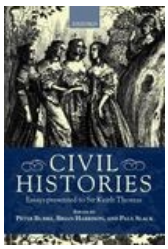

Civil Histories: Essays Presented to Sir Keith Thomas

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CHAPTER

7 Civilization and Deodorization? Smell in Early Modern English Culture

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Abstract

This chapter explores the meanings of certain smells in early modern England based on previous studies that suggested that perceptions are culturally mediated. It challenges narratives about smell and civilization which argue that the remote past was marked by squalor and stench while modernity by a *nostalgie de la merde*, and that smell was more central to earlier societies than our own. It also examines the argument that simpler peoples and less literate cultures are more attuned to sounds, tactile experiences, and above all to variations in smell.

Keywords: smell, civilization, England, culture, nostalgie de la merde

Subject: Early Modern History (1500 to 1700), Social and Cultural History, British History

> An eminent professor of mathematicks affirmed to me, that, chancing one day in the heat of summer, with another mathematician…to pass by a large dunghil…in *Lincoln's-Inn Fields*, when they came to a certain distance from it, they were both…surprised to meet with a…strong smell of musk, (occasioned, probably, by a…kind of putrefaction,) which each was for a while shy of taking notice of, for fear his companion should have laughed at him for it; but, when they came much nearer…that pleasing smell was succeeded by a stink proper to such a heap of excrements.
>
> (Robert Boyle (1772))[1]

If natural philosopher acquaintances of Robert Boyle were reluctant to discourse about smells for fear of ridicule, university-based historians, seeking to establish the civil and cerebral nature of their discipline, were even warier of discussing such grossly corporeal themes.[2] Only a few social historians remarked upon the importance of smell in the cultures that they were studying. Keith Thomas, for instance, remarked how in witchcraft cases 'stinking…living-quarters were…taken as evidence' of animal familiars, noted the importance of odours in herbalists' classification of plants, and drew attention to the opinion of the eighteenth-century physician George Cheyne that God made horses' excrement sweet-smelling because humans would spend so much time near it.[3]

p. 128 With the recent somatic turn in the humanities, historians have begun to pay increasing attention to the history of sensibilities and the senses, including the olfactory. Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant* (1982; English translation, 1986) was indubitably *the* pioneer in this cultural history of smell. As Frank Kermode noted, it 'created…a stir…partly…because no respected historian had ever before written…so explicitly, about shit'.[4] Despite the unsystematic nature of its arguments and chronology, Corbin's work has been widely influential. But he was neither the sole progenitor of this new historiography, nor simply a historical byway in the denigration of sight in twentieth-century French thought.[5] Historians' interest in the olfactory coincided with an increased use of odours in representations of the past.

In 1984 the York Archaeological Trust opened Jorvik, one of the first museum experiences in which you could 'smell the past'. Despite the Adornoesque ruminations of some sniffy commentators, Jorvik essayed a pioneering new historical and museological poetics of the sensorium, which sought to communicate directly with the public.[6] No matter how much historians grub around in archives and no matter how colourful and evocative the vocabulary we employ, we are not going to produce work that is as pungent as the scratch and sniff cards of the Viking privy that you can buy at the end of your trip under Coppergate.[7] As Barthes concluded in his study of De Sade, 'Written down, shit does not smell; Sade can drench his partners in it, we receive no effluvia from it, only the abstract sign of something disagreeable.'[8] In history and anthropology the real and the written are inevitably severed.

Although Jorvik transgressively foregrounds behaviour normally confined to what Erving Goffman termed 'back space',[9] its smellscapes contain some highly conventional stories about history, hygiene, and olfaction. First, it reinscribes what the celebrated Chaucer scholar Terry Jones has dubbed the toilet-
p. 129 training theory of history—the notion that the remote past was marked by ↳ squalor and stench, and modernity by a *nostalgie de la merde*. The past, the visitor learns, *smelt*. These excremental odours construct a narrative of progress and deodorization. They reinforce the way in which dirt signifies otherness and the past in popular and not-so-popular historiography, and ignore how dirt is a culturally relative concept, being what offends 'the eye of the beholder', the nose of the inhaler, and the cultural rules of a particular society.[10] Secondly, the Jorvik experience (consciously or not) suggests that smell was more central to earlier societies than our own. Simpler peoples and less literate cultures, it is often argued, were more attuned to sounds, tactile experiences, and above all to variations in smell. Drawing on studies that stress how far perceptions are culturally mediated,[11] this paper will explore the meanings of certain smells in early modern England and challenge these two grand narratives of smell and civilization.

I

Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* is perhaps the most elegant and influential account of the devaluing of smell over the centuries. Significantly he related the repression of the olfactory and increasing recourse to 'modern' hygienic practices. 'The diminution of the olfactory stimuli' in human beings, he suggested, was a necessary part of 'the fateful process of civilization'. It was concomitant with the adoption of an upright gait. 'A social factor', he added, 'is also unmistakeably present in the cultural trend towards cleanliness…. The incitement to cleanliness originates in an urge to get rid of…excreta, which have become disagreeable to sense perceptions.' But this revulsion towards faeces 'would scarcely be possible if the substances that are expelled from the body were not doomed by their strong smells to share the fate which overtook olfactory stimuli after man adopted the erect posture'.[12]

Freud's speculations traversed a grandly Darwinian timescale; more historically minded thinkers have located similar shifts in the more recent past. Corbin suggested that between the mid-eighteenth and late nineteenth centuries urban space was deodorized. Other authors have claimed that the early modern period saw a significant shift from olfaction and from hearing to the cultural primacy of sight and that the

sixteenth century placed particular emphasis upon the sense of smell. 'Observation, from the seventeenth
p. 130 century ↳ onwards,' declared Foucault, 'is a perceptible knowledge furnished with a series of systematically negative conditions. Hearsay is excluded…so too are taste and smell.' 'The eye', declared Norbert Elias, 'takes on a very specific significance in civilized society,' becoming the principal 'mediator of pleasure'. Like touch, 'the sense of smell, the tendency to sniff at food or other things, comes to be restricted as…animal-like'.[13] 'Whereas today smell and taste are relatively unimportant by comparison with the other three senses,' wrote Robert Mandrou, 'the men of the sixteenth century were extremely susceptible to scents and perfumes.' Mandrou was developing Lucien Febvre's claim that the 'sixteenth century did not see first: it heard and smelled'. Its inhabitants, Febvre continued, 'were open-air men, seeing nature but also feeling, sniffing…breathing her'.[14] Like Freud, Mandrou and Febvre represent olfaction as a more 'natural' sense and as one that has atrophied with the development of culture.

Such ideas have a long pedigree. In 1667 Henry Oldenburg reported John Beale's suggestion that humans 'by…drink of water only, bread, and food of litle odor, clean lodgings &c. may have…a more universall extent in smelling, than Dogs or Vulturs'.[15] Meanwhile, in a narrative that anticipated the Enlightenment fascination with the sensory skills of the wild boy of Aveyron,[16] Kenelm Digby wrote of a boy who had grown up living alone in a forest in the Ardennes on a diet of roots and who consequently 'could att a great distance wind by his nose, where wholesome fruites or rootes did grow'. However, 'a litle while after he came to good keeping and full feeding, [he] quite lost that acutenesse of smelling'.[17]

Febvre's and Mandrou's portrayals of Ronsard and Rabelais as unalienated organic intellectuals sniffing the air is massively overdrawn. It is not as if sixteenth- and seventeenth-century people possessed a highly elaborated vocabulary for smells that has been lost over the last three hundred years. Tudor and Stuart people did not subtly distinguish between many different types of odour in the ways that the Inuit were once alleged to be capable of differentiating between a myriad qualities of snow.[18] Comenius's mid-seventeenth-
p. 131 century ↳ educational text *Orbis pictus* noted that the nose scented 'smels and stinks'—that was it.[19] Other early modern dictionaries reveal a similarly impoverished vocabulary with which to treat the sensations of the nose. Both the widely diffused iconography of the five senses,[20] and dominant strands of Aristotelian philosophy, concurred on the primacy of sight.[21]

Nevertheless, odours did arouse more explicit concerns in areas of early modern English culture than today. As Mary Dobson has recently shown, the olfactory quality of airs was a standard feature of topographical description.[22] Smells that we might consider simply unpleasant could be as fatal as mustard gas. During the late 1640s two London apprentices who had participated in Royalist demonstrations fled to Paris. There one of them fell ill. His companion's diary records that he came downstairs and met their landlord who 'made great complaints yt [he, the sick man] going to stoole in ye Chamber did anoy his howse & would bring the plague in his house…'. 'I made them answer', the diarist continues, 'yt what came from him [i.e. the sick apprentice] was only Jelly and water & had no sent', but nevertheless resolved that they should seek fresh accommodation.[23]

The landlord's fear of the disease-bringing power of smell would have made perfect sense on the other side of the Channel. Throughout the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the olfactory drove social policy with regard to the regulation of London's public space. An examination of the orders about street cleaning and environmental regulation throughout this period indicates that the City's mayors and aldermen were preoccupied with the extirpation of stench and noisome air. In June 1580, for instance, the Lord Mayor, Nicholas Woodroffe, ordered that the streets be cleansed and the kennels run for 'the Avoydinge of the infection of the plague and the lothesome Stinckes and savours that are in the severall streetes of this Cyttie'.[24] In May 1634 a precept complained that the streets were 'much annoyed with soyle, dunge and other noysome…things and by noysome smells therefrom arrisinge'; just over thirty years later another command explained that its purpose was 'to pr[e]vent those unsavory and noysome smells and stenches…

p. 132 wch hath a pestiferous Influence on Mans Body'.[25] Up till the final third of the ↳ seventeenth century their concern above all was to ensure that the streets and thoroughfares were kept clean and sweet.[26]

Preservatives against epidemic disease were similarly olfactory. In 1631 the mayor and aldermen of York recommended the use of sponges soaked with camphor and white wine vinegar to ward off the infection of the plague and ordered that all infected houses be perfumed with juniper, rosemary, bay leaves, vinegar, 'Tarr, pitch, or Rosin'.[27] In every plague epidemic in sixteenth-and seventeenth-century London churchwardens invested in frankincense and other fumigants to burn in vestry rooms and churches. The College of Physicians' official recommendations suggested a battery of pomanders, perfumes, and ferocious fumigants.[28] Among the alternatives listed in advice books were sniffing tarred rope or herbal nosegays. Thomas Dekker noted sardonically how during the London plague of 1603 'rosemary, which had wont to be sold for twelvepence an armful, went…for six shillings a handful'.[29]

Such smells were understood to have a direct effect upon the body. Aromatics consequently featured more prominently within early modern learned discourse than they do today. During the 1650s and 1660s, for instance, John Evelyn and John Beale entertained ambitious schemes for social, religious, and metaphysical transformation through the odours of flowers and blossoms, while the Royal Society discussed the effects of tobacco smoke and rank smells on silkworms.[30] Johanne St John's late-seventeenth-century collection of cures included the recommendation that you should sniff hot hog's dung to cure nosebleed and inhale the smoke of burning rosemary as a remedy for headache.[31] One remedy for the palsy was 'the strong scent…of a fox'. Combined with energetic rubbing of the head, it would disperse the humours to the outer parts of the body.[32]

Women, particularly their wombs, were held to be particularly sensitive to odours. The early seventeenth-century French surgeon Jean Guillemeau recommended that, if a woman retained the placenta after delivery, you should cause her 'to smell unto bad, and stinking odors, as old shoes, and Partridge feathers burnt, *Assafoetida, Rue*'. Applied to the nose, such vapours would cause the uterus to expel the afterbirth. Women with a post-partum hernia or prolapsed womb, by contrast, were to be treated with '*Pessaries,*
p. 133 *Parfumes'*, and '*Suffumigations*'. 'Let the woman', he wrote, 'receive this fume beneath, sitting ↳ in a chaire, with a hole in it,' and let the perfumes include assafoetida 'because the Matrice flyeth from any thing…of a bad savour'.[33] John Sadler, the Norwich physician, made similar recommendations for women suffering from suffocation of the mother. 'Hold under her nose *Partridge*: feathers haire and old shoes burnt', he wrote, 'and…other stinking things: for evill odours are an enemie to nature, hence the Animall spirits doe so…strive against them, that the naturall heate is thereby restored.'[34]

II

Many classical authors stated that pestilence originated in bad airs, but one can perhaps better grasp how smell could be interpreted as a direct threat to bodily health and integrity if one examines contemporary understandings of olfaction. As Richard Palmer has outlined, within Galenic physiology 'to smell' was to take a substance into the brain.[35] According to Galen, two projections reached from the front ventricle of the brain down to the cribriform plate that separates the nasal cavity from the brain. These 'horn-like processes' were not nerves, Galen's anatomy explained, but in 'substance…exactly like…the brain'.[36] Furthermore, Galenic physiology reckoned that the bony area at the back of the nasal fossae was permeable. It allowed catarrh—the waste product produced by the cooling of hot vapours rising to the brain—to escape and it allowed part of the air that you inhaled to enter the cerebellum. There airborne odours were received directly by these two projections and thence the sensation communicated to the sensus communis.[37]

This account was endorsed by Avicenna,[38] and remained dominant during the first century of the anatomical renaissance. Part of the 'breath that we draw' in, wrote John Banister in 1578, 'ascendyng up by

p. 134 the nostrels into these…litle holes…part of the breath…passeth this way into the brayne'.[39] Helkiah ↳ Crooke's *Microcosmographia* (published some forty years later) concurred. The nose, he wrote, 'leadeth the ayre, informed, as it were, with the formes of odours through the hole of the Spongie bone to the Mammillary processes as unto the principall organs of smelling'. He made the process clearer a few pages later: 'The Aire altred with Odors or by an aierie exhalation of odorifferous thinges is received by the Nose…'. At the top of the nostrils were two holes. The greater part of the air inhaled went to the lungs 'without any sense of odours; the rest ascendeth…to the instrume[n]ts of Smelling, but…is altred in the spongie bones' at the top of the nasal cavity. 'This aire thus altred in the Labyrinths of the spongie bones,' he continued, 'together with the species or forme of the odour passeth thorough the holes of the *Sive* [as he characterized these bones] into the *Mammillary processes*, or by them…is received and so conveyed to the common Sense…in the Braine.'[40] To, that is, the area of the brain that brought together the information provided by the five senses.

The boundaries of the human frame were thus permeable; what we might now term the olfactory environment penetrated the body and was absorbed by the brain. Consequently there were physiological reasons for Montaigne's declaration that odours altered his spirits 'according unto their strength and qualitie'.[41] Furthermore, some commentators argued that you were what you smelt as well as what you ate. There was a learned tradition deriving from the Pythagoreans that it was possible to be nourished from the smell of food and that Democrites sustained himself on the smell of honey or hot bread. Anatomists debated whether it was true that 'Cooks, who…are busie boyling and roasting viands for other men, doe receive so many odours from them that they scarse ever are hungry'.[42] By contrast, to ingest fetid smells was to introduce poison, 'a certaine venemous facultie', such as James VI and I detected in tobacco, 'to the braines'.[43] '*The best thing against the Plague*', therefore, was that 'In the morning before you go far from your habitation', you should 'wash your mouth with water and vineger…then drink a quarter of a spoonfull of the…liqour, and so press your nose, that your brain being freed from all externall ayre infected, may…by the vapour and steem held in your mouth, be moistned'.[44]

Over the seventeenth century the notion that air reached the brain was discredited as physicians reconceptualized the process of respiration after Harvey. Van Helmont argued forcefully that catarrh was
p. 135 nasal mucus, not phlegm produced by the cooling of animal spirits in the brain and excreted through the ↳ cribriform plate.[45] In the 1650s and 1660s Conrad Schneider, professor of medicine at Wittenburg, argued at great length and after much anatomical work that, although nerves ran through it, the forehead bone was not permeable.[46] Thomas Willis's and Robert Lower's research into cerebral anatomy reached similar conclusions. As Lower wrote in 1672,

> That nothing passes through the cribriform plate into the nostrils, is…proved by the conformation of this part of the body. For although in dry skulls the openings of this bone appear permeable and let light through, yet in a living creature they are wholly stuffed with the nerves and membranes coming from the olfactory bulbs…[47]

Doctors and other natural philosophers increasingly saw the *nerves* lining the upper part of the nose as the immediate organ of smell. Thomas Willis's anatomy of the brain explained,

> although many Nerves belong to the Organ of Smelling, yet that sense is properly performed by the Fibres interwoven in the inward Coat of the Nostrils: for those Fibres being struck by the sensible object, move and contract themselves…according to the Idea of the impression; which Affection of them being carried by the passage of the Nerves to the Head…[and] there staid by the common Sensory, causes the perception of the sense.[48]

It is tempting to link Galenic physiology in which the mammillary processes directly encountered the air to Bakhtin's arguments, developed recently by Barbara Duden and Ulinka Rublack, about the openness of the

early modern body, which continually 'swallows the world and is itself swallowed by the world'.[49] The shift towards nervous perception could then be seen as part of the emergence of the 'more tightly sealed, more
p. 136 leakproof' *homo clausus* of modernity.[50] Although by *c.*1700 both olfaction and hearing had come to be ↳ understood in terms of nerves rather than internal air or *pneuma*,[51] we should resist such lines of interpretation. First, as many authors on eighteenth-century sensibility have demonstrated, the sensitive nerves of the man of feeling intensified the physical bond between the individual and the world around him: he was anything but sealed off from his surroundings.[52]

Secondly, claims that there was a shift from an open to a closed body hugely oversimplify the variety of physiological models in the pro-modern world. Just as not every account of the early modern body placed biological sex upon a continuum,[53] so not every sixteenth-century understanding of olfactory perception considered the brain to be as permeable as did the Galenic model. The Pythagorean belief that you could survive on the odour of food was widely discussed, but it was generally rejected for many of the same reasons that Aristotle advanced in *De sensu*. Moreover, the Aristotelian account of olfaction drew an ontological distinction between smells and vapours that is blurred in many cultural histories of perception. For Aristotle, and after him Averroes, odour was a dry exhalation that was transmitted through pneuma—air. It was a *species—an* immaterial quality possessed by and diffused from an object—not itself a form of vapour.[54] Throughout the Middle Ages and thereafter there was a debate over whether smell was a physical entity that was taken into the body, or an immaterial sign, transmitted through the air that you breathed in, and that the human mind could detect.[55]

This uncertainty permeates many early modern accounts of olfaction. Crooke, for instance, entangles the two, writing that odours could affect the body, sustain life, and so on, if the effect 'be understoode [to be] of that vaporous or aerie exhalation…wherein the odour is transported'. But, 'if we understand by odours the simple obiect of the smell, naked and separated from exhalations', then such claims were utterly false. For 'of an odour considered by it selfe and separately there is no knowledge, for so considered it is nothing, neither doth it fall under Sense, but as it is ioyned with the exhalation it mooveth the Sense and…falleth under Science or knowledge'.[56]

More importantly, learned physiology may have closed off the human brain from direct contamination by
p. 137 the odours of life, but doctors and laypeople ↳ continued to be acutely conscious of the physical effects of particular smells upon the body—whether that impact was understood in terms of the chemical composition of these odours, the size and shape of the particles that comprised them, or their putrefying qualities. They thus attached great significance to the airs that one inhaled. Sir Richard Blackmore's 1725 *Treatise on the Vapours and the Spleen* was couched in iatromechanical terms, focusing on the tone of the nervous fibres. But he acknowledged that 'sweet and disagreeable Odours', 'by their Impulses and Impressions on the Spirits in the Brain, continued…by the Mediation of the Nerves to the inferior…Parts' of the body, could produce fainting, fits, convulsions, and palpitations of the heart. Like Sadler, a hundred years before, he reckoned that 'outward Remedies of a…foetid Scent' were of benefit to hysterical patients, though he cautioned readers about the dangers of traditional and (in his opinion) overstrong scents like burning feathers.[57]

Moreover, the neo-Hippocratic strands within Restoration and Augustan medicine probably increased the attention paid to the environmental origins of disease. Smell was often treated as indicating bad air *and* as being bad air. More importantly, throughout the early modern period and long into the nineteenth century airs were held materially to affect those who experienced them and who took them into their bodies. In the eighteenth century fears about the link between bad air and disease inspired innovations such as the erection of windmills to ventilate Newgate prison.[58] As William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine* (1772) warned, 'unwholesome air is a very common cause of diseases'; 'what goes into the lungs', he continued, was more dangerous than food or drink.[59]

Furthermore, throughout this period airs were the object of intense natural philosophical analysis, involving air pumps, retorts full of nitrous oxide, or diverse experiments *en plein air;* no matter what Foucault may have said in *The Order of Things*, smell continued to provide experimenters with valued information. Robert Boyle, for instance, recorded how he

> inquired of my Lord of *Sandwich*…whether it be true which is reported of the Purity of the Air at *Madrid*, that though they have no Houses of Office, but every Night throw out their Excrements into the Streets, yet by the Morning there remains no more Smell of them. To which I was answered, That 'twas true the Excrements were so disposed of, but that *Madrid* is the stinkingst Town they ever came into.[60]

Claims for a fundamental shift in the cultural significance of olfaction during the early modern period thus
p. 138 seem to be at best overdrawn and at ↳ worst misguided. Indeed, framing research in terms of whether there was a fundamental sensory tranformation, a shift from an odoriphile to an odoriphobe culture,[61] seems an unhelpfully crude way of approaching the cultural history of the senses and of scents. Not only is experience fundamentally synesthetic,[62] but people exploited (and exploit) their senses in different ways in different contexts, whether in cooking, dairying, carving, practising medicine, studying, or whatever. The practices of everyday life do not observe a fixed hierarchy of the senses; Corbin's call for historians to examine 'the hierarchy of the representations and uses of the senses at the heart of a culture' is thus utterly impossible, because such a research project would require us to be able to determine the heart of a society.[63] Nor, furthermore, are odours banished together. One odour can be decried while another is celebrated and cherished. It is surely more productive to begin to trace a history of smells, exploring the cultural meanings of particular odours in specific locations or within particular discourses, rather than a history of smell. I conclude, therefore, with a brief exploration of such a case study—the history of the smell of garlic (with occasional digressions into the olfactory history of onions and leeks).

III

The English aversion to the smell of garlic is stereotypically one aspect of the Victorian repression of sensuality swept away in the 1960s in a process initiated a decade earlier by Elizabeth David's *Mediterranean Food*, the preface of which evoked the interwar Mediterranean through the southern smells of garlic and rosemary.[64] I began research expecting to trace how first polite and then popular culture gradually rejected the herb as distasteful and foreign. However, early modern recipe collections, herbals, and household manuals do not suggest that Mrs Beeton's neglect of the root (garlic appears only in a faintly alarming Anglo-Indian curry recipe) was simply the result of nineteenth-century sensory deprivation. Rather, there is considerable evidence of English aversion to the pungent herb in previous centuries. By the mid-eighteenth century such discourse had permeated the political language of the urban middling sort. Rioters in Bristol in the 1750s apparently shouted out 'No Jews! No French…No Lowering Wages…to 4d. a Day and
p. 139 Garlick!' In Hogarth's painting *Calais Gate* (1749), the indigent ↳ Scottish exile in the foreground has, some scholars suggest, been reduced to eating garlic.[65]

While this construction of garlic-hating and xenophobic (particularly anti-French) Englishness probably intensified during the eighteenth century, there were many hostile or comic representations of the root throughout the early modern period. Garlic was included in the culinary anti-masque of Ben Jonson's *Neptune's Triumph*. As Culpeper wrote in 1653, the 'offensiveness of the breath of him that hath eaten Garlick will lead you by the Nose to the knowledg hereof'.[66] Describing roughly contemporaneous experiments into odours, Robert Boyle wrote how he had placed a 'fragrant liquor in stopped glasses…in a warm place'. After a while he found it 'so to degenerate in…scent, that one would have thought it to have been strongly infected with garlick'.[67] Whereas by the 1590s leek-eating was presented as particularly Welsh,[68] other national

groups were denigrated by portraying them as raising and eating garlic. Samuel Colvil's late-seventeenth-century satire depicted louse-ridden Scottish Presbyterians and their Whig allies dining enthusiastically on pigs' tails and garlic, while another Hudibrastic satire of Scotland published a couple of years before the Union wrote dismissively of how north of the border

> The pregnant Roots that in the Garden settles
> Are Garlick, Poppies, Artichoks and Nettles.[69]

In the 1690s John Evelyn declared that, though garlic was 'both by *Spaniards* and *Italians*, and the more Southern People, familiarly eaten', he reckoned it 'more proper for our Northern Rustics…living in *Uliginous* and moist places, or such as use the *Sea*'.[70]

Importantly all these groups were poor. The reek of garlic was a marker of social (and not just national) distinction throughout the early modern period, as it had been in the classical world.[71] Many authors wrote of the stinking breath of the common people; garlic regularly functioned as a sign of poverty and of rusticity, contrasted with the costly scents of spices and perfumes. In *Measure for Measure*, for instance, Lucio declares that the Duke was so lecherous that he 'would mouth with a beggar though she smelt brown bread and garlic'.[72]

p. 140 However, even when it was serving as an olfactory marker of alterity, garlic was a complex image. In the Roman world garlic was generally associated with the rustic and the barbarian, but was often represented as preferable to the perfumed and effeminate breath of the flatterer.[73] Similarly, on occasions in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries garlic and onions symbolized simple and authentic society or pious retreat. Arthur Warren's early seventeenth-century *Poverties Patience*, for instance, contrasted the terror of the rich man expecting to be poisoned at every feast with the carefree diet of the poor.

> Rootes, Onions, garlick, and the Hermits meale,
> Proves better feasting then this dangerous fare.[74]

Nor was a distaste for garlic an uncontentious expression of English national public opinion. The power of Hogarth's images, for instance, stemmed from their role in debates about the nature of Englishness in artistic style and in cultural forms. As with language and manners, garlic's French associations were enormously attractive to sections of eighteenth-century polite society.[75] Indeed, garlic featured in the 'overheated' sauces and cullis fashionable in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and condemned by many moralistic and patriotic commentators.[76]

Garlic, like onion, was seen as heating—it was hot in the third or fourth degree, most herbals reckoned.[77] While thus good for asthmatics and those with cold, watery stomachs, this natural heat gave both roots, from the Middle Ages onwards, an association with lust. William Turner, for instance, noted in the 1550s that garlic stirred men to venery; Chaucer's Summoner, afflicted with a loathsome skin condition, was exceedingly partial to onions, garlic, and strong red wine and kept a concubine.[78] Such moral connotations were strengthened by garlic's walk-on part in the Bible. When the Israelites were crossing the desert, they complained that in Egypt they had dined on fish, onions, and garlic, not to mention melons and cucumbers; now they had to subsist on boring old manna.[79] Pious authors thus regularly used garlic to symbolize sensuality and its loathsomeness. The Puritan minister William Attersoll commented, 'In these words we see how carnall men conceive carnal things. They prefer their trash before Manna,' reminding his readers that 'all ye wealth of the world…is no better then onyons and garlike in comparison of spirituall things'.[80] As
p. 141 the poet, John Collop, asked in 1656, ↳

> Can *Egypts* garlick, we or onyons need?
> On th'milk of th'word can't our youth better feed?[81]

Furthermore, if, as such authors reiterated, carnality was a false god, what better demonstration could there be of this than Pliny's account of 'the foolish superstition of the Ægyptians, who use to sweare by Garlicke and Onions, calling them to witnesse in taking their othes, as if they were no lesse than…gods'?[82] This story was energetically reworked by Juvenal in his fifteenth satire, and many early modern versifiers exploited the topos for all it was worth. In *The Overthrow of the Gout*, for instance, Barnaby Googe, reminded the sore-toed

> Bothe Garlick, Rue and Onions soure
> expel them far from thee:
> Although the fond Egiptians doo:
> suppose them Gods to be.[83]

By the late seventeenth century the image had not only been incorporated into Hobbes's catalogue of possible gods,[84] but was finding its way into the language of philosophical denigration and even political ephemera. William Petty, for instance, dismissed the 'Vaporous garlick & onions of phantasmaticall seeming philosophy',[85] while one satirical poem on Titus Oates declared,

> Th'Egptians once (tho' it seems odd)
> Did worship *Onyons* for a *God*;
> And poor peel'd *Garlick* was with them
> Esteem'd beyond the greatest *Gemm*…[86]

Before we conclude that garlic-hating was a timeless peculiarity of the English, however, we need to look at other strands of discourse about the root. Commenting on the lines in Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in which Menenius dismisses the commoners' opinions as the 'breath of garlic-eaters', E. K. Chambers rather literal-mindedly wrote in 1898 that 'Apparently the lower class Londoner ate more garlic than he does today.' In fact, the evidence for the practice is somewhat contradictory. Garlic seems to have been used quite extensively in the Middle Ages, suggesting that the City parish of St James Garlickhithe was, in the words of the Elizabethan chronicler John Stow, an area where 'of old time…Garlicke was usually solde'.[87] In 1333–4
p. 142 the garden of Glastonbury Abbey supplied the monks with 8,000 heads of garlic; ↳ medieval household and garden accounts make fairly regular reference to the herb.[88] In the 1550s William Turner described common or garden garlic as 'good meat', and other subsequent herbals noted that country people ate wild garlic.[89] However, other early modern writers declared that most of their contemporaries did not use the root for culinary purposes. The herbalist John Parkinson observed in 1629 that

> The old World, as wee finde in Scripture…and no doubt long before, fed much upon Leekes, Onions, and Garlicke boyled with flesh; and the antiquity of the Gentiles relate the same manner of feeding on them, to be in all Countries the like, which howsoever our dainty age now refuseth wholly, in all sorts except the poorest…[90]

Yet garlic *was* being cultivated and used. It appears occasionally in seventeenth-century household accounts; Gervase Markham's *English Housewife* (1615) advised that in February the good wife should sow garlic alongside other herbs. A century later Hannah Glasse's cookbook listed garlic among the products of the kitchen garden, while its 1796 edition listed garlic among the vegetables in season in February and March and from July to December.[91]

Not the least of its uses would have been medicinal. Culpeper may have decried its stench, but he also recognized it as a powerful and efficacious herb. As commentator after commentator from the early sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries observed, Galen designated it the poor man's mithridate (or cure all).[92] As Sir John Harington's translation of the School of Salernum noted, garlic did not just make you wink and stink, it protected you against all kinds of diseases.[93] Taken internally, it killed worms; it was
p. 143 recommended for animal bites and as a protection against stagnant water.[94] By the 1790s ↳ some doctors

regarded garlic as, in Dr William Lewis's words, 'not only an offensive, but...a noxious drug', but other health advice books continued to recommend its therapeutic possibilities. Indeed its efficacy as a cure for tuberculosis found professional medical advocates during the early twentieth century.[95]

IV

This brief survey has delineated some of the multifaceted meanings of one smell and its representations. It has deliberately resisted the tendency in many histories of the senses to generalize about the sensory regime of an entire culture or to discourse about modernity. The sense of smell has a rich and various history, but we need to get away from grand evolutionary narratives such as Donald Lowe's *History of Bourgeois Perception*. In such histories of the sensorium, sight is always triumphing just as the middle class is always rising. In Georg Simmel's words, 'modern social life increases in ever growing degree the rôle of mere visual impression'.[96]

Most authors discussing the cultural history of the senses seem to assume that their interrelations constitute a zero-sum game—that any increase in the cultural significance of one sense automatically means an equal devaluing of another. Even though clinical psychologists working with blind and partially sighted people report that their sense of hearing may become more developed, there is no logical reason why the enhancing of one faculty should lead to a decline in another.[97] Moreover, it is not, I think, at the moment productive to ask whether olfaction played a greater or lesser role in modern and pre-modern cultures, or to ponder whether printing, Albertian perspective, or the telescope marked the decisive victory of ocularcentrism and the traumatic mirror phase of Western history.

We need to distinguish more clearly between the two narratives of deodorization that I outlined in my introduction and that Freud wove so artfully together. Cultures may banish faecal or other odours from public space without devaluing odours or olfaction in general.[98] Pronouncements like Zygmunt Bauman's that 'Scents had no room in the shiny temple of perfect order modernity set out to erect' sound very grand,
p. 144 but a cursory examination of nineteenth- or twentieth-century culture reveals the complete vacuity ↳ of such claims—after all, the deodorized house smelt *fresh*.[99] Every deodorizing is another olfactory encoding.

My ideas are partly inspired by recent lines of writing within the history and anthropology of literacy. Anthropologists and historians once linked the acquisition of writing with a fundamental mental transformation and a major realignment of the senses—the domestication of the savage mind. Increasingly, however, they are unwilling to categorize the peoples that they study as literate or illiterate in the style of UN education programmes. Many prefer to talk about *literacies*, recognizing that reading and writing constitute a range of practices just as, as Keith Thomas showed, they did in early modern society.[100] Perhaps the history of the senses should develop this kind of multiple ethnography and abandon its attempts to sniff out the origins of the modern sensorium.

Notes

I am grateful to the audiences in Cambridge, Leicester, and London who commented on my papers on smell in early modern England, and to Fay Bound, Justin Champion, James Robertson, Jenny Smith, and Adrian Wilson. Above all my profound thanks to Patricia Greene for her encouragement and her perceptive comments.

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3 K. Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (1971), 731; *Man and the Natural World: Changing Attitudes in England 1500–1800* (1983), 53, 82, 19.

4 F. Kermode, 'With the Aid of a Lorgnette', *London Review of Books*, 16/8 (28 Apr. 1994), 14.

5 M. Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1993).

6 On its search for directness, see P. V. Addyman, 'Reconstruction as Interpretation: The Example of the Jorvik Viking Centre, York', in P. Gathercole and D. Lowenthal (eds.), *The Politics of the Past* (1990), 259–63.

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