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**‘The Surgeon’s Mate’: Exploring cultural
constructions of scent in seventeenth-century
England**

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'The Surgeon's Mate': Exploring cultural constructions of scent
in seventeenth-century England

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'What safety have we then, or what can be a more fearfull enemy to mankind than pestilential vapours, which seaze upon mankind as a thief, and invade him at unawares, which lurke in every corner of the house, yea in his most secret chambers, threatening to take away his life when he least mistrusts...'

- John Woodall¹

¹ J. Woodall, *The Surgeon's Mate* (London: Printed by Rob. Young, for Nicholas Bourne, 1639) p. 324

Introduction

Smell suffers from an intrinsic identity crisis. It exists only momentarily in the nose of the inhaler as a subjective and fleeting sense. 'What safety have we then,' writes John Woodall, from vapours which lurk in the air we are forced to breathe and thus 'invade' our bodies when we 'least mistrust.'² In this he shows both an interest in the nature of smell, illusive in its description and physical state, and in its mysterious effects on the mind and body. Gilbert identifies how fear of fragrance is a current that flows through society 'like an underground stream,' one which is constant, fluid and 'bubbles to the surface here and there with ironic results.'³

Seventeenth-century England was a vacillating and vibrant sensual landscape. The relentless frequency of plague outbreaks since the fourteenth century meant disease and death was ever present. Voyages to the New World were at their height as England exercised its strength through oceanic exploration and military conquest, steadily constructing a diverse trading empire that would last for centuries. The Reformation of the sixteenth-century devastated Catholic influence and destabilised a collective sensual relationship with God. Such religious ambiguity led to inflated anxieties about the presence of evil. Due to these factors, Jenner implies that the early modern body was constantly swallowing and being swallowed by the world⁴ suggesting a turbulent, cyclical relationship between the body and its environment, and one that was as dangerous as it was exciting.

The Surgeon's Mate (1639)

² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 324

³ A. Gilbert, *What the nose knows: The Science of Scent in Everyday life*, (New York: Crown publishers, 2008) p. 119

⁴ M. Jenner, 'Civilisation and deodorisation: Smell in Early Modern English Culture,' *Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas*, Oxford Scholarship Online (October 2011) p. 10

In 1967, Sir Geoffrey Keynes asserted the place of John Woodall in history as a learned and experienced professional. He claimed that the few remaining copies of *The Surgeon's Mate* testified to its widespread use and positive reception.⁵ Modern work on Woodall styles him as 'the father of sea medicine,'⁶ as his work on regulation surgeon's chests on English ships contributed significantly to advances in military medicine. Woodall was appointed as the first Surgeon General to the East India Company (EIC) in 1613 due to his 'wide experience and organisational ability as a military surgeon and merchant,'⁷ according to Hazlewood. He was a surgeon and an administrator, therefore spending most of his time on shore. Furthermore, as a surgeon, Woodall was inferior in status to a physician. He argued for the improved status of surgeons by making their trade more widely applicable,⁸ indications of which can be seen in the second edition of *The Surgeon's Mate* completed in 1639, twenty two years after the first, with the added treatises tending towards medicinal aromatics rather than exclusively surgery.

Woodall was intelligent and practical with an ambition to assert his work as applicable to more than just military circumstances. However it cannot be overlooked that his expertise lay in surgery primarily, and his commentary on treatment of the plague in the second edition was based upon personal experience and interest rather than expert training. This may be dubious for his professional standing, but it is useful for the historian as his comments make him a helpful source in understanding seventeenth century thought on smell. Woodall also had the advantage of being a seasoned traveller. He lived in France in 1589 and gained

⁵ G. Keynes quoted in G. Hazlewood, 'John Woodall: From Barber Surgeon to Surgeon General,' in W. A. Whitelaw (ed.), *The proceedings of the 12th annual History of Medicine days*, The University of Calgary (March 2003) p. 120

⁶ Hazlewood, 'John Woodall.' p. 117

⁷ J. H. Appleby, 'A new light on John Woodall,' *Medical History* (July 1981) 25:3 p. 254

⁸ S. S. LeJaq, 'Roy Porter Student Prize Essay, The Bounds of Domestic Healing: Medical Recipes, Storytelling and Surgery in Early Modern England,' *Social History of medicine* Vol. 26, No. 3 (2003) p. 456

experience as a surgeon with Lord Willoughby's regiment in support of the Protestant Henry IV of France. He is also known to have lived near Hamburg where he worked on his understanding and treatments for the plague. He returned to London in 1603 where he worked for Sir Thomas Smith, Governor of the EIC, on numerous European expeditions in the name of King James I. Woodall, therefore, is unique in having been exposed to, and engaged with, different environments and first hand medical experience. This may have made smells more potent to him as in an unchanging environment the nose risks overlooking subtleties of scent. The second edition of *The Surgeon's Mate* will be used in this dissertation as a baseline from which cultural constructions of smell can be evaluated, Woodall presenting a well-travelled, intelligent and Protestant perspective of seventeenth-century England.

Historiographical outline

In the early 1960s, Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) perpetuated the great divide theory pertaining to sensory perception in the early modern era. He speculated that the increasing importance awarded to sight and hearing, the higher senses, relegated smell, taste and touch to primal as western societies moved from orality to 'the neutral visual world.'⁹ This view has been supported by subsequent works including *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* (1982) by Walter Ong. However, Mark Smith comments in *Sensory History* (2007) that whilst the great divide theory drew attention to the significance of the senses in shaping cultural attitudes of the past, there was still a 'great deal that is quite disconcerting'¹⁰ about it. Dugan and Jenner respectively concur, presenting the great divide theory as 'unhelpfully crude'¹¹ and a problematic model for the sensory historian to view the early modern period. Whilst sensory history is still a nascent

⁹ M. McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1962) p. 22

¹⁰ M. M. Smith, *Sensory History*, (Oxford: Bloomsbury, 2007) p. 11

¹¹ Jenner, 'Civilisation and deodorisation.' p. 13

historical discipline, recent works have since moved away from the struggle to produce an all-encompassing model of sense that can be so rigidly applied. Roodenburg's edited work *The Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance* (2014) includes chapters on religion, medicine and modernity, each of which explore the significance of certain senses and their perception in various contexts. In this way, recent histories of sense have shown that it can no longer be assumed that smell was treated as a lower sense in the early modern era as a myriad of factors including inter-sensuality, cultural change and historical memory impact upon smell within different contexts.

In the context of smell, Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1986) was a significant breakthrough. His work on the perfume industry and the French social imagination in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century asserted scent as an important, yet frustratingly overlooked, 'maze of fascinating taboos and mysterious attractions'¹² which shaped the cultural landscape. Another pioneer in scent historiography was *Aroma: A Cultural History of Smell* (1994) by Constance Classen, David Howes and Anthony Synnott. The work speculated on the psychological history of smell and analysed the olfactory imagination from various angles including antiquarian smell, the progression of smell through the early modern era and the place of modern scents. What the study showed was that theories of smell permeated and informed many aspects of the cultural imagination, yet it neglects to award smell much importance in influencing behaviour. Drobnick asserts in *The Smell Culture Reader* (2011) that such publications have 'crystallised an agenda of sorts on smell'¹³ by analysing historical scent as a separate discipline. Interestingly, Jenner identifies in his article 'Civilisation and deodorisation: Smell in Early Modern English Culture' (2011) that in 'histories of the sensorium, sight is always triumphing just as the middle class is always

¹² A. Corbin, *The Foul and the Fragrant: Odor and the French social imagination* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1986) p. 8

¹³ J. Drobnick (ed.), *The Smell Culture Reader* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2006) p. 4

rising,' and historians of scent must work against the tide of eye-centric histories in order to demonstrate the importance of smell in the seventeenth century.

This dissertation will use John Woodall's *The Surgeon's Mate* to assert that whilst scent may well have been understood retrospectively as occupying a diminishing influence in the seventeenth century, this does not mean that it lost significance in the contemporary social consciousness. The assumption that smell lost favour is drawn from institutionally produced sources and is thus based upon a loss of reliance on the olfactory within the public sector.

Methodology

This dissertation argues that scent was not only intrinsic in the early modern mindset, but that it played a crucial role in informing cultural attitudes and behaviour. Fundamental to this was the increasing privatisation of smell during the seventeenth century which led to ambiguity in the previously fixed categorisation of scents. Furthermore, smell fuelled anxieties in a way that the other senses could not. Its physicality presented the opportunity for both health and harm, making it unique in its ability to interpret one's surroundings, yet it could also be easily misled. *The Surgeon's Mate* reflects these fears and physiological applications of scent through the eyes of the professional and thus provides an effective lead in exploring cultural constructions of scent.

The first chapter addresses scent and the self, exploring how medical theories prevalent in the seventeenth century, and reflected in *The Surgeon's Mate*, imagined the body as a vessel for conflicting vapours. Since the internal body was governed by scent, it was also subject to changes in its olfactory environment as scents used the body's vulnerabilities to manipulate it. As a continuation of this concept, there existed an ambiguity about personal scent as an indication of morality.

Personal scent could be corrected, however, by recipes devised by individuals such as Woodall in a medicinal context through the use of pomanders, and a personal context through the rise of the perfumed elite. Privatisation occurred through the passing of such powers over moral scent and one's internal environment to the individual, leading to a form of potent social distancing.

The second chapter analyses the impact of community olfaction and how the smells of the wider environment both inspired and developed cultural constructions of scent. The smells of the city were simultaneously evocative and repulsive. Ideas about the vulnerable and vaporous body distilled through communal consciousness as bad smells were relegated to the outskirts out of fears that they perpetuated the spread of the Plague. This in turn deepened the social divide in the city. Divine smell was also undergoing a dangerous fluctuation in the aftermath of the Reformation as the Catholic church struggled to retain their monopoly over the scent of God. This destabilisation of communal scent reshaped religion and social status, introducing a degree of ambiguity about access to God and the scent of safety.

The final chapter addresses the smell of the Other. The scent of the woman is created, inhaled and controlled by the patriarch, placing her outside of the olfactory norm by assigning complex meaning, and in some cases awarding power, to her scent. The supernatural in the seventeenth century also employed smell as a crucial aspect of its perception and recognition. The witch and the demoniac represent significant transgressive figures in the early modern imagination. While divinity had been deodorised, the advocates of social subversion retained scent as a form of invisible power over the population, taking advantage of the ethereal nature of the olfactory to infiltrate the subconscious and instil fear. Scent thus experiences a revival as its mysterious absence from institutionalised worship intensified ideas about its presence in other contexts, adding to the effect of social distancing by scent associations.

1) Scent and the self

How a culture presents and imagines the body relates to identity on a profound level. The body is a symbol of both scientific understanding and cultural perception. It is also a product of its time and place and as McCleery suggests, a historian of the body must work to understand behaviours in relation to the time even if such behaviours are incomprehensible to the modern mind.¹⁴ The ways in which the body was understood and received in the seventeenth century reveals the complexities of its relationship with the olfactory.

The scientific body in the seventeenth century was understood as a collaboration of elemental humours. Devised by Hippocrates in the fourth century BC, Humorism claimed that hot and dry, wet and cold, hot and wet, and cold and dry vapours kept the body in balance. Imbalance of these humours resulted in illness, but the balance could be restored through the correct application of medicinal scents. John Woodall depicts Hippocrates on the cover page of his 1639 edition of *The Surgeon's Mate*,¹⁵ suggesting the antiquarian philosopher to have been a significant influence on him. Furthermore, in *The Surgeon's Mate*, Woodall describes numerous recipes with a 'cooling and drying' or 'hot and moist'¹⁶ effect on the body, an indication of his investment in the science of humoral balance. It is then but a short step for medicinal thought to muse on the nature of humours themselves. Another survival from antiquity in early modern scientific thought was the controversy over odour transmission and whether it possessed a physical quality, as was asserted by Plato, or

¹⁴ I. McCleery, 'A sense of the past: exploring sensory experience in the pre-modern world,' *Brain: A Journal of Neurology*, 132 (March 2009) p. 1117

¹⁵ Woodall, *The Surgeon's Mate (1639) Early English Books online*, http://eebo.chadwyck.com/search/full_rec?SOURCE=pgimages.cfg&ACTION=ByID&ID=72800170&FILE=../session/1460988314_15148&SEARCHSCREEN=CITATIONS&VID=184151&PAGENO=1&ZOOM=&VIEWPORT=&SEARCHCONFIG=var_spell.cfg&DISPLAY=AUTHOR&HIGHLIGHT_KEYWORD= [Accessed 18 April 2016]

¹⁶ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*, p. 28

was more of an immaterial imprint on the brain, as was contended by Aristotle.

Furthermore, 'if the transmission of odour was in dispute, so was the physiology of olfactory perception'¹⁷ highlights Woolgar, as intelligent minds such as Woodall's attempted to capture an understanding of smell's effect inside the body. Galen, also pictured alongside Woodall and Hippocrates in the cover portrait, postulated in the 2nd century BC that smell was received through the nostrils by two appendages at the front of the brain, identifying the brain itself as the sensory organ concerning perception of scent.¹⁸ The suturing of Hippocratic and Galenic theories by seventeenth century medical professionals gives weight to the prevailing theory of miasmas,¹⁹ that smells in general affect the body according to their favourable or repulsive scents. This line of intellectual thinking produces two very important concepts; that the body was vulnerable from outside vapours; and that health was defined as the mind and body combined. Woodall demonstrates a recognition of both of these anxieties in *The Surgeon's Mate*, expressing concern about the smell of Brimstone on the body as is it the 'enemie to the brain' and a 'venemous and deadly scent.'²⁰ By directly implicating the brain in the body's relationship with scent, he identifies both the greatest advantage of scent as well as its dangers. Physicians and surgeons were also aware of 'danger from misapplied smells'²¹ and thus they constructed the use of aromas accordingly. Woodall sets out alternative guidelines for children in using scents in treatment of the plague²² and the fact that this distinction is made strongly implies that smells within certain bodies were believed to

¹⁷ C. M. Woolgar, *The Senses in Late Medieval England* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press 2006) p. 15

¹⁸ Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*. pp. 15

¹⁹ H. Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume* (Maryland: The John Hopkins University Press, 2011). p. 108

²⁰ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 337

²¹ C. Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*. p. 126

²² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 354

be especially potent. Scent has the unique ability of accessing the ‘secret closets’²³ of the body, according to Woodall, and thus provides a means of internal diagnostics in a way that sight cannot. They also have the potential to treat the body from the inside, which hearing cannot. Avicenna, also a figure of admiration for Woodall on his cover page, classified the various smells of urine as indicative of the prominence of certain humours in the body.²⁴ Woodall’s treatise indicates that medical thought had far from abandoned smell as a fundamental part of curative medicine, a challenge to the theory of smell becoming seen as primitive in the seventeenth century.

The characterisation of good and bad smells as synonymous with good and bad effects created a market through paranoia over the body’s vulnerabilities that, whilst not new in the seventeenth century, was catered for by medical professionals. It is precisely because breathing allows ‘corrupt ayre...which we can no way avoid, to draw into the secretest parts of our bodies’²⁵ that Woodall presents favourably scented concoctions. He instructs one to ‘take an ivorie or wooden box, with holes in it...wherein some cordiall herbes or spirits have been first infused’ in order to protect ‘against the venemous disposition of the ayre.’²⁶ These methods were types of pomanders, conveniently portable and able to be carried in the hand, in the pocket, as jewellery or as belt attachments. One pomander made between 1600-1650 is housed at the V&A Museum in London. It’s made of silver with enamel work and carved floral designs,²⁷ indicating that the market of anxiety surrounding smell transcended social boundaries, an essential for the elite as much as for

²³ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 324

²⁴ F. Wallis, *Medicine and the Senses: Feeling the Pulse, Smelling the Plague, and Listening for the Cure* in R. G. Newhauser (ed.), *A Cultural history of the senses in the Middle Ages* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 141

²⁵ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 326

²⁶ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 338

²⁷ ‘A History of Jewellery in the seventeenth century,’ London: V&A Museum <http://www.vam.ac.uk/users/node/19143> [Accessed 05 April 2016]

the less well off. For these, Woodall suggests that a lemon stuck with cloves would do the same job.²⁸ Woodall's work is also filled with reference to rosemary as an effective sensory agent against the onset of the plague. This was a popular idea as English dramatist Thomas Dekker notes in his 1603 *The Wonderfull yeare* that the demand for rosemary had risen so extortionately that what had sold for '12. pence an armefull, went now for six shillings a handful'²⁹ during the plague in London. Classen, Howes and Synnot highlight that each person wished to 'remain enclosed in a private olfactory bubble,'³⁰ by creating a controlled, personal environment within which to cocoon themselves from outside pestilence. This desire became increasingly achievable with the diversity and availability of pomanders and other potent scents, revealing another facet of paranoia surrounding smell and the body.

The atmosphere of hysteria created by ambiguities in the nature of smells fed into the wider realm of anxieties about moral corruption. Pre-Socratic and Hippocratic authors mused that the five senses bridged the gap between the body and the soul,³¹ and that the soul had physical substance and a unique role in sensory interpretation as well as stimulation. However the smell of sanctity is typically Catholic and particularly well defined in the Middle Ages, and had thus met considerable opposition by the seventeenth century. As a result, it would be most peculiar to find Woodall making explicit reference to this faded idea, however what is apparent is his belief in the connection between sin and stench in general. Harmful vapours are "noisome" in his work and they "seize upon mankind as a thief."³² The figure of the thief in this

²⁸ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 338

²⁹ T. Dekker, *The wonderful yeare* (1603) <http://www.luminarium.org/renascence-editions/yeare.html> [Accessed 05 April 2016]

³⁰ C. Classen, D. Howes and A. Synnot, *Aroma: The Cultural History of smell* (London: Routledge, 1994) p. 62

³¹ J. Reinartz, *Past Scents: Historical perspectives on smell* (Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 2014) p. 7

³² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 324

passage implies clandestine activity which takes advantage of a body that has no choice but to inhale the air. Such air is also described as “evill” and “corrupt,” language which invokes powerful images of sin. So strong was the association between corruption and scent in popular culture that Shakespeare’s ‘Sonnet 94,’ published in 1609, laments that “the sweetest things turn sourest by their deeds.”³³ Le Guerier suggests that in the early modern imagination it was ‘but a short step from physical contamination to moral contamination.’³⁴ Whilst it cannot be definitively confirmed that Woodall subscribed to the smell of sanctity, neglecting to refer to scents as reflective of man’s deeds specifically, his work in conjunction with contemporary popular culture works suggests a continued anxiety about the nature of deeds more generally generating smells. Moreover, idiomatic speech reveals a further indication of how individuals perceived each other’s moral scent, even if such a scent isn’t physically tangible. To smell a rat as King Lear smelt out³⁵ traitors in the 1606 Shakespeare play is symbolic of the imagined presence of sin. Furthermore, those who transgressed behavioural norms lost this privilege as popular thought characterised wrathful or ignorant men as ‘without a nose.’³⁶ Morality therefore had a smell of its own, and the nose was an essential tool in determining the nature of an individual’s soul and their intentions, whether figurative or apparent.

Just as medical corrective smells could be manufactured by the individual, so could moral smells. The seventeenth century saw tremendous advances in the perfume market, particularly amongst the elite upper classes, due to influences including technological advances to create scented waters and availability of exotic scents. Access to such scents, intoxicating and rare, and use of them on the body became

³³ W. Shakespeare, ‘Sonnet 94’ (1609) <http://www.shakespeare-online.com/sonnets/94.html> [Accessed 02 April 2016]

³⁴ A. Le Guerier, *Scent: The mysterious and Essential powers of smell* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1993) p. 32

³⁵ W. Shakespeare, *King Lear*, ed. K. Muir (London and New York: Routledge 1964) p. 164

³⁶ Woolgar, *Senses in Late Medieval England*. p. 14

synonymous with wealth and moral superiority. Unlike pomanders which were for personal medical protection, perfume was supposed to be smelt by others. This popping of the private olfactory bubble invited others to inhale the changing scents of power during the period. Dugan identifies the two bodies of the monarch in relation to perfume as the 'body natural' and 'the body politic.'³⁷ She asserts that the use of monarchical perfume is both a confirmation of moral superiority and spiritual health as well as a tangible symbol of power over the subject's atmosphere. In this way, perfume creates a presence as an indication of where the body has been, which makes it an extraordinarily powerful tool of status. Woodall recommends formulas "for the wealthier sort" of "Labdanum...cloves, cinamon [and] Mirrhe,"³⁸ as well as cheaper alternatives involving a paste made from cloves, to create a body perfume to counteract the smell of the Plague. This is as separate from his recipes for pomanders and they take away the visible nature of carrying a scent receptacle. Scent, and status, is instead perceived through the nose alone rather than by presentation of wealthy scent receptacles. Smith highlights that the 'English elites were especially adept at demarcating class through the nose'³⁹ and this raises the question of how such generated scents were categorised in the social imagination. Those who could afford to exude exotic scents created an olfactory presence within the corrupted air of the plague and thus fed into an imagination which centred on access to types of scent. What is clear is that the association of wealth with morality and poverty with corruption underpinned the early modern relationship with smell on a personal and communal level, the latter of which will be explored in the next chapter.

The body was perceived as a complicated sensory battleground in the seventeenth century. Smell was the only sense which gained insight into the state of both the body and the soul, yet even scent could be

³⁷ Dugan, *Ephemeral History of Perfume*. p. 59

³⁸ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 336

³⁹ Smith, *Sensory History*. p. 66

masked by various intoxicating concoctions. The fact that such concoctions were devised by medical professionals such as Woodall, and well received by the population, testifies to the importance of smell in the regulation of the body in numerous ways. It is evident that smell revealed a great deal about an individual and that understanding and application of personal smells contributed to a potent social distancing, indicating class as well as morality.

2) The olfactory community

Plato asserted that the body produced smells when it was in a process of change,⁴⁰ therefore in a similar way, what has been analysed so far can be applied to the body of the seventeenth century community. Communal space had never been so complex and confusing, and there was 'more to sense in towns than would have been possible in the centuries before.'⁴¹ The olfactory experience of those that inhabited the cities of England at this time dictated its characterisation on numerous levels.

The home is the final frontier over which the individual has olfactory control. It therefore presents an effective microcosm for characterising the management of smells within the community as well as the perception of the home in the city. Woodall's domestic recipe of 'juniper or the berries of thereof, or bay leaves, Lavender, Sage, Rosemary...laid upon a hot fire shovell, and carryed to and frome in a roome' to 'correct the evill disposition of the ayre in houses'⁴² reveals the importance of a favourably scented home environment in the times of the Plague. Classen, Howes and Synnott suggest that the 'smell of the home and the town were in an olfactory war'⁴³ as a constant and necessary reaffirmation of sensual individuality. This also indicates both the anxiety of protecting the house from the pestilent city as well as the need for the city to quarantine noxious home environments. Le Guerier concurs, asserting that measures to fumigate the home during the early modern plague outbreaks were in order to 'cleanse the breath of the house.'⁴⁴ The home therefore engages in an atmospheric exchange and must guard

⁴⁰ R. Palmer, *In bad odour: Smell and its significance in medicine from Antiquity to the seventeenth century* in W. F. Bynum and R. Porter (eds.), *Medicine and the five senses* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1993) p. 65

⁴¹ Roodenburg, *Cultural history of the senses in the Renaissance*. p. 4

⁴² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 335

⁴³ Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*. p. 62

⁴⁴ Le Guerier. *Scent*. p. 68

against invasive vapours whilst simultaneously regulating its output. In this sense, space, and management of it, was incredibly important. Cockayne highlights the flexibility of the wealthy to utilise space by employing architectural design in the home, carefully isolating chambers of waste from the main living area. She adds that this ‘access to space was the key to privacy, comfort and cleanliness,’⁴⁵ as again class and favourable scent become closely associated. However, the elite did not just invite good scents into the home, they cultivated them just outside. Access to space allowed the maintenance of a garden as private generators of powerful scents. Francis Bacon describes the placement of flowers in his 1627 essay ‘Of Gardens,’ stating that gardens are ‘the greatest refreshment to the spirits of man’⁴⁶ and should be arranged to create a favourably scented experience. The social distancing effect of smell can be seen in this transfer of olfactory guardianship to the immediate domestic environment, making the home an extension of its inhabitant in status, morality and health.

There were also significant concerns about the origin of bad smells the seventeenth century city. A reliable manufacturer of dangerous vapours was the Plague, which Woodall describes as ‘a disease venomous and contagious, lothsome, noysome, feareful, and hatefull to mankind.’⁴⁷ He offers explanation for its presence ‘more particularly in great cities, as in London’ as due to ‘the uncleane keeping of houses, lanes, Allies and streetes, from those recited and the like infectious venomous vapours,’⁴⁸ identifying the source of such vapours as emanating from unkempt parts of the city. There is some truth in this, the poorest areas of the seventeenth century city being more tightly packed and badly ventilated by architectural nature. However, Woodall’s

⁴⁵ E. Cockayne, *Hubbub: Filth, noise & stench in England 1600-1770* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007) p. 232

⁴⁶ F. Bacon, ‘Of Gardens’ in *Essays of Francis Bacon* (1627) <http://www.literaturepage.com/read/francis-bacon-essays-93.html> [Accessed 14 April 2016]

⁴⁷ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 323

⁴⁸ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 326

investment in Humorism, both in the body and the atmosphere, indicates that his identification of such sources of pestilence relates to the inhabitants as much as to the habitation itself. He states that poverty is dangerous because it 'brings emptinesse of the belly and where emptinesse is, there evil ayre is not wanting,'⁴⁹ implying that it is a fundamental attribute of the working-classes to exude noxious miasmas. Wallis adds that 'to control the imagination in time of the plague was essential'⁵⁰ and it is evident that the search for the source of the Plague led to scapegoating and paranoid olfactory conjectures, particularly concerning the poor. Furthermore, Le Guerer argues that the smells of the plague severed various bonds between men since they 'could no longer bear each other's sight, each other's smell.'⁵¹ In this sense, the plague contributed to an olfactory distancing within the community that damaged integration and bred suspicion. Jenner further adds that scent drove social policy in the city as officials implemented various measures to dispel the noxious plague vapours. Woodall recommends one such way using wine vinegar 'dropped onto [a] sponge and put into a box, and smeled unto, it preserveth from any infectious ayre.'⁵² This practice was adopted in York in 1631 as officials urged the population to soak sponges with white wine vinegar and camphor to ward off the plague.⁵³ Moreover, trade-produced offensive scents such as that of butchers, tanners and ironmongers were relegated to the outskirts of several cities to preserve the interior from contamination and aromatic bonfires were lit in some areas.⁵⁴ From the late sixteenth century, scavengers were appointed to collect waste from doorways and streets and by 1615, Manchester had nineteen scavengers and several appointed waste management

⁴⁹ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 326

⁵⁰ Wallis, *Medicine and the Senses* in Newhauser (ed.), *Cultural history of the senses in the Middle Ages*. p. 149

⁵¹ Le Guerer, *Scent*. p. 62

⁵² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 339

⁵³ Smith, *Sensory History*. p. 65

⁵⁴ Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*. p. 60

officials.⁵⁵ However this systematic olfactory cleansing contributed to a perceived social distance between those that smelled and those who could afford not to. Control of scent and its implementations therefore effectively transferred to the elite, and thus became privatised and prejudiced.

Alongside the smell of the plague, the seventeenth century witnessed a flood of new scents from voyages to the New world which permeated through the social climate in English cities. The area of the city where this exciting diversity was most keenly felt was in the market. A consistent source of medicinal products and personal curiosities, the market provided a public platform on which scents were displayed and inserted into the social consciousness. Welch identifies that the dynamic of the city market relied on smell, taste and touch, the 'lower' senses, to determine the quality of the products. Smell enjoyed a renewed significance in the early modern city by not only altering the smell-scape, and the parameters of smell, but also by presenting a way of determining and challenging material quality. The market thus became the place to test all types of belief,⁵⁶ smell being asserted once again as an indicator of inherent value.

The scent of divine had come under intense scrutiny in the preceding century. As a result of the English Reformation, the place of sensational public worship was destabilised and became increasingly seen as an archaic form of devotion. However, religion remained an integral part of seventeenth century culture, and the changes in religious expression and holy scents had severed the chance of a collective experience of the divine, contributing to olfactory fears.

⁵⁵ Cockayne, *Hubbub*. p. 184

⁵⁶ E. Welch, *The senses in the Marketplace* in Roodenburg (ed.), *A Cultural History of the senses in the Renaissance* (London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2014) p. 64

The relationship between Catholicism and incense is based on a shared sensual experience in order to invite the divine into the congregation. Classen suggests that ‘humans and the divine’ were locked in a type of ‘olfactory cycle’⁵⁷ as before the Reformation, incense from heaven was channelled through the church and prayers from earth acted as a type of metaphorical incense. Furthermore, she also attests that incense represented both the ‘mysterious presence and mysterious absence of God.’⁵⁸ This links to ideas about perceiving the invisible and smell as a marker of morality, as well as tying closely with concepts concerning the creation of an atmosphere of power. However, the Protestant approach to divine scent is far more vague. John Woodall asserts that ‘all herbs and plants sprang out of the bowels of the earth, with their infinite varieties of flowers and feeds, with different odours, vapours, colours and formes, embued...with great and many vertues’ all in ‘Solum ex praescientia Dei,’⁵⁹ translated as ‘onely of the foreknowledge of God.’ In this, Woodall strips the church of its ownership over divine scents by attesting that all scents are created in the knowledge of God and are freely accessible. This supports the theory of a privatisation of scents in the seventeenth century as the community no longer relied upon the church to manufacture the olfactory presence of the divine. Milner adds that there was a fear of ‘counterfeiting the divine’⁶⁰ in the Renaissance and that Reformists asserted that godly religion should have ‘a more worldly bouquet.’⁶¹ Both Catholics and Reformers therefore called for proper use of the senses, but provided their own stipulations on how to do so.

⁵⁷ C. Classen, *The colour of angels: Cosmology, gender and the aesthetic imagination* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998) p. 44

⁵⁸ Classen, *Colour of Angels*. p. 60

⁵⁹ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. fol. A6r

⁶⁰ M. Milner, *The senses in religion: Towards a Reformation of the Senses* in Roodenburg (ed.), *Cultural History of the senses in the Renaissance*. p. 94

⁶¹ M. Milner, *The Senses and the English Reformation* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011) p. 315

However, justification by faith alone encouraged the individual to commune with God privately, and this included sensual experience, therefore it would be untrue to characterise Protestantism as anti-sensual. Yet, due to the regulatory silence in contemporary English sources on anything pertaining to Catholic practices, evidence of its continuing use is hard to confirm. As earlier argued, cultures may banish odours from public space 'without devaluing odours or olfaction in general.'⁶² In his *Journal of the Plague Year*, English author Daniel Defoe wrote that during the 1665 plague in London, 'the whole church was like a smelling-bottle.'⁶³ Classen, Synnott and Howes have used this as proof that the church still exercised power over the population by providing divine scent as an olfactory refuge. This seems plausible, but does not take into account the intense fear of disease miasmas and the enduring tradition of religious shelter as separate from scent through the centuries of Plague outbreaks in England. The account is also semi-fictional and wasn't published until 1722, suggesting that the evidence it provides of the significance of religious smell during the 1665 plague is retrospective. However, by making all things divine and denying the community a definition of divine scent, Reformers created a vacuum in the religious significance of scent which may have contributed to olfactory fears. The balance was therefore disrupted: now that everything was divine, nothing was divine. Devaluation of institutionalised odour thus may have caused an evaporation of religious smell's significance from the early modern consciousness as 'hell retained its flames and heaven its flowers, but somehow, the scent was no longer there.'⁶⁴ The Catholic church could no longer control the space or nature of faith. Yet incense was still used as late as 1683 when Frankincense was employed in a procession of a Bishop at St. Nicholas in Durham.⁶⁵ But instead of proving divine smell by

⁶² Jenner, 'Civilisation and deodorisation.' p. 19

⁶³ D. Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year*, (1722) as quoted by Classen, Howes and Synnott, *Aroma*. p. 62

⁶⁴ Classen, *Colour of Angels*. p. 58

⁶⁵ Dugan, *Ephemeral History of Perfume*. p. 30

this time, such examples along with Defoe's account suggest the survival of an olfactory tradition and scented power rather than a continued investment in smell as indicative of God's presence. Scent had thus become increasingly, and dangerously, subjective in the context of religion.

The smells of the city were therefore up for debate by the seventeenth century. The olfactory war of the home and community and the cycle of scented divinity was reshaped with poorly defined boundaries. Deodorisation of the city and of religion privatised scent and left interpretation uncomfortably open. Furthermore, *The Surgeon's Mate* has shown that enduring associations of scent with corruption or devotion remained, but they were now more ambiguous than ever.

3) Smelling the Other

The Other exists outside of society and subverts social norms. The woman and the supernatural represent significant categories of the Other in the seventeenth century, characterisations of which contributed to the trend of olfactory distancing in society.

Medieval thought imagined the Virgin Mary as a 'spicer's shop smells sweet of divers spices...sweet for the presence of the Holy Ghost that was in her and the abundance of virtues that she had.'⁶⁶ This reflects the Catholic perspective of scent as indicative of virtue and the sensory presence of God. Yet similar ideas can be seen to survive into the seventeenth century as the sweet smell of the pure woman remained synonymous with virtue and humility. Lyric poet and cleric Robert Herrick wrote 'Upon Julia's sweat' in 1648 within which he described the natural scent of a pure woman: 'Let her breath, or let her blow, All rich spices thence will flow.'⁶⁷ However, such a trust in the stability of moral smells had waned by this time, as Milner stipulates that in the seventeenth century many grew apprehensive that 'the most dangerous vices were those that had the veneer of virtue.'⁶⁸ Existing alongside the Virgin was the antithetic seductress who used scent and sexuality to seduce men away from God. English author Richard Braithwait warns in his 1630 publication *The English Gentleman* that male readers should be wary of women 'who hath deckt her bed with ornaments, carpets and laces...and perfuming her bed with Myrrh, Aloes and Cynamon.'⁶⁹ Smith further argues that the 'spicy signature of the hyper-sexualised woman'⁷⁰ was

⁶⁶ C. Wooglar, *The social life of the senses: Experiencing the self, others and the environment* in Newhauser (ed.), *Cultural History of the Senses in the Middle Ages*. p. 34

⁶⁷ R. Herrick, 'Upon Julia's Sweat,' *Hesperides* (1648) <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/herrick/robert/hesperides/complete.html#section719> [Accessed 17 April 2016]

⁶⁸ Milner, *The senses in religion* in Roodenburg (eds.), *Cultural History of the Senses in the Renaissance*. p. 94

⁶⁹ Richard Braithwait, *The English Gentleman* (1630) (Bristol: Thoemmes Press, 1994) p. 24

⁷⁰ Smith, *Sensory History*. p. 66

indicative of a marginalised woman, one whose scent betrayed her perversions to the inhaler. What can be seen from these texts, however, is that the scent of the woman was the most ambiguous of all, informed by male desire and religious context. On the one hand, the image of the intoxicating, beautiful and humble woman remained in popular culture, but on the other, availability of air correction introduced a doubt detrimental to such women's reputations. Women are thus awarded with an intrinsic smell based on their fulfilment of acceptable female characteristics. Woodall, operating within the homosocial male environment of medicine and the English navy, embodies an inherently masculine perspective on women, and therefore their absence in his work is worthy of comment. It is possible that Woodall wrote intending for his work to be read by both genders, mentioning some recipes to be carried by 'man or woman'⁷¹ as part of his efforts to make his work more widely applicable.

Yet *The Surgeon's Mate* presents an opportunity to understand the seventeenth century woman through the eyes of the medical profession. The fact that Woodall mentions some concoctions specifically for the 'tender woman'⁷² implies an understanding of certain female's vulnerabilities. Therefore, just as a child must be treated differently because of fears surrounding poor reception to vapours, so must remedies be separately devised for any fragile, feminine body. Classen postulates that such females were thought to be a 'half-baked' version of the male counterpart; incomplete and prone to the wet and cold humours.⁷³ A continuation of this brings in the work of John Sadler, an English academic who wrote in 1636 that to cure a hysterical woman, the physician must 'apply to the nose Assa faetida' and 'provoke her to sneeze, by blowing up into her nose the powder of castor, white

⁷¹ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 338

⁷² Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 360

⁷³ Classen, *Colour of Angels*. p. 64

pepper.⁷⁴ Meanwhile, the midwife is implored to ‘tak oyle of lillies, marjerom, and baye” and “put it up into the neck of the wombe.”⁷⁵ What is significant about this account is that it describes an unpleasant purging of the female body for the purpose of repositioning the womb, the rising of which was thought to provoke hysteria in women.⁷⁶ The technique is a survival of a treatment of the Middle Ages for the same affliction, indicating that not only that scent in medicine could be gender specific, but that there was a tradition of its effectiveness. In this line of thought, the seductress perhaps behaves in such a tempestuous manner because of her inhalation of counterfeited sweet scents which caused her womb to rise. Evans explores the possibility that vapours were used to both diagnose and treat female barrenness and fertility in the seventeenth century⁷⁷ and that treatments were made available for women to perform at home. This may have been in order to instil a sense of female dignity as well as for the protection of the male physician’s reputation. It appears that scents in the context of the medical female body were becoming increasingly specialist into the seventeenth century and something that Woodall neglects to address beyond recognising particularly tender women. This is significant as it demonstrates either his lack of experience in treating women, or his lack of interest. However, his encouragement of domestic remedies and self-medicative techniques for women further supports a privatisation of scent.

The nose could no longer be trusted to deliver a clear view of the disposition of an individual. This is especially applicable when discerning female virtue as a continuation of the theme of religious destabilisation of scent creating a morally ambiguous olfactory landscape. Furthermore,

⁷⁴ John Sadler, *The Sick Womans Private Looking-glasse: Wherein Methodically are handled all Uterine Affects, or Diseases Arising from the Wombe*, (1636) p. 71 <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/A11278.0001.001?view=toc> [Accessed 30 March 2016]

⁷⁵ John Sadler, *Sick Womans Private Looking-glasse*. p. 73

⁷⁶ Bynum and Porter (eds.), *Medicine and the five senses*. p. 65

⁷⁷ J. Evans, ‘Female barrenness, bodily access and aromatic treatments in seventeenth-century England,’ *Institute of Historical Research*, vol. 87, no. 237 (August 2014) p. 427

concerns over the scent of the divine triggered anxieties over distinguishing the scent of evil and it is in the seductress that this imagination converges, igniting fears about the hidden evil of women.

Characterisation of the supernatural in the seventeenth century can be divided into two subcategories; the terrestrial and the extra-terrestrial. The terrestrial is the witch on earth, a power born into an earthly body and exercised through an individual to sinister ends. The extra-terrestrial refers to powers beyond the earthy realm which are mastered and controlled by superhuman entities. Such a characterisation includes the progression of the plague as well as possession and demonic presence. Crucially, the supernatural cannot, in many cases, be identified by visual consensus. This ambiguity and fear of this Other forced a reliance on scent for its distinction.

Alongside the seductress, witches were also a sensory antithesis to the virgin. They indulged in their senses and manipulated the sense of others where the virgin respectfully exercised control. It is in the context of possession that Woodall defines the gender of the victim, as vapours which 'invade *him* at unawares',⁷⁸ implying an inadvertent stereotyped female architect of pestilence. In Reginald Scott's *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* published in 1584, he describes how witches are 'so troubled with evill humors, that out go their venomous exhalations' which are 'conveyed through the nostrils and mouth, etc, to the bewitching of whatsoever it meet.'⁷⁹ Later, in 1685, Scottish demonologist George Sinclair demonstrates in *Satan's Invisible World* that this belief continued, and that a 'witch sendeth forth from her heart thorow her eyes venomous and poysonful Spirits as Rayes.'⁸⁰ Witches supposedly used a variety of

⁷⁸ Woodall, Surgeon's Mate. p. 324

⁷⁹ R. Scott, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584) p. 227 <https://ia800201.us.archive.org/32/items/discoverieofwitic00scot/discoverieofwitic00scot.pdf> [Accessed 18 April 2016]

⁸⁰ G. Sinclair, *Satan's Invisible World* (1685) quoted in Classen, *Colour of Angels*. p. 81

herbs and spices in creating elaborate potions and smells, yet what is fascinating is that the witch's spells were effective for precisely the reason that Woodall's concoctions worked on the humorous and susceptible body. In this way, it seems that the early modern body was in constant danger, perpetuating the concept that pestilent vapours must be balanced by favourable, medicinal counterparts. Also apparent is that witches were not just creating scents deliberately through spells, they also exuded a repulsive vapour due to their rejection of the Holy spirit and myriad of social transgressions. Men could not so readily fall into the category of the witch as they were neither as sensual nor vulnerable to scent as women. Yet Classen implies that after the religious deodorisation of the previous century, Witchcraft may have been the only remaining outlet through which women could exercise power.⁸¹ Furthermore, Roper adds that a history of witchcraft would not be complete without taking 'account the extent to which irrational, deep and unconscious feeling can determine human action.'⁸² Concerns about the power of witches through deliberate scented bewitchment and inherent smell ties very closely with ideas surrounding the scent of the morally corrupt soul and the physical effect of living vapours.

Witches had the social advantage of being grounded in a physical body, yet there were other concerns that the atmosphere was filled with an invisible pestilence. Ekirch implies that in the early modern era, there was a belief that night descended as noxious vapours,⁸³ demonstrable by the perceived frequency of deaths at night. Nevertheless, Woodall recommends the harvesting of the younger Hemlocke plant in one of his preventative recipes to be gathered when 'the Moone being in the signe Aries or Libra, and before the full of the moone.'⁸⁴ In this he demonstrates

⁸¹ Classen, *Colour of Angels*. p. 82

⁸² L. Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil: Witchcraft, Sexuality and Religion in Early Modern Europe*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 218

⁸³ A. R. Ekirch, *At Day's Close: A History of the Nighttime*, Phoenix (London 2005). p. 12

⁸⁴ Woodall, *Surgeon's Mate*. p. 192

an investment in the power of the moon, curious but significant in a medical treatise, and one which reflects a belief that its presence might alters the potency of substances. A symbol of insanity and the supernatural, the moon was thought to facilitate cold and wet humours as the antithesis to the hot, dry sun.⁸⁵ This not only gave it feminine connotations, but also awarded it a unique power over the imagination. Yet if evil could be smelt in bad air, and bad air had power to enter the body, then the next fear was the invasion of the body by such noxious spirits. Woodall uses his treatise to inform readers of the ‘supernatural causes of the plague’ and warn how such odiferous vapours could ‘... seaseth upon, invadeth and possesseth mans body.’⁸⁶ Roper suggests that exorcisms enjoyed a new vogue during the seventeenth century as Catholics tried to prove the superiority of their sensory-based religion.⁸⁷ Milner elaborates upon this, adding that the demoniac in the early modern period was a demonstration of how susceptible the senses were to outside influence,⁸⁸ something that could be remedied by inhaling God’s divinity. Evidently from Woodall’s account, fears surrounding possession had become so acute that they were believed to exist in the air of the plague and that inhalation of it surmounted to submission. What is most significant is that the potential for possession from supernatural airs remained while the cure for them, inhalation of the divine, lost favour. This converged to create an intense fear of the invisible and the unexplainable. Moreover, Woolgar asserts that smell could detect the ‘celestial and diabolical,’⁸⁹ an idea that ties closely with detecting that which evades the higher senses. Smell could be said to take advantage of its liminal status here, being the only bodily sense that transcends worldly boundaries.

⁸⁵ Ekirch, *Day’s Close*. p. 12

⁸⁶ Woodall, *Surgeon’s Mate*. p. 323

⁸⁷ Roper, *Oedipus and the Devil*. p. 24

⁸⁸ Milner, *Senses in Religion* in Roodenburg (ed.) *Cultural History of the senses in the Renaissance*. p. 90

⁸⁹ Woolgar, *Senses in late Medieval England*. p. 145

What is clear is that fear underpins constructions of scent and the supernatural, both in its invisible presence as well as its increased potency due to the fading scent of the divine. Perhaps this contributed to the acceleration of the witch hunts around this time, as loss of divine smell and deodorisation of the city increased the sensitivity of the seventeenth century nose to smells of corruption.

Conclusion

The effect of the role of scents and changing attitudes towards their utilisation contributed to a trend of olfactory privatisation and social distancing in seventeenth-century England. It could no longer be the exclusive property of the church and it wasn't under the control of the city officials as deodorisation measures removed a typical city smell. Medicine, whilst the source of scent prescriptions, relinquished control to the population and encouraged self-medicating techniques such as those in *The Surgeon's Mate*. Smell thus became separate from the collective. Good and bad scents were still there, but the margins for distinction had become so immense and so subjective that smell's significance was perceived to have evaporated. What remained in reality were close associations with smell and morality, subversion and status which informed cultural attitudes and shaped wider social categories despite the Western shift to literacy. Whilst it is close to impossible to identify how far Woodall's work influenced, or was influenced by, popular belief about smell, it is obvious from its numerous editions and affiliations with the monarch that it was in high demand. His insight has therefore revealed that smell had far from lost its control over the imagination in the seventeenth century.

This dissertation has demonstrated that smell was fundamental to early modern thought, and as such is impossible to overlook as an influence on cultural attitudes and behaviours. Privatisation made scent appear devalued, but the deodorising effect of institutions in the seventeenth century such as the city and the church awarded smell new significance to the individual as a means of controlling the visible and identifying the invisible.

Smell is fascinating because today it has become an undervalued sense. In a study conducted in the 1990s, subjects chose smell as the sense that they would most readily give up.⁹⁰ Modernity has deodorised

⁹⁰ Drobnick, *Smell Culture Reader*. p. 2

the world and replaced olfactory perception with synthetic impostors, effectively stripping smell of its use as a distinguisher of class, morality and spirituality. Classen, Synnot and Howes reflect that modern scents 'are evocative of things which are not there, of presences which are absent.'⁹¹ Perfumes are floral without ever having seen a flower as they now present an olfactory shadow rather than a true smell. Scent has become so commercialised and so easily manipulated that imagination in modern society neglects its importance. Perhaps the very fact that foods and perfumes are awarded synthetic scents can be seen as an indication that the population remains enthralled by the physiological powers of smell.

'Although to some extent smell remains a mystery,' claims Reinartz, 'scents have always been an integral part of people's lives, possessing distinctive and often shared meanings.'⁹² It is the origin of these shared meanings of smell that historians must work to uncover, as well as how far they were shaped by, and in turn dictated, the English imagination.

⁹¹ Classen, Howes and Synnot, *Aroma*. p. 205

⁹² Reinartz, *Past Scents*. p. 18

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