<sup>95</sup> Sherman 29.

<sup>96</sup> Evelyn B. Tribble *Margins and Marginality: The Printed Page in Early Modern England* (Charlottesville: The University Press of Virginia, 1993) 51.

obeyed her father's useless *sententiae* in vain. These men's commonplaces, almost all of which proclaim the virtues of chastity, do not adequately equip Ophelia for her unique circumstances, and whether or not Hamlet's mental illness is true or feigned, Ophelia's is indisputably real. Bereft of her cerebral faculties, Ophelia's psyche reduces her to the only thing she really knows: *florilegia*. In concurrence with Margreta de Grazia's findings in her book, *'Hamlet' Without Hamlet*, I maintain that Ophelia, having lost her father and seemingly her lover, devolves into a ranting commonplace book.<sup>97</sup> Now, however, instead of offering up recognizable quotes, Ophelia sings sporadically, recounts memories without context, and distributes flowers. The First and Second Quarto versions of this scene vary on matters of both content and order; however, because the passage in which I am particularly interested differs very little, I will quote from Q1 for one line of advantage:

I a bin gathering of floures  
 Here, here is rew for you,  
 You may call it hearb a grace a Sundayes,  
 Heere's some for me too: you must weare your rew  
 With a difference, there's a dazie.  
 Here Loue, there's rosemary for you  
 For remembrance: I pray Loue remember,  
 And there's a pansey for thoughts  
 [...]  
 There is fennel for you, I would a giu'n you  
 Some violets, but they all withered, when  
 My father died... (H2)

While there exists a long stage tradition of providing Ophelia's character with tangible flowers to distribute, I propose that the scene functions just as well without them. The crux of the matter is the demonstration of Ophelia's madness, and, for my purposes here, that her only possessions are useless *florilegia*. Whether theater productions use physical

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<sup>97</sup> Margreta de Grazia, *Hamlet Without Hamlet* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007) 112.

flowers to convey the point or not, the *sententiae* remain substanceless. Laertes's exclamatory interruption, "A document in madness, thoughts and remembrance" (H2), primarily reinforces Ophelia's madness and does not necessarily comment an interpretation using tangible blossoms. Furthermore, by calling his sister a "document" Laertes characterizes Ophelia both as a physical lesson or demonstration of madness and as a text herself, likely a commonplace book in which thoughts and remembrances have been inscribed. The particular pay-off for using Q1 to which I alluded is the line, "I a bin gathering of floures," which does not appear anywhere in Q2. Ophelia's explicit classification of all the subsequently named plants as flowers, lends significant weight to their correlation with *florilegia*. Now, not only can we read each flower as symbolically depicting an emotion or character trait as David Bevington does, but we can also see them more abstractly as *sententiae*. By handing out illusory flowers to the other characters, Ophelia demonstrates the only method she knows for expressing herself or for caring for others. Although this practice is a staple for both Laertes and Polonius, Ophelia's reenactment of their commonplacing illustrates the ridiculousness and futility of relying on *sententiae* for anything more than idle chatter or flaunting one's stock of sage axioms.

In addition to De Grazia's deduction that "her flowers carry the same lesson as the precepts, ballad, and tales: beware male treachery,"<sup>98</sup> I contend that Ophelia's assortment of flowers also prefigure her death. The only flower Ophelia claims for herself in IV.v. is rue, which as Bevington argues, was considered an "emblem of repentance."<sup>99</sup> At the same moment she appropriates the rue for herself, Ophelia also insists that "You"

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<sup>98</sup> De Grazia 117.

<sup>99</sup> David Bevington, *The Necessary Shakespeare* (New York: Addison-Wesley Educational Publishers, 2002) 570.

(whoever that may be, Claudius, Gertrude, Laertes, or all three) wear it “with difference,” suggesting that the “You” has his or her own cause for repentance. Although Ophelia’s identification with the commonplace book should probably negate the idea of context regarding her antics in this scene, we have the ability and benefit, as readers, to read Ophelia, not just in this moment of insanity, but in the greater scope of the play. Thus, we use Ophelia’s verses, dictums, and babbling in both versions of this scene to deduce her cause for repentance: the loss of her virginity, presumably to Hamlet, made apparent in the lines, “Let in the maide, that out a maide/ Neuer departed more” and “before you tumbled me/ You promised me to wed” (H2 right). Instead of “I a bin gathering of floures,” the Q2 edition on which Bevington relies begins, “There’s fennel for you, and columbines” (IV.v.184). Although the fennel is given away, the assignment of the columbines, emblematic of unchastity, is unclear.<sup>100</sup> So, in shameful penance for engaging in premarital sex with Hamlet, Ophelia wears rue to connote spiritual repentance and possibly columbines as if a floral scarlet letter. Neither flower, however, exhibits any power to heal her mind and body. In reality, rue was known to the early moderns as an antidote against hemlock, the traditional poison of drama. According to Della Porta, however, taken in too large a dose, rue could become a poison itself. Therefore, Ophelia’s overzealous self-prescription of rue is, in fact, lethal; her immense sense of repentance brings about her death and possible suicide.

In the Queen’s account of Ophelia’s demise, we discover that our heroine clearly acquires real, substantial flowers, which give form to all the *florilegia* she has collected and thus allows her to manipulate the very *sententiae*, which have thus far manipulated her. In the Q2, Gertrude recounts the scene as follows:

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<sup>100</sup> Bevington 570.

There is a willow grows askant the brook,  
 That shows his hoar leaves in the glassy stream;  
 Therewith fantastic garlands did she make  
 Of crowflowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
 That liberal shepherds give a grosser name,  
 But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
 There on the pendent boughs her crownet weeds  
 Clamb-ring to hang, and envious sliver broke,  
 When down her weedy trophies and herself  
 Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide,  
 And mermaidlike awhile they bore her up,  
 Which time she chanted snatches of old lauds,  
 As one incapable of her own distress,  
 Or like a creature native and endued  
 Unto that element. But long it could not be  
 Till that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
 Pulled the poor wretch from her melodious lay  
 To muddy death. (IV.vii.167-184)

In both versions, the Queen reports seeing Ophelia in a tree with a garland of flowers – a description which presupposes Ophelia's possession of literal, visible flowers. In Q2, the Queen specifies several types of flowers including the dead men's fingers, or lady slipper orchids.<sup>101</sup> By naming this vulgar, phallic blossom, Shakespeare conjures a sexual image which recalls Ophelia's promiscuity and repentance. Departing sharply from de Grazia's analytical vein, I do not interpret Ophelia's actions in this scene as futilely working to restore her family's honor, but instead as attempting to reclaim her own sense of self-possession. Ophelia subverts the orchid's phallic power by incorporating its blossoms in a yonic "crownet." In lieu of naming the different types of flora Ophelia now possesses, Q1 generalizes much the way it did in IV.v.: "the yong Ofelia/ Hauing made a garland of sundry sortes of floures,/ Sitting vpon a willow by a brooke" (H4). The phrasing of "sundry sortes of floures" closely echoes the then recent title of George Gascoigne's *A Hundred Sundry Flowers Bound Up in One Small Poesy* as well as the numerous other

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<sup>101</sup> Bevington 574.

volumes of *sententiae* and poetry named with floral metaphors. Holding in her hands literal flowers that are phallic in form and oppressive in their representation of misogynist *florilegia*, Ophelia weaves and bends these decorative buds into a “crownet.” Its round, yonic form reinforced, by a clear association with flowers, presents the heroine’s garland to us as a uterus.

If, in this scene, Ophelia has her flowers literally, then transitively she also has them physically. In Act II Scene ii, Polonius boasts about his own parenting skills to Claudius and Gertrude:

And then I prescripts gave her,  
That she should lock herself from his resort,  
Admit no messengers, receive no tokens.  
Which done, she took the fruits of my advice” (II.ii.142-145).

Familiar with the jargon of *sententiae*, one recognizes that Polonius’s “advice,” his actual “prescripts,” are not considered fruits, but flowers (*florilegia*). The fruits, then, are the results or effects of Ophelia’s accepting her father’s dictums. Polonius mistakenly infers that the consequence of Ophelia’s standoffishness is Hamlet’s apparent insanity; we know, however, that his madness is either a device or the product of his revenge-focused angst. The real outcome of Polonius’s precepts is Ophelia’s madness. Thus, when we see her through Gertrude’s eyes at the end of Act IV, Ophelia is the crazed fruit perched precariously in a willow tree, “the fruitless emblem of sterility.”<sup>102</sup> Upon landing in the brook, Ophelia’s skirts temporarily billow outwards, “Her clothes spread wide” creating a full and moist womb-like space. Accompanying Ophelia in her descent are her “weedy trophies” (IV.vii.175), which similarly land in the water. By tumbling from the tree with her collected flora, Ophelia transforms from fruit back to flowers and so ending her

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<sup>102</sup> De Grazia 119.

madness, the fruition of useless *florilegia*, with death. Reminiscent of *Secreti*'s recipe for inducing menstrual courses through a forced miscarriage, Ophelia's fall aborts the psychosis with which her mind was pregnant and reverses the damage done by Polonius's *florilegia* with her own natural flowers. Abdicating their vain, sententious discourse, Ophelia, by choice or by chance, drowns with her flowers and, in this way, cleanses her body by removing the impurities of all the patriarchal *sententiae* her brother and father forced upon her. It is thus that Ophelia arrives at her "muddy" (Q2) and "sweete" (Q1) death. These disparate adjectives depict Ophelia's fatality as both menstuous ("muddy," indicating fluid and filth) and pure ("sweete," suggesting a righteous victory and welcome escape). By gaining her menstrual period, Ophelia triumphantly purges the commonplace book of her body and her mind with her own womanly flowers and escapes the insanity of misogynist *sententiae*.

Yet, other characters seek to force flowers and their phallocentric associations on Ophelia even after her death. Laertes, the well-intentioned brother who hypocritically warned against the fires of passion, declares, "Lay her i' th' earth,/ And from her fair and unpolluted flesh/ May violets spring!" (V.i.238-240). Though Ophelia's body is truly "unpolluted," it is the result, as I have shown, of her purifying death, not the untarnished chastity presumed by the "virgin crants" (V.i.232) presented at her funeral. Moreover, violets were the only flowers Ophelia could not dispense in IV.v because they had "withered all when [her] father died," but somehow she is supposed to produce these emblems of faithfulness posthumously. Nevermind that she was true to Hamlet and loyal to her father to the point of her own demise, Laertes expects Ophelia to be faithful to her father's precepts from the grave – an impossibility since she has at last rid herself of the

*florilegia* that drove her there. Even Gertrude frustrates Ophelia's posthumous freedom by "scattering flowers" (V.i.243) on her coffin. Infuriatingly complicit in the corrupt patriarchy which steers *Hamlet's* plot, Gertrude symbolically reassigns the very *sententiae* that propelled Ophelia's downfall.

Unreservedly encouraged to learn and study the classics, Lavinia's excellent literacy (reading, writing, commonplacing, and cross-referencing) ultimately reap the benefits of agency and full disclosure of the truth. Although she alone is not characterized as a text, the male reliance on literary precedent in *Titus Andronicus* demonstrates she might as well be; Shakespeare and Titus calculate her worth as little more than an archetype, and so kill her because she resembles a familiar character. Her ability to manipulate literature, with or without hands, sets her apart as a complete and competent person, yet she alone is not permitted to die a cleansing menstruous death at her own hands; patriarchy and its obsession with *florilegia* murder her. Similarly, the heroine of *Lucrece*, which later became a hugely commonplaced work, also proves a painful victim of the patriarchal literary world. Lucrece's beauty was considered extraordinary, but constant comparison to material texts works against her, diminishing her human individuality to common literary property. Rape, like reading, functions as a trope of vulnerability – one upheld by the imitative early modern process of compositional simulation, and the respected adages of the day only further serve this arrogant misogyny, which Tarquin embodies. These *sententiae* also disappoint Ophelia and reveal to her the uselessness of commonplace books apart from reading the original



texts. Had she had more reading experience, perhaps Ophelia could have experienced the self-recognition Lucrece finally finds in Philomela's story and saved her sanity. Her education, however, was undercut by the strict instruction and constant interference of the men in her life. Shakespeare's presentation of Lavinia, Lucrece, and Ophelia acutely demonstrates that the early modern perception of women, armed with *sententiae* but not society's respect, were vulnerable, subhuman, and irrefutably text-like.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### A SWEET NOSGAY AND THE FRUITS OF LABOR: ISABELLA WHITNEY'S NEGOTIATION OF *FLORILEGIA* AND FEMALE AUTHORSHIP

Though it may seem incongruous to a modern audience, women's education and women's writing in sixteenth-century England were at striking odds with each other. Silence, chastity, and obedience comprised the threefold standard for womanly virtues, and any other qualities a woman possessed were considered secondary. Consequently, the education a girl received was designed to reinforce these principles; any additional objectives of her education were intended to equip her with domestic skills or to mold her into a pleasing wife. Extensive reading of histories and Scripture were understood to improve a woman's conversational skills in private and her silence in public. Hilda Smith, who provides a fuller picture of early modern women's education than I can here, cites the conventional dictums of Juan Luis Vives (1493-1540),<sup>103</sup> on women's academic learning, for although women could never be too accomplished in other areas (like needlework), women's literacy education was only encouraged "to a point."<sup>104</sup> In particular, the societal hope was for girls to gain a basic understanding of reading and even writing to the extent that it would aid them in household or wifely duties. It was not desirable, however, for women to achieve critical understanding in any way that

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<sup>103</sup> Vives authored *A Very Frutefull and Pleasant Booke Callyd the Instruction of a Christen Woman*, a strongly chauvinistic pedagogical tract, which became one of the most instrumental texts in the early modern education of women.

<sup>104</sup> Hilda Smith, "Humanist education and the Renaissance concept of woman" (*Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700* Ed. Helen Wilcox. 9-29) 16.

provoked them to ask questions. Far from imagining that inquisitiveness and critical thinking could make women better wives and mothers, the prevalent view of the times encouraged stringent supervision of female education to reinforce blind obedience.

As an extension of virtuous silence, women were discouraged from public writing, which, in turn, excluded them from the controversial and lucrative conversation surrounding their situation. Despite the cautions and taboos encompassing women's writing, females fought their way into print. Citing outspokenness and disobedience, the societal perception concurrently developed that a "woman's entry into public domain through publication was associated with female transgression and promiscuity."<sup>105</sup> Of course, surrounding a variety of texts are tales professing that a manuscript was circulated or printed apart from the author's wishes, which excuses the virtue of any number of female authors. Other texts, like legacies, were written for a private audience and published by relatives after the female author's death. Women like Aemelia Lanyer, Charlotte Kohler, and Elizabeth Cary who wrote with the intention of being read, on the other hand, foresaw the probable objections to their texts and made concerted efforts to cloak their work in a socially acceptable guise.<sup>106</sup> Most writing women employed various means to safeguard themselves against the backlash of appearing in print; the simplest of these was to write under a different name or simply under no name at all. Some women, such as Mary Sidney and Isabella Whitney, worked in genres like translation which were more accepting of their work.<sup>107</sup> Translating was among the most common and revered

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<sup>105</sup> Bronwen Price, "Women's Poetry 1550-1700: 'Not Unfit to be Read' (*A Companion to Early Modern Women's Writing* Ed. Anita Pacheco. Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2002) 283.

<sup>106</sup> Boyd Berry, "'We are not all alyke nor of complexion one': Truism and Isabella Whitney's Multiple Readers" *Renaissance Papers 2000*. Eds. T H Howard-Hill and Philip Rollinson. Rochester: Boydell & Brewer, 2001) 23.

<sup>107</sup> Margaret Ferguson, "Renaissance concepts of the 'woman writer'" (*Women and Literature in Britain 1500-1700* Ed. Helen Wilcox. 143-168) 149.

professional writing practices and figured prominently in respected male-authored work of the time as well. Early modern translation, however, was more than the semantic and syntactic transcription we think of today; translators frequently redacted the source material in the translation process and produced what we now would consider new “versions” of a story. This sort of accepted leeway allowed female translators an opportunity to implant their own personal, political, or literary views in a translation, which they could humbly profess was truly the work of another. In this way, the female translator appeared to (and probably did) revere the original writer but was also engaging subversively in print culture. Thus, to Ilona Bell’s lamentation that early modern “English women write very little original poetry,”<sup>108</sup> I answer with Danielle Clark’s assertion that women writers were “engaged in the imitation of texts and traditions much as male writers” were.<sup>109</sup> Literary imitation, which included emulating style, form, or content of another writer, was a significant part of early modern authorship, and to do it well was the mark of a good writer.<sup>110</sup> So when women wrote imitatively, they were inserting themselves into the literary tradition at the same moment they disobeyed gender roles.<sup>111</sup> By being adept imitative writers, women authors were actually being quite original.

One of the premier examples of these bold women writers is Isabella Whitney (fl. 1567–1573), a middle-class woman who worked as a companion to an aristocratic lady and generally considered by scholars to be the first English female secular poet.<sup>112</sup> Just

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<sup>108</sup> Bell 100.

<sup>109</sup> Danielle Clarke, *Isabella Whitney, Mary Sidney, and Aemilia Lanyer: Renaissance Women Poets* (New York: Penguin Putnam, 2000) x.

<sup>110</sup> White 4.

<sup>111</sup> Ferguson 149.

<sup>112</sup> Laurie Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” (*SEL* 45.1 Winter 2005. 1-22) 2.

as skillfully as her male contemporaries, Whitney imitated and innovated upon the works of her male predecessors, role models who objectified women. This paradox led Wendy Wall to her investigation of how a woman could “become an author if she was the Other against which ‘authors’ differentiated themselves.”<sup>113</sup> How does Whitney escape her position as trope to become the writer? Wall provides an answer involving the female legacy and “Wyll,” which I will consider later, but Whitney’s first step is simply to enter directly into the masculine forms and rhetoric circulating in English literature at the time. I propose that through the framing of *A Sweet Nosgay* in her dedicatory preface and opening poem, “The Auctor to the Reader,” Whitney sexualizes and problematizes the apian metaphor, which taken with her closing piece, “The maner of Her Wyll,” overturns male use of the childbirth metaphor and reclaims the role of mother for writing women.

Before Whitney can upset the misogynist status quo of male authorship, she must first enter into literary practice under the guise of established and acceptable precedents. Like the women translators more generally mentioned above, Whitney constructed *A Sweet Nosgay* (1573) as a translation of Hugh Plat’s *Philosophicall Flouers* (1572) not from Latin to English but from prose to verse. Because Plat’s text is an interpretive collection of Senecan *sententiae*, Whitney is engaging in the layered recycling of *florilegia*, the proper domain of literary males<sup>114</sup> and the basis of the apian metaphor. So although working with *sententiae* justifies her work as a writer, translating allows Whitney a little protection from the taboos of the writing woman. And although her title, *A Sweet Nosay*, comes most directly from Plat’s floral-titled piece, their original source, Seneca, made the same analogy between flowers and literary excerpts: “We should

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<sup>113</sup> Wall 36.

<sup>114</sup> Ellinghausen, “Literary Property” 2.

follow, men say, the example of the bees, who flit about and cull the flowers that are suitable for producing [...] We also, I say, ought to copy these bees, and sift whatever we have gathered from a varied course of reading.”<sup>115</sup> The interruption of “men say” surely reminds us of the patriarchal contexts for Seneca’s and Plat’s work as well as the audacity of Whitney’s self-insertion into their domain. Yet Whitney’s decision to make “this simple Nosegay” (preface 1-2) from Seneca’s suitable flowers demonstrates her good taste and an appreciation for ancient writers. Showing her familiarity with Greek legends and their associated *sententiae* in the midst of introducing her nosegay, Whitney makes allusions to Antipater, an ancient Greek governor, and his quotation of Demeades, a fourth century B.C. personality from Plutarch’s *Life of Phocion*.<sup>116</sup> Despite the gender disparity in early modern literacy and the fact that Whitney is the first female poet of her kind, Whitney is clearly comfortable with and adept at the current modes of commonplacing, culling flowers, and Classical *imitatio*.

Despite her obvious skill and comfort with the literature, Whitney presents her work to the reader with conventional humility. An introduction or preface timidly offering up an allegedly “unworthy” piece of writing to the hopefully “merciful” reader frequently opened early modern works. Women writers, like Whitney, especially played to this tradition in an attempt to mitigate the immodesty of appearing in print.<sup>117</sup> Employing the modesty *topos* from the start, Whitney begins the preface to *A Sweet Nosgay* representing her work as an insufficient gift for a gracious friend:

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<sup>115</sup> Anderson 249. Anderson borrows these lines from Richard M. Grummere’s translation of the Latin: “Apes, ut aiunt, debemus imitari, quae vagantur et flores ad mel faciendum idoneos carpunt, deinde quicquid attulere, disponunt ac per favos digerunt [...] Nos quoque has apes debemus imitari et quaecumque ex diversa lectione congegimus, separare.”

<sup>116</sup> Clarke 284.

<sup>117</sup> Ana Kothe, “Modest Incursions: The Production of Writers and Their Readers in the Early Modern Pregaces of Isabella Whitney and Margaret Tyler.” (*English Language Notes* 37.1 Sept. 1999. 15-3) 16.

But waying with my selfe, that although the Flowers  
bound in the same were good: yet so little of my labour was  
in them that they were not (as I wysht they should) to bee  
esteemed as recompence for the least of a great number of  
benefits which I have from time to time (even from our  
Childhood hetherto) received of you. (4-9)

By belittling her poetic gesture and emphasizing Mainwaring's generosity, both reinforced by parenthetical interjections, Whitney plays the part of the bashfully humble writer. More than just alleging the inadequacy of her text, Whitney downplays her own role in its composition: "so little of my labour was in them" (5-6). Since Whitney is defying the social expectations for a publicly silent woman, it is all the more critical for her to depict her literary bouquet as someone else's work and words; she is not culturally permitted to produce secular verse of her own. Interestingly then, Whitney's next step in prefatory humility is to compare herself to a "pore man" (18):

not havyng of mine owne to discharg that I go  
about (like to that poore Fellow which wente into an others  
ground for his water) did step into an others garden for these  
Flowers. (25-28)

Her use of this tale is an intriguing one, for while it invokes an image of one with no possession whatsoever to give, it also reminds her readers that Whitney is not, in fact, a man. For Whitney to call herself a "poor woman" instead would prove slightly redundant since women by law could not own property. More importantly though the analogy continues contentiously to imply that Whitney is man-like.

However impoverished Whitney may represent herself, she begins more confidently to take ownership of her authorial role and insists that her previously downplayed "little" labour now warrants respect:

considering they [the flowers]  
be of my owne gathering and makeing up: respect my labour

and regard my good wil, and not onely receave them, but  
vouchesave to be a protector of them from the spightful. (29-32)

Based on the pattern set by innumerable prefaces, the modesty *topos*, a customary device of the Renaissance in which the masculine author begins a work with self-deprecation in order to cajole the reader into kind reception, must eventually give way to some degree of self-assertion, at least enough for the writer to charge his audience with responsible, gentle reading. The work's inherent vulnerability, of course, underlies the early modern association between a text and a maiden. In this case, the female identity of the author augments the correlation of the work with femininity. By pleading with her readers to handle her poetry mercifully, Whitney begs the same consideration for herself. Thus, she deploys the customary modesty *topos*, and fits it to her unique female purpose; this serves as proof of what Danielle Clarke describes in her editorial preface to Whitney's work as "the negotiation and resituating of male [literary] models."<sup>118</sup> Playing to the expectations of her audience, Whitney invites them to remember their role as good and respectful readers free of spite, all the while subtly trapping them into favorably receiving her as a writing woman.

For all her humility about appearing in print, Whitney's explication of how she came to her material in the poem, "The Auctor to the Reader," reveals her confident discernment of traditionally canonized texts. Confined indoors by illness and unemployment, Whitney explains, she determined to spend her time studying:

To reade such Bookes, whereby I thought my selfe to edifye.  
Sometime the Scriptures I perusd, but wantyng a Devine:  
For to resolve mee in such doubts, as past this head of mine  
To understand: I layd them by, and Histories gan read:  
Wherein I found that follyes earst, in people did excede.  
The which I see doth not decrease, in this our present time

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<sup>118</sup> Clarke xi.



More pittie it is we folow them, in every wicked crime.  
I straight wart wery of those Bookes, and many other mor[e]  
As VIRGILL, OVID, MANTUAN, which many wonders [bor]e. (3-12)

Burdened with unexpected leisure Whitney elects to read productively, not for relaxation or diversion but “to edifye” herself. Appropriate to her position as a woman, she begins with “the Scriptures” for her education; however, her abundance of qualms and questions frustrates the endeavor. Although she excuses her doubts as her own mental inadequacy, “past this head of mine” (5), an early modern woman who questions the Bible was considered seditious and in jeopardy of having her own virtue questioned. Skirting past this issue, the speaker turns to histories, in which she uncovers abhorrent “follyes” repeated generation after generation. Whitney expressly laments, “More pittie it is we folow them, in every wicked crime” (10). Though the wicked crimes in question are easily presumed to be the foolish acts of historical ancestors, it is equally plausible that the “follyes” Whitney rebukes are literary in nature. The authors Whitney proceeds to name, Virgil, Ovid, and Mantuan, were heavily relied upon as source material; thus, early modern authors continued to repeat and recreate the traits and even mistakes of these legendary predecessors. Moreover, all three wrote in Latin, and our poet has grown “wery” of them. Not only is Whitney able to read Latin (or at least translations of the great Classics), but she also handles them with critique and shrewdness instead of the unwavering, idolatrous reverence many of her male peers exhibit. Having explored religious and historical writings, Whitney leaves both behind since they require unqualified subservience to the texts, without any space for contradiction or creativity – a bold stance for her to take when entering the self-seeking world of the good ole boys’ literary club, which still upheld the principle of womanly obedience.

Anticipating opposition to her secular choice of real-life London for creative inspiration, Whitney develops a fictional “friend” who redirects her to the “safe and appropriate” material of *sententiae*. Religion and history were the two genres deemed most suitable for women’s study, but this female poet seeks her material elsewhere: “And to refresh my mased [mu]se, and cheare my brused brayne:/ And for to trye if that my limmes had got their strength agayne/ I walked out” (13-15). First, these lines recall that the speaker’s illness prompted her extended studies; now that she is recovering, she can move about. Although Whitney does not explicitly emphasize the point, her time spent reading the Bible and Classical works was synonymous with her confinement, for now that she is well, she emerges and literally leaves them behind. Secondly, Whitney upsets the notion that such texts nourish the mind. Instead of divine or Ovidian inspiration, she expects “to refresh” her mind’s muse with the world beyond her front door – an unavoidably vernacular source and not at all acceptable literary practice, especially for a woman. As Whitney narrates, however, this is quickly thwarted: “... sodenly a friend of mine mee met:/ And sayd, yf you regard your health: out of this Lane you get./ And shift you to some better aire, for feare to be infect” (15-17). Although the friend appears to harbor concern for her well-being, he passes rather harsh judgment on the poet’s choice to walk outside. In fact, he shares his unsolicited advice, “out of this Lane you get” (16), without any sort of salutation or inquiry, the former being expectedly polite and the latter exceedingly appropriate in light of her recent poor health. Instead, this man orders her to go elsewhere. The polyvalence of the term, “Lane,” allows for the dual meanings of both street and path. Within Whitney’s narrative, it is highly likely that her stroll occurs in or along a roadway, a very public location and not altogether unrelated to the notion of

street-walking. Rereading the word as “path” or “way,” however, broadens the friend’s injunction against her location, “out of this Lane you get,” to include the nature of her endeavor as well. His directive is not just for Whitney to walk elsewhere but for her to change the manner of her walk, not to continue in this vein. Whether his motive is genuine care or anxious misogyny, this so-called friend essentially reminds Whitney of her place, and that place, according to him, is apparently not public London.

For a writer to seek inspiration in the work of a renowned predecessor was standard practice among the early moderns, and describing this process with gardening metaphors was equally common.<sup>119</sup> But does the apian metaphor serve a female author comparably and how does the entrance of a woman into this scene alter the analogy? With the notion of writing women as transgressive already looming large, Whitney imbues the garden metaphor with all the tantalizing provocation she can reasonably place on paper. As Ana Kothe notes, sexual implications pepper the passage depicting Whitney culling flowers from Plat’s garden.<sup>120</sup> Fortune, the narrator reports, “was my guyde/...and made me pleasures feele./ For she to *Plat* his Plot mee brought, where fragrant Flowers abound” (26,28-29). Without investigating the possible repercussions of the poet’s diction, Kothe draws passing attention to Whitney’s particularly provocative use of the word, “pleasures.” If made by a male author, indeed, the correlation between Hugh Plat and pleasure would seem far less scandalous, gesturing conventionally towards the joys of reading. From the pen of the first professional female poet, however, the association inherently suggests eroticism. Her confession that “Amongst those Beds” (31) she “resposde one howre” (32) reinforces the sexual imagery of the scene. Plat

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<sup>119</sup> Anderson 249.

<sup>120</sup> Kothe 27.

himself is excused from any licentiousness, but his flowers do, in fact, penetrate the lady narrator. Referring on three occasions to smelling the “slip<sup>121</sup> [she] tooke to smell unto” (variously “smell,” “smelling,” and “smelt”) Whitney emphasizes her inhalation of the blossom’s fragrance; she takes in its odor and essence with each breath. Willingly then, Whitney accepts the penetration and permeation of her senses and, by way of the erotic “pleasures,” her body by Plat’s *Philosophicall Flowers*.

Although Whitney’s gender incites a more suggestive reading of inspirational fertilization, we must recall (as I discussed in Chapter 1) that the botanical metaphor of literary flowers and authorial bees has always implied a coital moment of insemination. Commonplacing or “culling” from an established work was intended to fertilize the writer’s womb-like mind, producing literary ideas which would eventually be birthed as the textual fruits of his labor. Whitney, on the contrary, makes no direct allusion to her poetic translation as the fruits of her own personal labors. Despite Whitney’s three prior references to “my labor” in the preface, only for her reader does she expect the *sententiae* capable of “yielding fruite hereafter” (39-40). For Whitney’s own purposes, the flowers that she collects from Plat only ever yield a bouquet: “now I have a Nosegay got” (47). According to the compositional rules of the day, Whitney should have been able to produce a new creation from Plat’s *florilegia*; the bulk of *A Sweet Nosgay*, a poetic and personalized interpretation of his *sententiae*, fails to meet this expectation. Saving the final poem, “The maner of Her Wyll,” the contents of Whitney’s volume “translate” Plat’s prose *sententiae* into verse. In accordance with its establishment as a form of composition, translation was expected to result in an original creation, a new fruit.

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<sup>121</sup> *Oxford English Dictionary*, “slip.” The second definition attributed to the nominal form of slip fits Whitney’s usage: “a twig, sprig, or small shoot taken from a plant, tree, etc., for the purpose of grafting or planting.”

Granted, I find that *A Sweet Nosgay* is more than simple imitation, yet, in her own account of the process, Whitney both begins and ends with flowers. So despite breathing in all that the flowers have to offer, Whitney's mind is not as fertilized as the metaphor suggests it should be, something of a paradox considering her gender's obvious propensity for receiving fertilization. The promise of commonplaces to be literary flowers does not pan out for this woman writer because she does not bear literary fruit by them. Thus, she purposefully exposes the impotence of *florilegia* which Della Porta and Bodenham reveal accidentally. More than transforming Plat's work into something new, Whitney enacts a differing definition of "translation:" "transference; removal or conveyance from one person, place, or condition to another."<sup>122</sup> Not only does Whitney demonstrate that imitative literature does little more than rearrange its materials, but she also conveys patriarchy's precious *florilegia* into her own hands and thus into a new female sphere.

Apart from their potential as literary inspiration, Plat's *sententiae* also fail to serve Whitney as practical maxims for her everyday life, and Whitney's explanation of this ineptitude illustrates her practical distrust of *sententiae* (rather unlike the initial attitudes of the heroines discussed in Chapter 2) in addition to their literary ineffectiveness. The fundamental value of a commonplace is that it provides wisdom or insight in a multitude of settings and is thus applicable to real-life experiences. A healthy store of such sayings, then, would prepare a person for a variety of situations, hopefully safeguarding against ignorance or indecision. Thus, it is to this idea of intellectual protection Whitney refers when she writes, "A slip I tooke to smell unto, which might be my defence./ In stynking streetes, or lothsome Lanes which els might mee infect" (36-37). The narrator believes

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<sup>122</sup> OED "translation."

that filling her nostrils and lungs with healthful flowers will ward off any moral or pathological pestilence in the streets or lanes. The danger of walking along such lanes, of course, is already familiar to us from the friend's warning: "out of this Lane you get./ And shift you to some better aire, for feare to be infect" (16-17). Though a historical reference to the plague of 1563 is possible,<sup>123</sup> the peril of infection portrayed in this passage appears to be more critical than its nature is explicit. Whitney claims to have plucked the flower for protection ("defence"), yet she is reluctant to assure others of its defensive qualities:

For thy health, not for thy eye, did I those Posye frame:  
Because my selfe dyd safety finde by smelling to the same.  
But as we are not all a lyke, nor of complexion one:  
So that which helpeth some we see, to others good doth none.  
I doo not say, it dyd mee help, I no infection felt:  
But sure I think they kept me free, because to them I smelt. (51-56)

The author believes herself to have experienced no infection whether it be moral or corporeal, yet she cannot discern whether or not her wellness was ever challenged. Since she "no infection felt" (55), it is impossible for Whitney to determine if the *florilegia* are medically proactive or simply enable a placebo effect. Either the flowers preserved Whitney against the threat of contagion, or she attributed her coincidental good health to flowers that were irrelevant or ineffective.

Too aware of this ambiguity, Whitney does not guarantee her readers' good health but simply attests to her own condition; she possessed the flowers and did not encounter contamination. Still, she does allude to the testimony of others who use Plat's *sententiae*: "For this I say the Flowers are good, which I on thee bestow:/ As those which weare them to the stalkes, shall by the sequell know" (87-88). Unpacking this early modern idiom for

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<sup>123</sup> Clarke 285.

us in her endnotes, Clarke explains that “those which weare them to the stalkes” refers to those persons who live out the advice contained in *A Sweet Nosgay*.<sup>124</sup> This “sequell” which Whitney mentions allows for at least three possible interpretations of how the flowers will be justified. First, the “sequell” may be a procession of followers<sup>125</sup> of her *Nosgay* who will demonstrate the efficacy of its precepts. Secondly, “sequell” could simply indicate everything that proceeds from<sup>126</sup> that statement and consequently refers to the remaining contents of Whitney’s volume. Perhaps her fictional epistles and verse can confirm that her flowers protect against infection. For the third reading I offer a more explicit and qualified rendition of the second: instead of the “sequell” being all that follows “The Auctor to the Reader,” I want to propose that the sequel or second part is the final portion of *A Sweet Nosgay*, specifically “The maner of Her Wyll,” which does not rely upon Plat’s flowers. Adopting the form of the mother’s legacy, “The maner of Her Wyll” is a ballad poem, which closes the volume and marks Whitney’s imagined death affected by her departure from London. If the value of Plat’s and Whitney’s *florilegia* is both genuine and commonplace, then Whitney’s mock-testimonial should capture their true functionality in her own personal narrative.

As the collection progresses, however, we discover Whitney’s mounting frustration with her circumstances as well as with her writing. By the time Whitney composes, “IS. W. beyng wery of writyng, sendeth this for Answere” (Clarke 17), her earlier cautious optimism has faded into self pity. Writing to her cousin, she laments, “my haps they are so hard:/ None beareth lyfe, is so from Fortune bard” (4-5). This is consistent with her previous statement that Fortune “ever hath denyde, to hoyce me on

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<sup>124</sup> Clarke 286.

<sup>125</sup> *OED* “sequel” definition 1.

<sup>126</sup> *OED* “sequel” definition 4.

her Wheele” (“Auctor” 27), a fateful pattern Whitney perceived to be interrupted by her trip to Plat’s garden. In fact, Whitney expected the bouquet she gathered there to mark a turning point for her, yet it appears that having such a nosegay has done nothing to improve her circumstances. These *sententiae* neither protect Whitney from hardship, nor do they ameliorate her resultant downtrodden outlook. Instead, she withdraws from writing into textual silence:

For now I wyll my writting cleane forsake  
till of my griefes, my stomack I discharg:  
and til I row, in Ladie Fortunes barge. (10-12)

Whitney’s two goals are to escape her “griefes” and to return to the good graces of Fortune. In addition to shaping the more general conditions of her life, Lady Fortune is also something of a muse for Whitney. The original purpose for the author’s “walking out,” Whitney explains, to “refresh my mased [mu]se” (13), at which point Fortune leads her to Plat. Whitney’s economic troubles and weariness of writing reveal that the pleasures of that original encounter in the garden do not last in the long-term. Now, Whitney is in need of new advice, new wisdom, and fresh literary stimulation. Moreover, she looks to excise the troubles from her life, regarding which she resolves, “of my griefes, my stomack I discharg” (11). Purgation of the stomach was considered a reliable method of balancing the body’s humors and cleansing impurities, and for a woman it was commonly believed that this was affected by her menses.<sup>127</sup> Thus, Whitney determines not to write again until her stomach is cleansed through menstruation, or to use early modern terminology, until she experiences her monthly flowers. Excreting her menstrual flowers will discharge Whitney’s grief. In the context of *A Sweet Nosgay*, however, Whitney’s flowers are also those she has gathered from Plat; to purge her authorial

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<sup>127</sup> Laqueur 25-27.



creativity, then, Whitney must discard his *sententiae*. By discharging Plat's *florilegia* from her womb-like brain (as the minds of artists were generally characterized), Whitney can cast out the patriarchal insistence on literary imitation and purify her creativity. Expelling the male-authored flowers will allow Whitney's writing to flourish and bear new creative fruit in the same way that physical purgation of menstrual flowers insures her own procreative ability. Writing without bowing to men's literary models, Whitney will demonstrate her own inventiveness, an authorial creativity buttressed by her novel position as a woman writer.

Free of the patriarchal *sententiae* which she gathered from Plat, Whitney can then compose "The maner of her Wyll, and what she left to London: and all those in it: at her departing," a pithy look at her relationship with London which illustrates the city's contribution to her writing. Although the notion of this piece as her deathbed testimonial is fictional and Whitney merely "fayneth as she would die" (preface), the morbid premise conjures up the precautions against death offered by her nameless friend in "The Auctor to the Reader." In light of the appearance of Whitney's last will and testament, I will take another look at the exchange between the author and her friend, this time proceeding to the end of their conversation:

... a friend of mine mee met:  
And sayd, yf you regard your health: out of this Lane you get.  
And shift you to some better aire, for feare to be infect:  
With noysome smell and savours yll, I wyshe you that respect.  
And have regard unto your health, or els perhaps you may:  
So make a dye, and then adieu, your wofull friends may say.  
I thankt him for his carefulnes, and this for answer gave:  
I'le neither shun, nor seeke for death, yet oft the same I crave.  
By reason of my lucklesse lyfe, believe mee this is true:  
In that (sayd he) you doo a misse, then bad he mee adieu. (15-25)

The friend advises Whitney to avoid the lane and consequently any smell or ill she might encounter there such as could result in a fatal infection. The poet, however, does not share his trepidation and even admits to sometimes craving death. In early modern literary circles, death was often a metaphor for print publication, for it is that event which ends any authorial will or control over a text;<sup>128</sup> therefore, the death that Whitney craves is actually publication. Additionally, Whitney is writing in the style of a legacy, a form of publication which only ever went to print on the occasion of the author's death. For the narrator of *Nosgay* to crave death is for Whitney to desire releasing her work in print. Working back from her death towards discerning a cause then, an infection contracted from the streets of London must be the root of Whitney's fatality within *A Sweet Nosgay*, particularly literary inspiration outside the accepted parameters of *sententiae* against which she had once protected herself with Plat's flowers. No longer inhabited by the fragrant *florilegia*, Whitney breathes in the scents (and ills) of London and becomes infected by the authenticity of its people and streets. Her mind now fully fertilized by her immediate surroundings and the harsh reality of life in London, Whitney produces an imaginative poem which innovatively blends witty satire with a conventional form, ushering its female composer boldly down the path of original, secular poetry and towards her place as a professional writer. Therefore, Plat's flowers did prevent infection but only by smothering her with patriarchal *sententiae* and keeping out new, stimulating material.

The irony commonly observed by scholars about "The maner of her Wyll" is that Whitney bequeaths to London people and possessions which are not hers to give. As Wall has noted, mothers' legacies, after which "Wyll" is styled, generally contained

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<sup>128</sup> Greenstadt 50.

advice for their children instead of an explication on material inheritances – an obvious consequence of the fact women were mostly prohibited from owning property. This trend to publish privately composed legacies, which began as the posthumous heralding of a mother's written will, Wall points out, "cleared a space in which women could legitimize their own break into print."<sup>129</sup> Though Whitney capitalizes on this advantage in the form of her ballad, her heavy satire undermines the mourning trope that motivates typical legacies. So for Whitney to will possessions that are not hers to the society that withholds them from her, Wall argues, "throws into relief the strategies of exclusion generated by those [patriarchal] paradigms."<sup>130</sup> What is more, the legacy form with which she satirizes her state of dispossession only became an acceptable manner for women to appear in print because innumerable men put the dying words of their late wives and mothers in print, something those females could not do without repercussion while living.

In spite of her very real penury, Whitney is able to bequeath London something wholly hers: *A Sweet Nosgay*. In one of Isabella Whitney's epistles to her sister, Wall notes, the author presents a binary of being either a wife or a writer; Whitney is resolutely the latter.<sup>131</sup> This distinction, however, does not account for the possible role of mother, which though culturally attributed to the wife, Whitney appropriates for herself as a writer. This "Wyll" that she writes is in anticipation of leaving London, and is presented and attached to her newly composed volume of poetry. Whitney prepares for the literary death of printing like an early modern mother expecting to begin childbirth. On two occasions in "Wyll," Whitney mentions bookbinders, the second of which reads, "I store

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<sup>129</sup> Wall 38.

<sup>130</sup> Wall 58.

<sup>131</sup> Wall 55.

of Bookes have left,/ at each Bookebinders stall” (241-242). Although the line refers generally to non-specified tomes, I find that its presence in the material artifact of Whitney’s poetry cannot help but imply her own work in this statement. So in addition to the innumerable qualities, entities, and objects she bequeaths to London which are rightly his,<sup>132</sup> I suggest she also leaves her poetry, which the city essentially fathered. The infectious inspiration Whitney derives from London enables her to create and birth *A Sweet Nosgay*, the result of her literary labors. Not only does this imitate and employ the childbirth metaphor used by her male contemporaries, but Whitney also reestablishes creation as a woman’s rightful domain.

Whitney weds patriarchal *sententiae* with maternal legacy, resulting in a text that turns literary imitation on its ear. She has broken into the male arena of print with an utterly female voice and flair. And though the nosegay she arranges in “Auctor” cannot and does not sustain the character of her narrator within the volume, and economic troubles force her death to London life, the completed product of *A Sweet Nosgay* is a truly original composition. Despite Plat’s flowers never directly yielding any fruit in her life Whitney determines when and how to use them, and most notably when to purge them and take in new inspiration. In this way, Isabella Whitney successfully negotiates the gendered forms of the times and reclaims the maternal role in (pro)creativity for the woman writer.

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<sup>132</sup> London is gendered masculine in line 32 of “Wyll” by the pronoun, “him.”

## CONCLUSION

Grounding the divergent topics studied in all three of these chapters is the idea of imitation: a new author imitates his or her forerunner, and women imitate male rhetoric. The two reproductive analogies supporting this trend for replication and reapplication are the apian metaphor, which advocates the use of *florilegia*, and the childbirth metaphor, which dubiously overlooks the role of menstruation in fertility and simply figures the male author as a fruitful mother. The male-dominated early modern literary culture, however, did not appear to reconcile the notion that the inseminating flowers of *florilegia* from the first comparison bear the same floral name as the female menses (the natural courses that simultaneously display fertility and testify that a woman is not yet fertilized) associated with the childbirth metaphor. Additionally, the work of male natural philosophers continually vilified the character of menstruation by perpetuating the very unnatural myths surrounding women's menses. Infiltrating England from continental Europe, the work of Della Porta, in particular, reveals the cultural misogyny of the early modern era, one based on the same impotent fear Erasmus captures in his dialogues on women's learning.

English writers as a whole upheld the value of *florilegia*, especially through their chronic use of *sententiae*, but also quite frequently in their reuse of well-known stories from which they culled characters and plotlines. Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and his rendition of *The Rape of Lucrece* both include explicit allusions to Ovid's story of Philomela. The reference's occurrence in *Lucrece* demonstrates the heroine's familiarity

with Roman tales and helps her to grapple with her situation within the story. Lavinia's narrative, however, mirrors Philomela's tale at several points including the loss of her tongue and the culinary vengeance taken on her behalf. But more than illustrating Shakespeare's knowledge of the ancient Roman poetry, the recurrence of Philomela-like characters uncovers what happens in a literary world in which everyone emulates Ovid. By recycling material from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Renaissance writers were not just imitating the remarkable skill of a great Latin author; they were perpetuating a trope of rape. As if it were not perilous enough for women's voices to be excluded from the forum of public print, how much more volatile their situation becomes in a society that, as a rule, immortalizes tales of legendary rape! Add to this the fact that the measure of one's education was the ability to conjure up and effectively deploy *sententiae*, a substanceless brand of *florilegia* Shakespeare depicts as malleable and easily discounted, and it becomes a wonder that any cultured early modern Englishperson was equipped to face life outside of trite repartee. Ophelia obviously was not. Both she and Lucrece must rely on their own cleansing menstrual processes to purge their bodies of the useless *sententiae* of male discourse; less victoriously, Lavinia literally dies at the hands of patriarchy on the grounds of storied precedent. Sententious precepts are no defense against the traditions of culled flowers; the principle of imitation that forms new works out of old *florilegia* is the same one that transforms once witty *sententiae* into commonplace clichés.

Without formal university training, Whitney approaches her material with fresh eyes and unhindered creativity, the latter of which being subversive all on its own, even without mention of gender. Whitney's gender, however, is precisely the issue. Her

appropriation of the patriarchal *sententiae* that fails to assist Lavinia, Lucrece, or Ophelia demonstrates a female literacy and wherewithal beyond Shakespeare's dramatic imagination. Although he assigns some fortitude to the leading ladies of his comedies, that is also precisely the forum in which commonplaces were expected to flourish. The levity of these tragedies, on the other hand, dismantles the efficacy of *sententiae* at the same time we see the dissolution of the patriarchies themselves. Similarly, Isabella Whitney's entrance into the print profession as a serious and skillful woman writer begins to dissemble the male chokehold on literary authorship. Whitney's quotation of Diogenes in the preface of *A Sweet Nosegay* is as prophetic as it is reflexive; the "rejection of conventions" in which Diogenes believed<sup>133</sup> is precisely what Whitney's work accomplishes.

The arrival of a female writer complicates an abundance of authorial metaphors, which the previously unadulterated male constituency had allowed to coexist incoherently. Had writing men maintained the integrity of the apian metaphor, choice excerpts would have been universally termed, "pollen." Hardly disturbing the male author's use of such an extract, such a name would have ascribed more sexual tones to the writer's self-pollinating process and thus more strongly stigmatized a woman's entrance into writing. Furthermore, women would have remained seemingly inept as creators since even in their corporeal beings they possessed only flowers and not pollen. By virtue of gathering from many flowers in numerous authors' gardens, the bee of the apian metaphor is inherently rather promiscuous. Because the analogy had formerly applied only to men, this was of little concern, but Whitney's assumption of the apian role augments the notion of a transgressive woman writer.

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<sup>133</sup> Clarke 284.

If it is necessarily a collector of pollen or culler of flowers, the figurative bee was intrinsically gendered female by virtue of being a receptacle for fertilization. The childbirth metaphor that describes the hard work of writing as those of labor pains also figures the author as female, specifically a mother. Having birthed a literary work with one's pen, the writer ushers it into the world via the printing press, the rampant whore that reproduces indiscriminately. From the printer emerges countless documents considered hopelessly vulnerable in the hands of their readers and each text is personified as a defenseless, raped maiden. At every step, the process of composition and publication is portrayed as a stereotype of woman – sexual object, mother, whore, or raped maid. Although it is not within the scope of this project to discern exactly the relationships within and among this metaphor sequence here, it would be a worthwhile though daunting task to make sense of them. For my purposes, however, I am content to point out that woman's ability to bear fruit underscores every stage of authorship and to question how such a process could ever have been deemed men's domain. These misogynist analogies which reduce women to roles and types served early modern male writers in their own self-construction, but only for so long as professional writing was a strictly male territory. The emergence of a writing female cohort, which included Isabella Whitney, unequivocally exposed the farce of the early modern male monopoly on creativity; the fertile potential of ancient *florilegia* pales in comparison to the true fruitfulness indicated by a woman's menstrual flowers.



*If I have over-passed some Things, or not spoken so Properly of them, as I might; I know there is nothing so Beautiful, but it may be Adorned; Nor so Full, but it may be Augmented. Giambattista Della Porta*

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