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Chapter 6

Pissing Glass and the Body Crass: Adaptations of the Scatological in Théophile

Russell Ganim

Introduction

Examination of scatological motifs in Théophile de Viau's (1590-1626) libertine, or 'cabaret' poetry is important in terms of how the scatological contributes to the depiction of the Early Modern body in the French lyric.¹ This essay does not examine Théophile's portrait of the body strictly in terms of the 'Baroque' or the 'neo-Classical.' Rather, it argues that the scatological context in which he situates the body (either his, or those of others), reflects a keen sensibility of the body representative of the transition between these two eras. Théophile reinforces what Bernard Beugnot terms the body's inherent 'eloquence' (17), or what Patrick Dandrey describes as an innate 'textuality' in what the body 'writes' (31), and how it discloses meaning. The poet's scatological lyric, much of which was published in the *Pamasse Satyrique* of 1622, projects a different view of the body's 'eloquence' by depicting a certain realism and honesty about the body as well as the pleasure and suffering it experiences. This Baroque realism, which derives from a sense of the grotesque and the salacious, finds itself in conflict with the Classical body which is frequently characterized as elegant, adorned, and 'domesticated' (Beugnot 25). Théophile's private body is completely exposed, and, unlike the public body of the court, does not rely on masking and pretension to define itself. Mitchell Greenberg contends that the body in late sixteenth-century and early seventeenth-century French literature is often depicted in a chaotic manner because, 'the French body politic was rent by tumultuous religious and social upheavals' (62).² While one could argue that Théophile's portraits of a syphilis-ridden narrators are more a reflection of his personal agony rather than that of France as a whole, what emerges in Théophile is an emphasis on the movement, if not decomposition of the body.³ Given Théophile's public persona and the satirical dimension of his work, it is difficult to imagine that the degeneration he portrays is limited only to his individual experience. On a collective level, Théophile reflects what Greenberg calls 'a continued, if skewed apprehension of the world in both its physical and metaphysical dimensions'

(62–3) typical of the era. To a large extent, the body Théophile depicts is a scatological body, one whose deterioration takes the form of waste, disease, and evacuation as represented in both the private and public domain.

Of course, one could cast aside any serious reading of Théophile's libertine verse, and virtually all of scatological literature for that matter, as an immature indulgence in the prurient. Nonetheless, it was for his dissolute behavior and his scatological poetry that Théophile was imprisoned and condemned to death. Consequently, this part of his work merits serious consideration in terms of the personal and poetic (if not occasionally political) statement it represents. With the exception of Claire Gaudiani's outstanding critical edition of Théophile's cabaret lyric, there exist no extensive studies of the poet's libertine oeuvre.⁴ Clearly however, these poems should be taken seriously with respect to their philosophical and aesthetic import. As a consequence, the objective becomes that of enhancing the reader's understanding of the lyric contexts in which Théophile's scatological offerings situate themselves. Structurally, the reader sees how the poet's libertine oeuvre is just that — an integrated work in which the various components correspond to one another to set forth a number of approaches from which the texts are to be read. These points of view are not always consistent, and Théophile cannot be thought of as writing in a sequential manner along the lines of devotional Baroque poets such as Jean de La Ceppède and Jean de Sponde. However, there is a tendency not to read these poems in their vulgar totality, and to overlook the formal and substantive unity in this category of Théophile's work. The poet's resistance to poetic and cultural standards takes a profane, if not pornographic form because it seeks to disgust and arouse while denigrating the self, the lyric other, and the reader. Théophile's pornography makes no distinction between the erotic and scatological. The poet conflates sex and shit because they present a double form of protest to artistic and social decency while titillating and attacking the reader's sensibilities. Examination of the repugnant gives way to a cathartic experience which yields an understanding of, if not ironic delight in, one's own filthy nature.

The Lighter Side of Libertinage: 'A un marquis'

Initial analysis of Théophile's cabaret lyric requires a more precise definition of what is meant by the 'scatological' and the 'libertine.' In the strict physical sense of the term, the 'scatological' refers to excrement, particularly urine and feces. However, human waste also includes various bodily emanations such as mucous, genital discharge, and sweat. For Théophile, the focus is on urine, as well as these non-fecal emissions, all of which are by-products of his ongoing battle with syphilis. Théophile's fixation on the anus also reinforces the scatological nature of certain poems. Such a dimension is further developed by the idea that from an aesthetic standpoint, scatology denotes what the *Oxford English Dictionary* terms as 'filthy literature.' Through this description, readers establish the link between the scatological and the libertine. Certainly, many definitions of the word *libertin*

existed in the early seventeenth century, but most dealt with sexual freedom and/or atheism (Perceau 11). The raw sexuality and physicality of Théophile's verse, which led to his persecution by the Jesuits, clearly engendered the view that this part of the poet's oeuvre corrupted both social and moral order.

Despite the agony Théophile endured by his own hand through venereal disease, and by the hand of the Church in the form of condemnation, the inherently hedonistic aspects of Théophile's life and letters play a major role in setting the tone of his cabaret poetry. One work which stands out as an unabashed celebration of decadence is the poem 'A un marquis,' where the first quatrain in particular highlights the spirit of libertinage:

Marquis, comment te portes-tu?
Comme quoy passes-tu la vie?
Si tu n'as d'aujourd'hui foutu
Ces vers t'en donneront envie. (1–4)

Marquis, how do you carry yourself?
As what do you spend your life?
If you haven't fucked today
These verses will make you want to.

Théophile's intense affinity for the Marquis suggests a homosexual undercurrent which is reinforced in verse two, where the poet asks how, or more precisely as what ('comme quoy') the Marquis spends his life. This aspect of Théophile's affection remains largely unformed throughout the poem, and in the cabaret oeuvre in general. Yet, given the poet's admiration of the Marquis, such a question implies that the young nobleman, and quite likely Théophile himself, are disposed toward sex with either men or women. Implicit homosexuality becomes part of Théophile's libertine construct. Théophile defines the Marquis exclusively as a sexual being, and in verse four intimates that the poem is conceived in part to elicit the latter's desire. Unlike some of his darker lyric offerings, the poet deals only with the pleasurable aspects of sexuality in this work. There is no lamenting of a fallen state, nor is there mourning of past escapades. If indeed the Marquis experiences unfortunate consequences because of his behavior, there is every likelihood he will recover. As the poet remarks in the next strophe:

Es-tu gaillard? Es-tu dispos?
T'aperçois-tu que tu guerisses?
Ce couillon est-il plus si gros?
Sens-tu du mal lorsque tu pisses? (5–8)

Are you randy? Are you in good form?
Do you think you're cured?
Is your nut still as big?
Does it hurt when you piss?

The painful urination associated with syphilis becomes only a minor setback, as the scatological reference carries only humorous, rather than lethal, connotations. Most assuredly, the Marquis will heal, the swelling around his testicles will go down, and the bum will dissipate so that the young nobleman 'si amoureux de la desbauche' ('so in love with debauchery') can continue his exploits. Scatological references gain importance in this poem because they inform the reader about the state of the Marquis's penis, which in turn serves as a gauge of the young nobleman's sexual, and thereby physical, health. Searing evacuation clearly hinders the ability to be as 'gaillard' ('randy') and 'dispos' ('in good form') as one would like. But the movement from the temporarily sickened penis and testicles in the second stanza to what the poet describes as 'Les nerfs souples et le vit roide' ('Supple nerves and a stiff cock') in the final verse underscores the re-establishment of medical and sexual order. Figuratively speaking, what occurs over the course of the poem is that the erotic symbol of healthy masculinity, i.e., the erect phallus, triumphs over the scatological symbol of the diseased genitalia. As in other poems, the scatological in this work signals illness, but unlike other texts where the poet or his addressee is overcome by sickness, here the disease is overcome by the Marquis's youth and general vigor.

Somewhat ironically, the understanding of Théophile's use of sexual and scatological contexts is deepened by the way in which the poet combines these motifs with devotional themes. As Martine Debaisieux has shown in her work on Jean Auvray (c. 1580–1630), satirical and religious traditions of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries exercised a reciprocal effect on one another.⁵ Of note is how Théophile incorporates God into a poem about urine, sexual debauchery, and venereal disease. As if to substantiate, in a literary manner, his concluding image of the erect member, Théophile mentions that tales of the Marquis's adventures will resound long after the nobleman's death: 'Selon le cours de la nature, / Ton esprit au lieu du bordeau / Discourra de la sépulture' ('As is nature of things, / Your vigor in the brothel / Will tell its tale beyond the grave') (13–15). On one level, the idea that an erotic narrative will emanate from the grave itself can be seen merely as a satirical device meant to introduce blasphemous discourse into an already obscene text. Yet, given the lack of bitterness and invective seen in other of Théophile's poems, the reader has license to interpret these references to the supernatural as a divine sanction of human sexuality for its own sake. Visits to the whorehouse become the stuff of epitaphs because God himself wants humanity to view sex not as diseased, i.e., as scatological, but as healthy.

In his final stanza, Théophile states:

Mais que sert-il tant de resver
En méditation si froide,
Tant que *Dieu* nous veut conserver
Les nerfs souples et le vit roide? (16–20)

What good is it to dream
In such cold meditation
If *God* wants us to keep

Supple nerves and a hard cock?

Contrary to Théophile's depiction of God in his more lugubrious poems, Théophile's view of the divine seems favorable here. In verses 19 and 20, the poet suggests that God's will is to keep humanity erotically fit and active. Théophile establishes a contrast between divine nature — whose design is that humankind enjoy sex — and human nature, which passes its time uselessly 'dreaming' and 'coldly meditating' on sexual matters rather than engaging in them. Without question, Théophile's 'theology' comes across as intentionally mordant and sacrilegious. But at the same time, this representation of God suggests a fun-loving, libertine deity created in Théophile's own image. The poet sees God as an entity who allows humanity to benefit from Creation's endowment. Conversely, humankind establishes barriers to this natural merriment through the Church, and its endless efforts to impose restrictions on human sexuality. A more sympathetic vision of God changes the role of the scatological and the venereal.

Certainly, the illness signified by burning urine reminds humankind of its fallibility. However, at least in this particular text, the malady is not a malediction that represents God's cruelty or indifference. God and nature may conjoin sexuality and disease, but the combination is not necessarily destructive. In an effort to synthesize elements that seem grossly incompatible, Théophile depicts a world in which open sexuality, venereal disease, and divine will co-exist — if not peacefully, then at least without threatening one another. The scatological enhances the libertine component of the text by evoking surprise (if not shock), sensuality, and a considerable measure of the grotesque. Within the corpus of Théophile's cabaret poetry, this text outlines the major tonal and thematic constituents that the poet will try to reconcile, with varying degrees of success, as he sets forth his view of the body and libertinage.

Misogyny and Masochism: 'Stances contre une vieille'

As noted, a key feature of Théophile's lyric is how hyperconsciousness of the body plays a large role in writing the text. And, indeed, the present text offers a key example of what has been termed in Early Modern circles as the 'corps textuel' (Spencer 117–18). In the first strophe, Théophile alludes to the body of his subject, an old prostitute, as a textual construct:

Ceste vieille qui, des tombeaux,
Chasse les vers et les corbeaux,
Nasquit cent ans avant la guerre
Du fameux siege d'Ilion
Et avant que Deucalion
N'eust encore repeuplé la terre. (1–6)

This old hag who, from the grave,
Chases away worms and crows,

Was bom one hundred years before
The famous siege of Ilion
And before Deucalion
Had yet repopulated the Earth.

What strikes the reader first in terms of Théophile's poetic self-awareness is the word 'vers' which, while most apparently referring to the worms frightened by the woman's ugliness, also clearly represents a word-play on the French term for 'verse.' Théophile's consciousness of the pun is emphasized by the fact that he employs it at the very beginning of the work as if to suggest that, despite his ribald tone, he is cognizant of the artistic circumstances surrounding the stanzas. Within Théophile's œuvre, this context is reinforced in the same line with the word 'corbeaux' eliciting a subtle reference to Théophile's 'Un corbeau devant moi croasse.' The point here is not to develop an in-depth comparison between Théophile's famous ode and this significantly lesser-known obscene poem. Rather, it shows that, even in his libertine verse, Théophile seeks to establish a certain literary authority as a poet by relating his work either to: 1) other poems he has composed, or 2) larger poetic antecedents. The first stanza contains both these micro and macro referents as Théophile again evokes the ominous presence of the crow, while the mention of the *Iliad* and Deucalion in verses four and five calls forth epic and mythological traditions. On the one hand, these last two references are significant only in that they 'jokingly' underscore the extreme age of the woman. On the other, they also suggest that the woman's hideousness, accentuated by her superannuated state, is of epic and mythological proportions. As a result, the body that inspires and writes this text is unmatched in its wretchedness.

Not content with confining the parameters of his revulsion to the epic and the mythic, Théophile hints in the next strophe that the woman's ugliness is such that she would scare even the Devil:

Un jour, ceste vilaine là
Dans un benestier distilla
Les pleurs de son œil hypocrite;
Depuis le diable, qui le vid,
Craignant de gagner mal au vit
N'osa toucher à l'eau benite. (7–12)

One day, this wretch
Distilled in a Holy Water font
The tears other hypocritical eye.
Upon which the Devil saw her,
And fearing a sore cock from the clap,
Dared not touch the blessed water.

The idea that a supernatural figure such as Satan could catch a venereal disease by dipping his hand in Holy Water containing the prostitute's tears reveals the magnitude of the woman's repulsiveness. At the same time, the phrase 'mal au vit'

(‘a sore cock from the clap’) establishes the scatological nature of the poem. Already, a difference emerges in how syphilis is portrayed with respect to ‘A un marquis’ because Satan’s vulnerability illustrates everyone’s susceptibility to suffering and degeneration. Clearly, if Satan can experience this malady, then it is not something that can be cured quickly and thus allow the victim to resume his playful lifestyle. In effect, the poet himself contracts the ‘mal au vit’ after sleeping with the old woman, and thus becomes a ‘pauvre diable’ who must endure the agony of the disease. The idea of a cavorting marquis who goes from one conquest to the other is demolished. Venereal sickness is no longer to be brushed aside. Rather, its consequences have become grave, if not lethal.

Théophile is fascinated with the disease and the woman who spreads it. In the poem’s third stanza Théophile seemingly revels in describing the ill woman, highlighting in particular the scatological aspects of her being:

Ceste vesse, quand on la fout,
Descoule de sueur par tout:
Elle rotte, pette et [se] mouche;
Si par fois, elle vesse aussi,
On ne sçait lequel a vessi,
Du cul, du nez, ou de la bouche. (13–18)

This old fart, when you fuck her,
Oozes sweat everywhere:
She belches, farts, and wipes her nose;
Should she cut a silent, stinking fart,
One knows not from where it came,
The ass, the nose, or mouth.

For the poet, the wizened prostitute has no essence other than her scato-sexual existence. Metonymically, he reduces her to a silent but pungent fart, or ‘vesse,’ in verse 13. The poet’s recounting of the woman’s emanations from her ass, mouth, and nose can certainly be interpreted as imitating the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century lyric tradition of misogynistic satire. Yet, the detail with which the narrator describes the whore’s burping, flatulence, and nose-wiping manifests an obsessive quality that bespeaks mental as well as physical illness on Théophile’s part. In effect, the strophe’s opening verse, ‘Ceste vesse, quand on la fout’ (‘This old fart, when you fuck her’) indicates the poet’s perverted desire. If the metonymy of substituting the woman for the fart is temporarily cast aside in favor of a more literal interpretation, then what the poet screws is the fart itself. As a result, what Théophile is attracted to is the fart, as well as the sweat, belching, and snot. Of course, the stanza represents a sadistic mocking of the woman by the poet. But from a lyric standpoint, this type of ridicule stands as a reaction against the tradition, to which Théophile himself adhered, of venerating the woman’s body. With respect to the mouth and nose, readers need only think of the *blasons* of Marot, Scève, and Ronsard to understand the antecedents the poet seeks to undermine. The poem cannot be considered a *contreblason* because while it does insist

on the woman’s ugliness, it does not exclusively rail against one part of the woman’s body. Because this poem essentially describes a perverse attraction, it inverts the thematic and structural elements of the *blason* rather than subverts them.⁶ In this case, inversion is meant as a reversal in the use and meaning of signs. Here, disease and hideousness excite rather than repel, thus upending social, literary, and psychological norms.

Indeed, the poem should not be read merely as a crude *exercice de style* not only because the narrator is attracted to the woman’s horror, but because he appropriates the woman’s repugnance as his own. As Gaudiani notes, the poet confesses his own ‘intimacy’ (71) with the woman in the fourth stanza. Although the previous stanza suggests that the poet sleeps with the prostitute, the following strophe confirms it:

Son foutre jaune, verd, et bleu,
De morve, de cole et de gleu,
Sentoit le souffre et le bytume,
Qui descoulait sur mes couillons,
Comme deux pestilans caillons
Qui jaillissent d’une apostume. (19–24)

Her muck yellow, green and blue,
Made of snot, cum, and glue,
Smells of sulfur and bitumen,
That flow on my balls,
Like two pestilent clots
Gushing from an abscess.

With the reference to ‘mes couillons’ (‘my balls’), the poet signals that his body, as well as the woman’s, write the text. Clearly, he wishes that the diseased mush from the prostitute’s genitals flow onto his testicles so that he too may become infected if he is not already. The narrator’s likening of the odor from the whore’s muck to that of sulfur and bitumen strikes the reader as a covert reference to Satan. Théophile’s poet relishes the description of this sexual encounter not only for its Baroque grotesqueness but because he has achieved sexual union with a woman whom even the Devil himself has rejected. The narrator has reached the nadir of crudity by distastefully inverting poetic convention, and by personally entering into a liaison with a woman whose repugnance reaches supernatural proportions. Consequently, the poem reveals a perverse psychology at the heart of Théophile’s libertine project.

An essential element of this psychology is the poet’s death wish. References to Satan suggest an obsession with mortality, as well as a desire for suffering and punishment in this world, and potentially in the next. As a consequence, the sadistic enjoyment the narrator experiences from describing the woman is complemented by the masochism displayed in the poet’s urge to bed the old whore and to smother himself with her filth and disease. In referring to his testicles as ‘deux pestilans caillons’ (‘two pestilent clots’), the narrator calls attention to the deadly quality of his union

with the old prostitute. The temporary ecstasy of the *petite mort*, underscored by Théophile's use of the word 'jaillir' in verse 24, translates into the permanent orgasm that is death itself. Théophile depicts the fluids of both male and female orgasm as rendering death as opposed to life. In effect, the coupling the poet depicts inverts the traditional purpose and representation of heterosexual union in that the bonding engenders not human generation but degeneration. In the fifth stanza the poet's remarks that the whore's chancres 'percent jusqu'à la matrice' ('pierce all the way to the womb') (30), meaning she is sterile. The result of the mating is not an infant, but rather two sickened, and eventually dead bodies. *Eros* converges with *Thanatos* as the poet's attraction to the aged lady of pleasure betrays in fact a fascination with death.

The erotic obsession with dying does not stop with the poet. Given the narrator's description of her, the reader assumes that the tart excites herself with the knowledge of her diseased body and the damage it inflicts on others. Théophile's last two stanzas illustrate this idea:

Son con vilain, baveux, suant
Et plus que le retrait puant,
Cizelé de la cicatrice
De chaude pisse et de poullins,
Et de mille chancres malins
Qui percent jusqu'à la matrice.

Mille morpions, rangez aux bords,
Tous plats, pattus, et demy-morts,
Tenoient leur general concile,
Pour ronger Ponguent verolé
Qui leur a quatre fois volé
Le poil qui leur servoit d'azile. (25–36)

Her ugly cunt, drooling, sweating
And more than a stinking latrine,
Chiseled with the scar
Of the burnt piss and lice
And a thousand nasty chancres
That pierce all the way to the womb.

A thousand crabs, lined up on the edges,
All flat, with big claws, and half-dead,
Hold their general council
To gnaw away at the slimy clap-ridden man
Who four times stole them
From their bushy refuge.

The prostitute's wetness can certainly be ascribed to her desire, but the poet's description of her 'con vilain' ('ugly cunt') personifies the whore's genitalia and gives some insight into the woman's character. As is the case with Petrarch and his Pléiade disciples, the female object of Théophile's desire

is voiceless and to a large extent faceless. However, the personification of the chancres as 'malins' underscores the prostitute's ingenuity and delight in soliciting the desire of a man such as the narrator. As a result, the trollop might be nameless, but her personality is not entirely invisible. Certainly, in Théophile's mind, the woman has no function or identity other than a sexual one. But the notion that she is capable of villainy and shrewdness indicates that she sadistically enjoys delivering her services to ma-sochists such as the poet. To suggest that the whore's body reveals parts of her psyche adds depth to the text that is her body. By describing the influence the woman's body has on his own physical and psychological being, the poet illustrates how one body writes another.

Logically, the final chapter of the bodily text is of course death. Théophile's last stanza amplifies the death imagery of the fourth stanza by portraying the 'mille morpions' ('a thousand crabs') as 'demy-morts' ('half-dead'). In addition, the poet describes the crabs as 'rangez aux bords' ('lined up on the edge') and as holding a 'general concile' ('general council'), which suggests that the prostitute's genitalia, and therefore the woman herself, have planned an attack whereby the pox will 'ronger l'onguent verolé' ('gnaw away at the clap-ridden man') that is the narrator, and assure his death. From a structural standpoint, the reference to the 'concile' echoes the poet's religious allusions to the 'benestier' ('holy water font') and to Satan at the beginning of the text. With this type of closure, the Church is again satirized, but at the same time one of its most hallowed practices is ironically respected in that the poet confesses that he has slept with the whore four times. While the poet does not become penitent in his admission, he does nonetheless make a point affirming this relationship a second time. By confirming his multiple trysts with the antiquated harlot, Théophile underscores his masochistic obsession with the woman, while engaging in a form of self-loathing. By identifying himself in the previous verse as 'l'onguent verolé,' the poet brings himself down to the same level as the whore. Contrary to many poets in the Early Modern satirical tradition who berate women as a means of vaunting themselves, Théophile's air of superiority — which is clearly present at the beginning of the poem — disappears by the end. His existence, like that of the prostitute, is reduced to scatological functions. Now *he* will have to deal with the burnt piss, the chancres, and the viscous discharge. While the poet may indeed pathologically wish this lot upon himself, his manner of self-representation is unflattering by any objective standard. The syphilis he has contracted will transport him from the 'azile' that is the woman's sex in the last verse, to that of the sanitarium. The text thus represents a self-portrait as much as it does a depiction of the weather-beaten prostitute. Given that the narrator concludes the poem with an image of his decaying body, the work could just as easily been entitled 'Stances centre un verolé' ('Stanzas against a clap-ridden man') or even 'Stances contre moy-mesme' ('Stanzas against myself'). Théophile's originality lies in turning a satirical diatribe against a tart into an invective against himself. Not only does he recount personal experience, but also personal destruction in a genre where verbal annihilation of the other is the norm.

Dysfunction and Despair: A World without either Sex or God

A remarkable feature of Théophile's cabaret poetry — and one which shows that it should not be dismissed as so much obscene verse — is that the reader can detect significant shifts in tone and theme within the genre. One poem which stands out in tracing these variations is 'On m'a dit que ma sœur chevauche' ('They tell me my sister's a whore') in which Théophile's representations of the scatological, the philosophical, and the poetic converge to form a world-view that both coincides with, and deviates from, the perspectives outlined in the two previous poems. The work's second quatrain quickly establishes the tenor of the work:

Que nos jours ont un mauvais sort;
 Que ma pianette est mal logée;
 Que la fortune est enragée
 De me persécuter si fort! (5–8).
 That our days meet a sorry end;
 That my planet is misaligned;
 That fortune is so enraged
 To persecute me so harshly.

What this stanza typifies is the poet's anger, which he expresses on both a collective and personal level. The reference to 'nos jours' ('our days') as having a 'mauvais sort' ('sorry end'), as well as the implication that the poet himself is 'persecuted' by 'fortune' indicates that Théophile's narrator views his individual misfortune as representative of humanity's as a whole. With respect to 'A un marquis' and the 'Stances contre une vieille,' 'Ma sœur' reveals none of Théophile's playfulness nor excitement, no matter how perverse. Generically, Théophile labels the poem a 'plainte' ('complaint'). And when he exclaims in verse 9, 'Je me fasche, et me plains de tout,' ('I get angry, and complain of everything') and in verse 11, 'Ventrebleu! le destin me fout' ('Damn it! Fate fucks me over'), it becomes clear that the poet's capacity for enjoyment and/or subjectivity has been significantly diminished. The world is now screwing the poet, not the other way around. Without question, such a tone reinforces the idea of self-destruction seen in the 'Stances contre une vieille.' And while such an assertion is true to a large extent, the poet's cry of 'Tout me desplaît' ('Everything displeases me') in verse 10 suggests that now there is no pleasure in misery. As in the two other poems, Théophile focuses on venereal disease, but varies its depiction. Now, not only can syphilis not be cured, as it is in 'A un marquis,' it has become so severe that it has rendered the poet all but inactive from a sexual point of view. In the 'Stances contre une vieille' the idea of death from a sexual disease is certainly present, but it does not stop the poet from engaging in aberrant erotic delights. Here, however, the poet's malady is so advanced that he renounces sexual activity all together: 'Fouter des culs et des garçons! / Maugrebieu des cons et des garces!' ('Fuck all assholes and boys! / To hell with cunts and bitches!') (23–4). Of course, the use of the term 'fouter' is ironic in this case because it expresses the poet's desire to be

rid of all sexual orifices rather than penetrate them. As a result of Théophile's sexual dispossession, he appropriates the Baroque motif of the 'corps désanimé' where the virtually 'lifeless body' comes to represent a kind of 'cadavre parlant' ('talking cadaver').⁸ Théophile's narrator is much closer to death in this poem as opposed to the last, infusing the scatological context of the poem with a larger dose of *Thanatos* than before. In effect, the general desexualization of the poet brought about by the disease is such that the scatological is no longer sexual, as it was in the 'Vieille,' because the presence of death is so dominant. The lament's fourth and fifth stanzas highlight the narrator's desperation:

Je pisse du verre et du feu;
 Je ne crache que de la colle;
 Je n'ay presque plus un cheveu:
 J'ay la peste! j'ay la verolle!
 La gravelle me tient aux reins;
 Je ne trouve plus qui je foute,
 Et la sainte ampoule de Rheims
 Tariroit plutost que ma goutte. (13–20)

I piss glass and fire;
 I spit only grunge;
 My hair is almost gone:
 I have the plague! I have the clap!

Stones have a hold on my kidneys;
 I can't find anyone to fuck,
 And the holy ampulla of Reims
 Will dry up faster than my gout.

With respect to the language of the other poems studied, the reader notes that direct mention of the genitalia — either his or someone else's — is missing. With one exception late in the poem, gone are the references to the 'vit,' the 'con,' and the 'cul,' as well as the excitement they elicit. Instead, the poet alludes to the deterioration of the genital area caused by the disease. Théophile describes similar afflictions in the 'Vieille,' but the ravages of the illness do not hinder his activity. If anything, they enhance it by increasing his exhilaration. The very nature of the disease is more extreme in the current poem because here the poet is pissing 'glass and fire,' as opposed to dealing merely with the 'pisse chaude' ('burnt piss') alluded to in the 'Marquis' and the 'Vieille.' The internal contradiction that is the image of pissing fire underscores Théophile's desperation. Within the context of the lament, this represents the narrator's hopelessness because an act that normally snuffs a flame, *i.e.*, that of passing water, only serves to intensify the bum. Evacuation, rather than relieving the torment, only exacerbates it. Likewise, the allusion to 'pissing glass' advances the idea that, though the poet's corporeal deterioration may start with the genital area, it is not limited to that region. The image foreshadows the reference to the 'gravelle . . . aux reins,' otherwise known as a

kidney stone. Scatological allusions signal that the disease has spread to the narrator's vital organs, and will ultimately consume him.

The theme of waste associated with Théophile's scatological references expresses itself in the realm of sex as well. A declaration such as 'Je ne crache que de la colle' ('I spit only grunge') further develops the idea of the narrator's desexualization. The word 'cracher,' a vulgar term for 'éjaculer,' suggests that the poet's orgasms are devoid of any agreeable sensations. To come is to expel, nothing more. The discharge is a glutinous substance only referred to as 'colle.' With language of this nature, it becomes difficult to distinguish semen from phlegm, as the body makes a futile attempt to rid itself of infection by any means possible. Sexual dysfunction corresponds to mental dysfunction in verse 18. The poet's statement, 'Je ne trouve plus qui je foute' ('I can't find anyone to fuck') is rich in meaning. On the one hand, it suggests that because of the narrator's physical ailments, no one will have sex with him. On the other, it implies that Théophile's mental faculties have declined to the point where he is incapable of finding his bed partner, perhaps even in the same room.

If read alongside 'A un marquis,' an additional explanation for the narrator's impotence emerges in the lament: God's impotence. Throughout the poem, Théophile portrays a God whose indifference to human fate borders on the malignant:

Je n'attends secours d'aucun lieu;
Mon malheur est insatiable;
Les hommes m'envoyent à Dieu,
Qui m'assiste autant que le diable. (29–32)

I expect help from no quarter;
My misfortune is insatiable;
Men send me to God,
Who helps me as much as the Devil.

Here, God is no better than Satan in terms of his response to human suffering. This portrait stands in marked contrast to the libertine God of the 'Marquis' who encourages humanity to follow its natural inclination toward sex. In the present poem, God stifles human sexuality, preventing erotic interaction between his Creatures:

Dans le commun lit des humains
Un Dieu veut que toujours on dorme.
Ces beaux vits et ces belles mains
N'ont plus ni mouvement ni forme. (37–40)

In the common bed of humanity
A God wishes that we always sleep.
That these beautiful cocks and hands
Have neither movement nor form.

The stanza's tone is wistful in that the sensual appendages of the human body are rendered useless by a cold deity who puts humankind in the same bed only to make it sleep. Clearly, the image of the motionless, sexless lot that is humanity suggests that humankind is doomed, if not dead, from the start. By negating sex, God cuts off the source of all life, leaving his progeny to rot in the manner of Théophile's poet. Divine nature thus runs contrary to human nature, as God, who is in essence asexual, destroys humankind whose very existence is defined by its sexuality.

Théophile's mention of God in both the 'Stances contre une vieille' and in the present poem raises the question of how this portrayal compares to that found in the religious lyric of the Baroque era. On one level, no comparison at all exists because Théophile's references to God are satirical at best and - as his trial and death sentence no doubt indicate - blasphemous at worst. As a result, there is little basis upon which to read Théophile's cabaret poetry within the context of the Early Modern devotional lyric. Yet, issues of illness, sexuality, and the human condition in general show that the philosophical dimension of Théophile's lyric is readily perceptible. And as Gaudiani has shown quite convincingly, this particular lament by Théophile imitates the format of composition, analysis, and meditation found in Baroque religious poetry (50–51).⁹ From a comparative standpoint, the accent on decomposition links Théophile's work to the penitential lyric and to the *memento mori* traditions of the late Renaissance and early seventeenth century.¹⁰ One trait that perhaps rather surprisingly links Théophile's libertine verse with the religious lyric is the use of the scatological as it relates to sickness, dying, and God's role in human existence. As can be imagined, devotional poets, who often sought Church approval for their verse, were limited in the kind of language they could deploy to describe human physical and mental degeneration. Nonetheless, poets such as Philippe Desportes (1546–1606) use terms such as 'crasse' and 'ordure' to describe their internal and external deterioration:

Mais quand je me regarde au miroir de ta loy,
Que dedans et dehors transformé je me voy,
Que je trouve en mon ame et de crasse et d'ordure!
Que mes sens corrompus sont devenus infectes.... (quoted in Cave 121)

But when I see myself in the mirror of thy law,
That inside and out transformed I see myself,
That I find in my soul filth and mire!
That my corrupt senses have become diseased.

Without question, the same terminology could be used to describe Théophile's physical and mental states. Théophile's language is more explicit simply because of the nature of the cabaret genre. However, given the devotional tenor of Desportes's lyric, the appearance of words such as 'crasse' and 'ordure' in a religious poem would have produced effects of shock and aversion in the devotional reader, much in the manner of Théophile's libertine oeuvre. In both cases, the poet's approach is similar: to provoke, and in some cases offend,

the reader into re-orienting his or her thinking with respect to poetic form and the manner in which it expresses the human condition.

Desportes's somewhat muted scatological vocabulary notwithstanding, Auvray makes no effort to mask the part scatology plays in the Crucifixion, where he describes the dying Christ as 'de toutes parts pissait des flots de sang' ('[having] flows of blood pissing from everywhere') (quoted in Debaisieux 136). The idea of Christ 'pissing blood' from all parts of his body renders the idea of Christ's sacrifice more comprehensible by appealing to the basest of human functions. In this case, the incorporation of the grotesque tradition, or that which seeks to evoke horror or disgust, has a didactic function in that Christ, in one of his most divine moments, commits one of the most human of acts. As Debaisieux suggests, the purpose of such a portrait is to heighten the reader's sense of 'participation sensorielle et affective' ('sensorial and affective participation') (135). What the scatological does, in both the religious lyric and the cabaret lyric, is enable the reader to identify with the poetic subject — whether it be Christ in Desportes and Auvray, or with Théophile himself in the tatter's poetry. Of course, the devout public has little idea of what it is like to die on a cross, just as presumably few of Théophile's readers have had firsthand experience of syphilis. However, in both instances, the scatological can be traced to the suffering and decay which are an intractable part of the human condition. While alluding to humanity's future encounter with death, the scatological also suggests humankind's present vulnerability, where man finds himself particularly helpless in his inability to control the body. Christ's devout body, as well as Théophile's libertine body, are equally exposed to agony and deterioration. The very fact that the body produces waste indicates that humanity is incapable of mastering the physical dimension of its being. From a philosophical standpoint, the inability to master the body becomes indicative of the incapacity to master the self. Montaigne argues for the submission of the body to the mind — a sentiment later echoed by Descartes.¹¹ In the neo-classical period, the notion of the controlled body forms an integral part in the development of the self-possessed individual and state. During the Baroque era, however, the body eludes this type of dominance, showing itself easily weakened by humanity's fragile character. In effect, this section of Théophile's lyric shows an anti-Humanistic strain by underscoring the distinct limits of the human body and mind. Human capacity is thus decidedly curtailed by physical and metaphysical constraints.

For the devotional reader, humanity's refuge in the face of physical and spiritual misery is, of course, God and his salutary promise. For Catholic poets such as Desportes and Auvray, the scatological nature of man's existence is indicative of original sin and the subsequent need for redemption. If humanity is able to recognize itself as filth, then it can purge itself of sin and hope to attain grace. In discussing the work of the Counter-Reformation theologian Fra Giacomo Affinati d'Acuto, Piero Camporesi speaks of 'Mortification both internal and external of the self [as] the right key to open the gates of the Kingdom of Heaven' (73).¹² Similarly, early seventeenth-century Catholic theology and poetry claimed that 'decay and dissolution will be overcome' by faith in the resurrected body of Christ and

in the social body of the Church (Coakley 128).¹³ In Théophile's anti-theistic universe, bodily suffering in the hope of eventual divine blessing is clearly not an issue. However, in the absence of salvation, could some form of purgation and/or consolation be possible? At first glance, seemingly not. Sexual relief offers no hope, and even poetry itself appears to bring little solace. As the narrator states toward the end of the poem, in the ninth stanza:

Vaines ombres de l'Achéron,
Larves, démons, rivages sombres,
Pétrone, Aretin, Maugiron,
A grand'peine êtes-vous des ombres! (33–6)

Vain shadows of the Acheron,
Worms, demons, somber shores,
Petronius, Aretino, Maugiron,
At best you are only shadows!

Satirical and bawdy predecessors, such as Petronius, Aretino, and Maugiron are of no help to Théophile.¹⁴ In fact, by associating these authors with Acheron and other images of hell, Théophile suggests that not only have his lyric mentors failed him, they have perhaps even played a role in leading him to the desperation in which he now finds himself. The three poets must share in the blame by setting an example in which life and art converge in such a way as to bring about the poet's downfall. In 'On m'a dit que ma sœur chevauche' at least, the act of writing does not help in purging the narrator of his anguish. Neither sex, God, nor poetry provides the opportunity for catharsis. If anything, it seems as though painful sex, an uncaring deity, and the misleading poetic examples that have preceded Théophile only serve to increase his torment.

Conclusion: Sarcasm as Temporary Salvation

Nonetheless, 'Ma sœur,' despite the unexpectedly articulate and nuanced manner in which it expresses the fate of humankind, should not be seen as Théophile's definitive pronouncement on the subjects of sex, illness, and God. Much of his cabaret poetry reveals a sarcastic tone that calls to mind not so much hope or solace as it does the idea that human wit can survive even in the most exasperating of circumstances. One such example is a sonnet that takes the form of a sardonic lament:

Phylis, tout est foutu, je meurs de la verolle;
Elle exerce sur moy sa dernière rigueur:
Mon vit baisse la teste et n'a point de vigueur;
Un ulcère puant a gasté ma parole.

J'ay sué trente jours, j'ay vomé de la colle;

Jamais de si grands maux n'eurent tant de longueur;
L'esprit le plus constant fust mort à ma langueur,
Et mon affliction n'a rien qui la console.

Mes amis plus secrets ne m'osent approcher;
Moy-mesme, en cest estat, je ne m'ose toucher.
Phylis, le mal me vient de vous avoir foutue!

Mon Dieu! je me repens d'avoir si mal vescu,
Et si vostre courroux a ce coup ne me tue,
Je fais vœu desormais de ne foutre qu'en cu!

Phylis, all is fucked, I'm dying of the clap;
It imposes on me its final rule:
My cock dips its head and has no vigor;
A stinking ulcer has ruined my speech.

I've sweated for thirty days, I've vomited muck;
Never have such great ills lasted so long;
The firmest mind would be overcome by my langor,
And my affliction has nothing to console it.

My most intimate friends dare not approach me;
Even myself in this state I dare not touch.
Phylis, evil has come to me from fucking you!

My God! I repent for such foul living,
And if your anger at this time does not kill me,
I hereby swear to fuck only in the ass!

Images of illness and death dominate the beginning of the sonnet, with Théophile mocking the now-familiar references to impotence, vomiting, and general agony. Not only is he incapable of sex with another, he is, according to verse 10, powerless even to masturbate. The narrator is alone, abandoned by his friends and beyond consolation (8). From these perspectives, the poem clearly resembles the 'Stances contre une vieille' and 'On m'a dit que ma sœur chevauche' in unveiling the desperation Théophile experiences during his malady. And as in other texts, scatological and/or repulsive allusions such as 'Mon vit baisse la teste' ('My cock dips its head') (3), and 'j'ay vommy de la colle' ('I've vomited muck') (5), serve to reinforce the link between human waste and death. Indeed, Théophile continues to draw the parallel between sexuality and death when he states in verse 11, 'Phylis, le mal me vient de vous avoir foutue!' ('Phylis, evil has come to me from fucking you!'). The apostrophe to Phylis, also made in the sonnet's first verse, is significant in that this is the name of the beloved in many of Théophile's 'stances' and 'odes,' of which one of the most read is 'Le Matin.' By attributing responsibility for his sickness to Phylis — clearly a word-play on 'Si-Phylis' — Théophile not only repudiates her and the disease, but the poetry of which they are the object. 'Si/Phylis' becomes a scatological referent in that it is the cause of the narrator's

ulcers (4), sweat, and phlegm-laden vomit (5). Within this logic, the poet holds 'Si/Phylis' accountable for his dementia as well, stating, 'L'esprit le plus constant fust mort à ma langueur' (The firmest mind would be overcome by my languor') (7). The inspiration for Théophile's earlier work has now turned into a kind of anti-Muse, destroying the poet's creativity as well as his health.

However, the final tercet brings about a significant change in the sonnet's tone. The idea of making a 'bargain' with God to have only anal intercourse if the Almighty spares his life removes any trace of seriousness the poem might contain.¹⁵ The tenor of 'A un marquis' is considerably light-hearted, but a decidedly negative shift occurs in the 'Stances contre une vieille' and in 'On m'a dit que ma sœur chevauche' because the poet's irony disappears behind personal distress and existential angst. In the current poem, the mock prayer satirizes the devotional lyric of the Baroque era, while showing that, despite his suffering, Théophile has retained his verbal bite. Of course, Théophile will succumb to his illness. But for a moment at least, he preserves the caustic attitude at the heart of many of his satirical works. The steep modulations in tone throughout the poem and in Théophile's oeuvre lend a significantly protean quality to his lyric. To a certain extent, Théophile's cabaret lyric can also be thought of as subverting certain aspects of the religious Baroque in that sensuality leads not to death and redemptive ecstasy but to pain and death as ends in themselves. Spirituality, if it is to be considered at all, should be looked upon with derision or incredulity. As far as the relationship between the Baroque and the scatological is concerned, attention to human refuse allows the poet to concentrate on the reality of the body in order to subvert the illusions of the soul. Baroque detail and excess stay at a human level, putting man in his place not with respect to God, but with respect to himself. Any catharsis that might be achieved through suffering, poetry, and/or humor, begins and ends with the poet, underscoring that only in this world can humanity denigrate and celebrate its foibles.

Notes

¹ I use the terms 'cabaret' and 'libertine' interchangeably. Both refer to the scabrous verse Théophile wrote as part of the bawdy tavern culture in Paris during the early seventeenth century. See Gaudiani, *The Cabaret Poetry of Théophile de Viau* 15–22. All quotes from Théophile are taken from this edition; English translations of Théophile are mine.

² In foregrounding his thesis on the body and changing social order, Greenberg speaks of 'the Rabelaisian view of the universe as an ever-evolving living entity, constantly in process, copulating, birthing, and dying without beginning or end' (62). He also cites Montaigne's *Du Repentir* (III.2): 'Le monde n'est qu'une branloire perenne. Toutes choses y branlent sans cesse: la terre, les roches du Caucase, les pyramides d'Aegypte, et du branle public et du leur. La Constance mesme n'est autre chose qu'un branle plus languissant' (62).

³ Deterioration of the body as it relates to the Baroque aesthetic has been the subject of two recent articles, see Safty and Souiller.

⁴ The appendix of Guido Saba's critical edition of Théophile's *Œuvres poétiques* contains many of Théophile's licentious poems, but gives few critical remarks. For a history of the general reception of Théophile's lyric, see Saba's *Fortunes et infortunes de Théophile de Viau*. Joan De Jean's *The Reinvention of Obscenity* deals with Théophile's ribald lyric, but came to my attention after this essay had been prepared for publication.

⁵ Debaisieux's *texte de base* is Auvray's *La Pourmenade de l'Ame dévote en Calvaire, Accompagnant son Sauveur depuis les ruës de Jerusalem, jusqu'au Tombeau*, Rouen, 1634.

⁶ For a more precise definition of the *blason* and the *contreblason*, see Persels, 'Venereal Verse.'

⁷ *Thanatos* is, of course, the Greek figure representing death. Western thought has often opposed *Thanatos* and *Eros*. However, Théophile views them as intertwined.

⁸ I take the term 'corps désanime' from Soare, 'Cadavres exquis du théâtre baroque.'

⁹ Gaudiani follows the tripartite structure that forms the core of Louis Martz's argument in *The Poetry of Meditation*.

¹⁰ For more on these devout motifs, see Chapter 5 of Terence Cave's *Devotional Poetry in France*.

¹¹ See Dandrey 42–3, where he discusses Montaigne's *Apologie de Raimond Sebond* and *De trois commerces*. The theme of mental domination of the body is found throughout Descartes's œuvre. However, for a precise explanation of the mechanics of the subordination of the body to the mind, see the fourth and fifth parts of the *Discours de la Méthode*.

¹² D'Acuto's text is entitled, *Il Monte Santo della Tribulatione (The Holy Mount of Tribulation)*, published in 1602.

¹³ Coakley cites especially C. W. Bynum's 'Bodily Miracles and the Resurrection of the Body in the High Middle Ages.'

¹⁴ Greenberg notes that Aretino's *Ragionamenti*, a sexual coming-of-age novel published in 1534, was known throughout Early Modern Europe and 'decisively influenced . . . the modern pornographic genre' in France and elsewhere (70).

¹⁵ One is reminded of a similar vow by a syphilis-stricken narrator in Jean Molinet's (1435–1507) *Complainte d'ung Gentilhomme à sa dame*: 'Doresnavant vivray par rigle et par compas, / Au moins je ne feray jamais pour ung con pas' (69–70) ('From now on I shall live by rule and by measure, / At least I will not pass for a fucking idiot'). See *Les Faictz et Dictz de Jean Molinet* 731.

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