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# Anus as Oculus: Satire and Subversion in Eustorg de Beaulieu's *Du cul*

Russell Ganim

This study seeks to rehabilitate Eustorg de Beaulieu's (c. 1495–1552) *Du cul* (1537) in terms of the poem's satirically subversive nature. I choose the term "rehabilitate" in order to challenge certain aspects of Annette and Edward Tomarken's argument that the poem should be read more in terms of its commentary on the lyric genre of the *blason* than as a derisive indictment of social norms. I hold that on an implicit level, the poem does support the Tomarkens' contention that Beaulieu "push[es] to its ultimate limits the genre (i.e., the *blason*) with which he is working" (151). In the opening verses of *Du cul*, the reader remarks that the poem is indeed aware of itself as a *blason*, and Beaulieu's work decidedly reflects many of the genre's formal and thematic traits. Yet, apart from these opening verses and occasional allusions to various forms of the *blason*, the poem's language makes little to no reference to the theory and actual composition of the genre.<sup>1</sup> Arguments about Beaulieu's self-conscious critique of the design and execution of the *blason* are certainly plausible, but other elements of the poem stand out more forcefully as meriting scholarly inquiry. The Tomarkens' comments are reason enough to revisit the poem, but it should be noted that the depth of Beaulieu's satire, and its relation to contemporary notions of sexuality are such that one could also easily challenge Michael Pegg's dismissal of *Du cul* as a largely obscene effort to attract attention.<sup>2</sup>

From a critical perspective, the topic of scatology offers a richer means of analyzing the poem's language and purpose. In this essay, "scatology" and the "scatological" will come to mean the prurient references to the excretory and sexual organs and functions of the body.<sup>3</sup> Beaulieu deploys a scatological *thématique* in order to set forth a derisive

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- 1 The poem begins with an acknowledgment of previous *blasonneurs* who have dealt with this topic. This recognition is rather cursory, though, with the main point of the introduction being the "worthiness" of the butt as a subject of the genre. The Tomarkens rightly point to these opening lines as a sign that Beaulieu is conscious of the *blason* as a lyric form, and that his current poem does in some way contribute to the history of the genre. Be that as it may, Beaulieu's specific mention of the compositional process involved in writing the *blason* is limited. As the Tomarkens suggest, Beaulieu makes a second and final self-conscious reference to the *blason* genre about a third of the way through the work: "Et s'aulcung dict que tu es sale & ord / Et inutile, il te *blasonne* à tort" (vv. 45–46). They explain this remark as an attempt by Beaulieu to distinguish his work from that of others, and to "make fun" of the *blason* genre by undermining "the whole good/bad, positive/negative dichotomy so manifest in the standard notion of the *blason*" (142). Indeed, Beaulieu's effort to avoid clear-cut praise or blame manifests itself in the poem, but only on an implicit level. Given the text's focus on the ass as a symbol of human servitude, transgression, and hypocrisy, the language and themes of *Du cul* seem more to "make fun" of society than they do of the rules pertaining to a particular lyric genre. Unless otherwise noted, references to the Tomarkens are made to their article, "The Rise and Fall of the Sixteenth-Century French *Blason*."
  - 2 See p. 41 of Pegg's critical edition of Beaulieu's *Divers rapportz*. All quotes of Beaulieu come from this edition.
  - 3 In French, the term "scatologie" is primarily a nineteenth- and twentieth-century verbal construct dealing with the "propos, [et] écrits, qui ont trait aux excréments" (*Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, vol. 2, Paris: Hachette, 1935). Nonetheless, the word "scatophage" is found in both Huguet (*Dictionnaire de la langue française du seizième siècle*, vol. 6, Paris: Didier, 1965) and Cotgrave (*Dictionnaire of the French & English Tongues*, Columbia, SC: University of South

vision of 1. the body and sexuality, 2. political structures, and 3. the Catholic Church. Scatology also helps explain the relative absence of the *je/poète* who normally acts as the mediator between the world and the reader. In the case of *Du cul*, the eye of the poet is figuratively substituted by the anus, which becomes an oculus in the sense that human activity, in its most sophisticated and base forms, is perceived by its relation to this aperture. Beaulieu's choice of the anus as a topic for praise is best explained by a rhetorical question he poses near the end of his poem: "Diray je rien de ta grande franchise ?" (v. 103). For Beaulieu, the ass represents a certain kind of sexual, literary, and social freedom. Clearly, Beaulieu would not have been as free if he had chosen a more conformist subject for his *blason*, and in many respects, the "frankness" of the poem represents its fundamental characteristic. Contact with the sexual other, the nobility, and the Church is "viewed" through the "lens" of the anus in order to illustrate human vanity as well as Beaulieu's inverted view of the world. In this sense, "inversion" refers to the idea that what is normally hidden and kept inside the body, i.e., the anus, is turned outward and exposed, thereby presenting a satirical mentality that undermines established norms. On a social level, the anus becomes an equalizer in that it commands attention from all classes and persuasions. By reducing human exchange to its primordial anal element, Beaulieu figuratively "lays waste" to social conceit via the poetic conceit of the *blason*. The fundament has a similarly equalizing effect with respect to the body, as Beaulieu's *cul* becomes the principal organ on which all other body parts depend in order to maintain either their beauty or function.

Ideally, through the laughter the poem is intended to provoke, *Du cul* elicits a cathartic (in the original sense of the Greek word for "laxative") effect.<sup>4</sup> On a personal level, the reader is purged of the embarrassment caused by the most necessary and universal of human functions. Socially, the reader rids him/herself of the pretension and constraint caused by class and political divisions which hypocritically pretend to ignore the most fundamental of similarities between human beings. Beaulieu's *blason*, to quote the poem itself, is thus a satirical "suppository" (v. 31) that allows the poet to unleash his ideas about the relationship between human physicality and the vanity that seeks to deny it. At the same time, however, this physical and political "leveling" exhibits a coarser dimension. From a sexual standpoint, Beaulieu's focus on anal intercourse serves to undercut traditional notions of love and bonding, and also indicates a misogynistic strain in the poet's language. Similarly, though Beaulieu's social commentary does generally constitute an indictment of the Church and the upper classes, its portrait of the marginalized is often no less flattering, as the poem advances a sometimes misanthropic opinion of humankind as a whole. As a result, *Du cul* often subverts its own satirical process. For organizational purposes, I have broken down my argument into four principal sections. The first centers on Beaulieu's literary influences, the second deals with generic definitions, the third involves the body and sexuality, with the fourth highlighting politics and religion. Influences and definitions give a poetic context in which to locate Beaulieu's satire, while the close reading illustrates the originality of *Du cul* as a *blason* whose crudeness requires not dismissal but examination by virtue of its effort to ridicule dominant currents of social thought and behavior.

### Literary Influences

While Beaulieu is known for his letters to Marot and Scève, he knew these poets by name only. In part because Beaulieu was isolated from many of his most noted literary contemporaries, scholars disagree on where to situate his poetry. Hélène Harvitt classifies

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Carolina Press, 1950, reprint of the first edition, London, 1611), thus indicating that notions of the scatological did have lexical currency in France during the Renaissance.

4. See pp. 41–42 of the introduction to Aristotle's *Poetics* reprinted in Richter.

him as part of the Marot school, but Pegg resists this notion given that Beaulieu, unlike Marot, adhered to traditional genres, and did not write elegies in the manner of Marot. Pegg argues that Beaulieu writes in the popular tradition of Roger Collerye, and imitates the same genres, i.e., rondeaux, *dizains*, ballads, *oraisons*, and epitaphs. His *épîtres* are written in the “popular” style of the *rhétoriciens* such as Crétin, de Bouchet, and Jean Lemaire (37). In an overall sense, Beaulieu resembles the *rhétoriciens* in that he is disgruntled with his century, and criticizes the social hierarchy, if not everyone. Pegg appropriates Henri Guy’s remark about the *rhétoriciens* to Beaulieu: “pas de milieu : ou la grossièreté ou la fadeur” (52). The “popular” character of Beaulieu’s poetry becomes more evident in that there is no effort to translate the ancients or to write long, historical poems. Similarly, one sees no royal chants or poems centering on doctrine, allegory, or debate (37). Accordingly, while one can see links between Beaulieu and the *rhétoriciens*, he has next to nothing in common with the *grands rhétoriciens*. With respect to Marot, Pegg claims that only in his *coq-à-l’âne*, and his *blasons* does Beaulieu follow the Marotic example (37). Beaulieu clearly imitates Marot in composing his seven *Blasons anatomiques* of the female body, and certainly one can count Beaulieu among the first *blasonneurs*. But Beaulieu’s relative exclusion from the upper echelon of French literary circles is reinforced by the fact that none of his *blasons* was sent to Marot when he organized the *concours de blasons* from the court in Ferrara. Neither did Beaulieu’s *blasons* come out in Leone Battista Alberti’s 1536 *Hectomphilia*, nor in the 1539 edition. After their original publication in Beaulieu’s own *Divers rapportz* (1537), the *blasons* were published as part of the first edition of the *Blasons anatomiques du corps féminin* in 1543.

Pegg claims that of the five traditional *blasons* Beaulieu published, that is, the *Blason du nez*, *De la joue*, *Des dentz*, *De la langue*, and *De la voix*, only the last begins to reflect Marot’s sophistication. The final two *blasons*, *Du cul* and *Du pet et de la vesse*, represent for Pegg an effort to get noticed. This effort succeeds, according to Pegg, but only by evoking what he calls “les pires grossièretés” (41). Already during the Renaissance, critics such as Jean Visagier thought that the *blason* genre had gone too far in its choice of subjects and language (41). Adding his displeasure, Gilles Corrozet composed a poem entitled *Contre les blasonneurs des membres*, with Beaulieu, of course, being one of the principal targets (42). Beaulieu subsequently defended himself in two essays, often using obscenities for good measure. In a general sense, Pegg finds it difficult to defend Beaulieu because of a general lack of refinement in his poetry. It should also be noted that Beaulieu never lived at court and never went to Paris. This lack of exposure to high literary culture could account for what Pegg describes as Beaulieu’s excessive, if not exclusive, use of stereotypes and common images in his poetry (45). This relative lack of originality underscores the exceptional nature of *Du cul* as it is primarily through the *grossier* and the scatological that Beaulieu appears to distinguish himself. Pegg argues that it is only via the obscene that Beaulieu “uses his own imagination” (46, my translation). However, Pegg suggests that these *blasons* are so distasteful as to render them devoid of any significant literary merit. In comparing Beaulieu to Marot, Pegg is highly critical of Beaulieu, finding fault in the lack of a personal dimension to Beaulieu’s poetry, and in the failure to imitate either Marot’s images, or his elegant tone. The absence of the personal in *Du cul* is evidenced by the muted presence of the “je,” who is mentioned only four times in what can be considered a fairly long poem. In defense of Beaulieu, one can claim that the lack of emphasis on the poet’s persona reinforces the occasionally sordid, dehumanized tenor of the poem. *Du cul* reduces humanity to its basest functions. Consequently, even the narrator falls victim to a world in which human subjectivity succumbs to the natural and social authority of the ass.

From a generic point of view, Pegg claims that the majority of Beaulieu's social satire is expressed through his rondeaux and ballads. Nonetheless, examination of *Du cul* shows that Beaulieu's scatological *blasons* are chiefly sardonic in character as well. As is often the case throughout his *œuvre*, Beaulieu's venom in *Du cul* (and *Du pet et de la vesse*) is reserved for the powerful, thus making his satire more potent. Overall, the tone of the scatological *blasons* is less moralistic and more ironic than in many of the rondeaux and the ballads. One instance that comes to mind is Rondeau XXIV, where Beaulieu insists upon the equality of humanity before God, whereas in *Du cul* and *Du pet et de la vesse* he underscores the equality of humanity before the body and its functions.<sup>5</sup> In Beaulieu's *Divers rapportz*, appeal to both the highest and lowest common denominators reinforces the poet's sympathies toward the dispossessed.

The idea of compassion poses the question of whether or not there exist humanistic elements in Beaulieu's scatological *blasons*. For rhetorical purposes, the Tomarkens raise the issue of Beaulieu's humanism only to strike it down in their explanation of the poet's efforts to comment on the *blason* genre (139). Pegg does not employ the term in his introduction, and given his displeasure over Beaulieu's lack of references to Antiquity, as well as the poem's generally debased tone, it is difficult to imagine Pegg describing Beaulieu as a humanist. Indeed, objective analysis would lead to divided opinion. On the one hand, the *Divers rapportz*, let alone the scatological *blasons*, have no relation to the humanist effort to revive classical letters as a means of deriving a philosophy based on reason, science, and the overall pursuit of knowledge. Certainly, there is precious little about *Du cul* that can be called "transcendent," and the poem deals with neither problems nor solutions concerning the fundamental questions of human existence. Yet, in its own way, *Du cul* challenges established authority by taking exception to behavioral norms that undergird society. Power relationships are depicted as absurd, while religious institutions as well as the medical profession are ridiculed. Given that the *Divers rapportz* was published at the very moment Beaulieu left France and the Catholic Church for Switzerland and Calvinism, it is plausible to assume that one of the goals of the poem is to expose and embarrass social and ecclesiastical structures for what they are. Within Beaulieu's scatological *thématique*, what results is a kind of purgative humanism; one which makes no effort to solve social ills, but which, by associating these problems with scatological functions, does highlight a need for society to rid itself of such difficulties. Beaulieu's poems reveal a cathartic dimension through the idea of evacuating the world of the distress accumulated over time. The socio-political context of the poem renders the phrase, "le mal au corps latent" (v. 34) doubly significant in that the word "corps" takes on a social as well as a bodily meaning. By metaphorical extension, society comes to resemble a body that must be purified of the abuse and waste that is human hypocrisy and oppression.

### Generic Definitions and Rhetorical Structure

As the Tomarkens have shown, Thomas Sebillet's definition of the *blason*, and its antithesis, the *contreblason*, as alternately "une perpetuele louenge ou continue vitupere de ce qu'on s'est proposé blasonner"(139), do not correspond to Beaulieu's poem

5. On p. 109 of his edition, Pegg cites Rondeau XXIV as follows:

Mais nostre Bible en lieu ne testifie  
 Q'ung gendre humain, une nature unye  
 Soubz un seul Dieu. Donques par quel colleur  
 Nomme on Villain aulcun qui n'a pas l'heur  
 De grace ou biens. Fault il pour ce qu'on dye  
 Il est Villain ? (vv. 10–15)

because, at least on the surface, the ass is not discussed exclusively in terms of either its most beautiful, or its most repulsive aspects. If anything, Beaulieu generally accentuates the favorable aspects of the ass, but the tone is so clearly scandalous as to eliminate any serious notion of praise. The Tomarkens correctly point out that one of the reasons why the poem does not correspond to traditional concepts of the *blason* is that it lacks a Marotic/Scèveian conclusion which values “the superiority of the spirit over the flesh” (141). Likewise, *Du cul* cannot be considered a *contreblason* because it does not “stress the filth, vileness, and corruption of this part of the body” (140). Nevertheless, Beaulieu’s poem does emphasize “the filth, vileness, and corruption” of the milieu he observes. D. B. Wilson’s idea that Beaulieu “puts before us a straightforward, serio-comic ugliness . . . [that] betray[s] an attitude toward realism” (25) is entirely plausible, but is somewhat limited by the fact that Wilson confines his discussion to the body and its depiction in certain lyric genres. In effect, one can argue that the “realism” Wilson describes extends to society as well, with the bung-hole, the body, and society converging to form a kind of satire based on “scatological realism.”

In this vein, an interesting facet of the Tomarkens’ argument deals with their comparison between Beaulieu and Pierre Gringoire. They claim that Gringoire’s *Blason de pratique* (1505) differs from Beaulieu in that Gringoire “intend[ed] to criticize certain very real abuses in the law of his day. He was talking about life, not literature” (151). But it is entirely believable to assert that in his references to political, religious, and sexual practices, Beaulieu “was talking about life” as well. Similarly, the Tomarkens bring up the idea that Beaulieu follows the model of Lucian, Erasmus, and the Bernesque Italian poets who, in the tradition of the satirical eulogy, found it was “rhetorically and philosophically fascinating, or politically and satirically useful to praise the most low, insignificant, or reprehensible things, diseases, characteristics, or people” (151). They then dismiss this idea in favor of their argument that *Du cul* should be read more as a satire on the composition of the *blason* than as a commentary on sixteenth-century life. For the Tomarkens, “the irony of the poem is directed not at the human body, but at the *blasonneur*’s tendency to fragment and divide up this organic whole, and thus over-eulogize it and over-denigrate it” (151). While one cannot argue against the validity of this argument, it is more accurate to claim that the irony of the poem is aimed at certain members of society who, though thinking they occupy an elevated position, can be equally debased by their own physical or sexual needs, as well as by the social need to pay homage to the fundament above them in the pecking order. In several respects, Beaulieu does not resemble Erasmus and other mock encomiasts because his recourse to obscenity and the debauched robs his work of the wit, playfulness, and sophistication so characteristic of Erasmus. Moreover, given Beaulieu’s *vue d’en bas*, it is difficult to associate him with what Annette Tomarken notes as the perspective of a “down-looker” (*The Smile* 29). Quoting Lucien Bompaire, Tomarken explains that the “down-looker” is related to the Greek notion of *kataskopos*, which describes a figure “qui du haut d’une montagne ou d’un astre observe (et méprise) les humains” (29). Beaulieu’s poet may be misanthropic, but there is little indication that he considers himself morally and intellectually superior to those he despises, or that he has anything to propose in place of the current state of affairs. Be that as it may, Beaulieu’s narrator does recall satirical writers of Erasmus’s ilk through the broad and biting nature of his sarcasm, and through the technique of praising a normally despised object as a point of departure for social critique. From a rhetorical and social point of view, satire, in this sense, ostensibly defines itself as the practice of adulating the lowly in order to criticize the mighty.

Within this sarcastic world view, the point where the body meets society is the ass, and in many cases the anus. Rhetorically, the various aspects of society that come under Beaulieu’s ridicule must, like excrement, pass through the anus as it is the bung-hole that provides Beaulieu with the satirical perspective he wishes to provide the reader.

Poetically, this perspective expresses itself as a reversed Petrarchan conceit. In its traditional form, the Petrarchan conceit takes an image and transforms it into a metaphor that represents the most salient, if not the most positive aspects of the love object's physical and metaphysical being. For example, a material signifier such as the eyes comes to represent an ethereal signified such as the eternal nature of the soul. Elsewhere, I have argued that with respect to the *blason* genre, the *blason*, or physical object, becomes the signifier, while the allegorical signified can be thought of as the *blasonné*.<sup>6</sup> *Du cul* represents a variant, if not an inversion of this process because Beaulieu's mocking attempt to glorify the ass and anus presents a rhetorical framework where the *blason* of the physical butt represents a *blasonné* of an even more earthy, if not debased, society. The movement is consistently downward rather than upward. In many instances, Beaulieu's poem creates an overall seediness about humanity and how it interacts. As a result, from the standpoint of defining the *blason*, Albert-Marie Schmidt's concept of the genre as "Un poème qui vise, non pas à décrire, mais à évoquer [...] une chose" (A. and E. Tomarken 143) appears more pertinent to Beaulieu than does Sebillet's. What *Du cul* "evokes" is the derision of society via the intermediary of the body. Certainly, Beaulieu's poem, like many Renaissance *blasons*, is descriptive in nature. But Beaulieu repeatedly goes past description by deploying a reputedly disgusting part of the body as a conduit for social commentary. From a literary perspective, Beaulieu, more than most of his fellow *blasonneurs*, expands the scope of the genre not by making self-analytical observations on its origin and development, but by combining a private focus on the body and sexuality with a mordant assault on public mores and institutions.

### **The Ass as Boss and Servant: Anal Retention and Anal Sex**

Beaulieu's direct references to the ass begin with the butt's dominance over the human body. In a general sense, Beaulieu's allusions to the body and sex challenge the Renaissance celebration of the body by degrading its more sophisticated organs and appendages in order to valorize what is normally considered unclean. The poem's second strophe provides a good example:

Et tout premier dis que sans menterie  
 Le Cul (au corps) a haulte seigneurie,  
 Et que ainsi soit, La force de son sens  
 Vient parforcer toutz les aultres cinq sentz  
 A consentir aux sentences mucées  
 Dans son Cerveau, puis par luy prononcées  
 Si justement qu'on n'en peult appeller,  
 Ne contre luy (fors en vain) rebeller. (vv. 7-14)

The power of the rump is such that it has its own "sense" which predominates over the other five senses. Beaulieu even goes so far as to say that the anus functions in the manner of a brain. Poetically and philosophically, what occurs is an inversion of the Neoplatonic/Scèvian model whereby body parts representationally become more metaphysical and less "physical" as one moves up the body toward the head (see Cottrell 68–69). By placing the brain in the bung hole, Beaulieu prepares his satire of human behavior in that the anus becomes the locus of human intelligence and/or stupidity. Beaulieu continues the elaboration of the asshole's physical power by suggesting that body parts such the hair, forehead, eyebrows, eyes, and mouth, which not coincidentally are themselves objects of more traditional *blasons*, die if the anus is blocked or does not function properly. In alluding to the superiority of the ass over these various body parts,

6. For a more detailed description of this process, consult Ganim 22–24.

Beaulieu implies the superiority of his scandalous *blason* over those of his contemporaries.

As if to underscore the bum's importance from a rhetorical and physical standpoint, Beaulieu argues that while other organs are incapacitated in the event the anus malfunctions, the bung-hole itself remains unaffected if organs or appendages such as the eye or leg are lost. Not only does the hole not die if the rest of the body is injured, its meat, or "chere" is untouched (v. 24). While the poem deals very little with excrement itself, within the ribald logic of the text, the idea that the ass produces something worthy of the term "chere," as opposed to "merde" for example, does raise the status of the butt as an object to be venerated. It is interesting to note that despite Beaulieu's admittedly offensive subject matter and tone, *Du cul* is surprisingly free of crude language. With the exception of the term "chiant" near the very end of the poem (v. 134), the register of Beaulieu's language is curiously high. One likely reason is the poet's desire to underscore the irony of having a debauched subject portrayed in refined language. No doubt for Beaulieu a high level of language combined with the basest of topics raises his status as a *blasonneur*. To combine the Tomarkens' argument with my own, I hold that what the poet "mocks" is not the respect/ridicule framework of the genre so much as the literary and social pretension associated with composing *blasons*, especially those of a laudatory nature.

This first section of the poem highlighting the power and merit of the fundament ends with the conclusion that the organs comprising the human body depend on the anus not only for their health, but for their very life. Though not directly stated, the underlying assumption is that if humanity does not excrete, it does not exist. As the custodian of human excretion, the bung-hole thus becomes responsible for the body's ability to maintain itself. Beaulieu's satire derides the Renaissance interest in anatomy and science, as well as the general Renaissance ethos of prizing the body, by reducing observations of the body's organic nature to how the asshole exercises control over the human system. Clearly, the power and pleasure of the anus lie in its retentive abilities. As many critics have argued, anal retention acts as one of the key signs of male authority and identity. At this point in Beaulieu's *blason*, while the superiority of the anus is not yet depicted at the expense of a female counterpart, the power and pleasure of anal retention serve as a precursor to male sexual dominance as expressed through anal intercourse with the female. As a result, Beaulieu's poem identifies itself as part of a "masculine poesis" (Persels 12), typical of the many sixteenth-century *blasons* in which the male subject celebrates his power over the female or poetic object through a type of sexualized aesthetic.

The anus's presumably overriding importance to human health is what necessitates the most elaborate and luxurious care when it falls ill. Adopting a tone that evokes a religious sensibility, Beaulieu lists the suppositories, powders, perfumes, oils, and clysters administered to "appease" the bung-hole so it will release the waste called "le mal au corps latent" (v. 34); an image which, as noted, is vital to the social significance of this *blason* because bodily ills prefigure social ills. The irony, of course, is that what is ostensibly one of the most disgusting and least venerable parts of the body receives lavish adornment and offerings so that it may carry out its benevolence on those that do it honor. From a satirical point of view, the anus's ability to act as a signifier for various aspects of social and erotic behavior far outstrips conventional expectations. Indicating the bung-hole's role as a sign, Beaulieu, in the poem's first apostrophe, exclaims: "O donques Cul, de santé le vray signe" (v. 35). On the surface, the hole becomes not only a sign of health, but a sign of power and wisdom because doctors must visit and consult it. The *blason* of the ass represents the *blasonné* of corporeal and social dominance. The irony that the "docteur en l'art de Medicine" (v. 36) depends largely on the anus to exercise his profession is not lost on Beaulieu. With this remark, the poet explicitly



begins his social commentary based on the logic that the anus's mastery of the body reflects its mastery of society. In this case, learned doctors, for all their enlightened, if not humanistic forays into the complexities of the body, invariably start and end with the asshole, with the implicit "mal" being the doctors' intellectual haughtiness. Up to this point in the poem, Beaulieu's satire is characterized by a distasteful, but relatively innocuous tone localized within the body. After the mention of the medical profession, Beaulieu's *blason* is laced with a social cynicism which comes to dominate the timbre of the work.

Nonetheless, the butt's power over the body, as well as over those who study it, finds a more intense manifestation in the realm of sexuality. For Beaulieu, the ass's sexual dimension reveals itself in such a way as to be transgressive both erotically and socially. From the standpoint of language, the subversive character of Beaulieu's lyric is brought out by his repetition of the word "bransler" in verses 54-58:

O donq, gros Cul à façon de Paris,  
Cul qu'en allant te degoises & bransles,  
Comme en dansant basses Danses ou Bran[s]les,  
Pour demonstrier (si bien ta geste on lit)  
Que tu feroyz bien bransler ung Chalict.

Initially, the meaning of the term is clear enough, with the poet suggesting that an ass that shakes on the dance floor or on the street will shake well in bed. While Beaulieu does not directly speak of masturbation in this strophe, a word such as "bransler" nonetheless suggests that either the poet himself engages in forms of self-pleasure by describing or watching the butt's movement, or that his reader may perhaps be aroused by such as passage. As Beaulieu's language indicates in the phrase "basses Danses," the tone of the poet's description is base, if not lewd. Auto-eroticization adds to Beaulieu's salaciousness, as the suggestion of onanism contributes to a representation of sexuality that accentuates the sinful and the aberrant. Sexual uncleanness mirrors the overall dirty nature of society, as Beaulieu attempts to "shake," i.e. "branler," conventionally repressive notions of sexuality.

The sexual movement of the poem passes from the self to the other in the next strophe (vv. 59-62), where the adornment of the ass is related in great detail. Various silks and linings are added to flaunt the *derrière* and render it all the more erotic in character. This sexual portrait becomes even more vivid as Beaulieu discusses how the "Cul rondellet, Cul proportionné" (v. 65) "tien[t] tout jour la Bouche close, / Fors quand tu voys qu'il fault faire aultre chose" (vv. 67-68). While the allusion here could be to defecation, more likely is the suggestion of anal sex. Beaulieu embellishes the buttocks in the previous lines in order to render it more attractive for penetration later. The poet alludes to the invasion of this part of the body in subsequent strophes which are even more licentious in character. In one passage, the anus defends itself against intrusion through flatulence. These lines are important within the gender dynamics of the *blason*, as the poet describes the "ennemye [...] / Que tost ne soit en la malle heure houssé, / Et par ta force & canons repoulsé" (vv. 100-02). The pun on the phrase "malle heure" (v. 101), which constitutes Beaulieu's only allusion to the phallus, simultaneously indicates the raw, exposed presence of the male, and the potentially violent misfortune of the female. Beaulieu continues his portrait of subversive sex, which in this case is avoided only through recourse to the scatological. Toward the end of the poem, Beaulieu personifies the anus, depicting it as a sex organ that wants to be penetrated and in some cases abused:

Cul désiré de estre souvent baisé  
De maint Amant de sa Dame abusé,

S'elle vouloit, moyennant telle offrande,  
Luy octroyer ton prochain qu'il demande. (vv. 109–12)

For Beaulieu, the anus and vagina, which he calls the bunghole's "prochain," are equally desirable and desirous. The term "offrande" becomes important since the description of the anus and vagina as "offerings" reinforces Beaulieu's disdainful satire of the Church and its practices. Anal intercourse is on a par with genital intercourse, thus solidifying Beaulieu's vision of sexuality as rebellious and violent. His obsession with this act is such that, in pre-Sadean fashion, Beaulieu appears to favor anal intercourse to standard sex because he views it as deviant and misogynistic. It is important to note that this discussion centers on heterosexual anal intercourse because the poet (with one possible exception to be discussed later), makes no allusion to the homosexual equivalent of this act, and because earlier in the poem, he specifically refers to the "Cul de Femme" and the "Cul de fille" (v. 64), thus sexualizing the female ass.<sup>7</sup> Beaulieu's mention of anal intercourse is important in terms of showing the boundaries he is willing both to challenge and respect in this *blason*. Beaulieu's misogyny aside, it is plausible to assume that given the complete abhorrence with which sixteenth-century French society viewed intercourse between males, Beaulieu avoided direct reference to male-male sex even in a poem as subversive and perverse as *Du cul*. Anal intercourse with women was marginally permissible given male control of society. In an overall sense, Beaulieu's (hetero)sexualization of the anus shows a movement whereby the anal retentiveness that controls the localized body of the male self passes to and controls the body of the female other through anal intrusion.

Male subjectivity and, by literary extension, male poetics, are partially defined in terms of anal sex with women. But in minor instances, the ass's role in intercourse is not limited to penetration, as it can help one partner thrust against the other ("[Cul] qui fais hurter souvent ton compaignon" [v. 70]) and shiver during the act of kissing ("Et tressaillir quand s'Amye on embrasse" [v. 71]). Beaulieu's rather obsessive association of the female ass with sex is in keeping with the subversive and scatological *thématique* of the poem. For Beaulieu, at least in this *blason*, sex is a dirty and aggressive personal vice. The poet's "anal eroticism" inverts the lyric and moral ethos of the more traditional *blason* which seeks spiritual elevation of the female beloved and the male narrator through the female body and the act of loving.<sup>8</sup> His description of the ass in its sexual context is bereft of any affection for, or even mention of, the beloved; a trait that often defines the *blason* and other lyric genres. In *Du cul*, sex exists and occurs in a raw state. Ideas of eternal union with the beloved and worship of her as a love object are non-existent. Neither love, marriage, nor reproduction are associated with the type of sex Beaulieu describes. Apart from the physical ornamentation of the buttocks, there is no seduction to speak of, and even then, the seduction is only one-sided. Moreover, adornment in and of itself only leads to physical possession. The beloved herself is not only nameless but non-existent, as she is dehumanized into a vulgar synecdoche of the ass and asshole. In effect, Beaulieu's scatological *blason* replaces the beloved with the bunghole. The all-but-absent depiction of the phallus and the vagina de-emphasizes the genitalia in order to reduce sexuality to its lowest common denominator, with the fundament serving as the chief point of reference for ownership and oppression.

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- 1 I follow Boswell's lead in purposely excluding the term "sodomy" from this essay. Boswell argues that historically, the term "sodomy" has referred to so many kinds of sex acts that it has become "vague and ambiguous as to be virtually useless" (93). It should also be noted that Beaulieu never employs the term. In a similar vein, I use the adjective "homosexual" only in the sense of "same sex," since, as Foucault has shown (1976:59), the emergence of a homosexual identity began in the nineteenth century.
  - 2 I borrow the term "anal eroticism" from Hammill, who uses it in his description of male desire.

For Beaulieu, the butt is the primary female sex organ, a perversion intensified by the *derrière's* relation to excrement. The poet accentuates the relationship between fecal matter and sexuality near the middle of the *blason*:

Cul anobly, & à qui fait homage  
La blanche Main, voire Teste & Corsage,  
Se enclinant bas pour te pouvoir toucher,  
Et toutz les jours reveremment torcher. (vv. 79–82)

Beaulieu's image of the white hand, along with the head and the body, leaning toward the asshole to "reverently touch" and "wipe" it carries political and sexual connotations. From a general standpoint, his politicization of the bunghole (to be discussed shortly) illustrates that Beaulieu's anality possesses more than a corporeal dimension. Within a socio-erotic context, the reader can apply Jonathan Dollimore's observation about D. H. Lawrence's *Women in Love*, where Lawrence "seem[s] to confuse [the] distinction between anality and sexuality proper" (273). The same is true for Beaulieu because the anus comes to dominate his representation of sexual desire and activity. In his portrait of aberrant intercourse, Beaulieu conflates sexual and excretory functions. Lawrence is again useful in the sense that in his rather trenchant essay, "Pornography and Obscenity," he elucidates this conflation on a psycho-sexual level:

In the really healthy human being, the distinction between the two is instant, [as] our profoundest instincts are perhaps our instincts of opposition between the two flows. But in the degraded human being the deep instincts have gone dead, and the two flows have become identical. (Dollimore 271)

Although it is in a sense anachronistic to apply Lawrence's commentary to Beaulieu, one remarks that while Lawrence represents the standard opinion that is appalled by the relation of the fecal to the sensual, Beaulieu, in his subversive discourse, revels in it. Consequently, from the standpoint of catharsis, the purgative and the erotic have become equals for Beaulieu, inverting conventional notions of sexuality to the point where anal sex, and its related activities, is preferred to genital contact because of its scatological and misogynistic associations.

Similarly, Beaulieu's blending of erotic and excretory pleasure runs counter to the Freudian notion that sexual desire and satisfaction are basically incompatible because "the excremental is all too intrinsically bound up with the sexual; the position of the genitals—*inter urinas feces*—remains the decisive and unchangeable factor."<sup>9</sup> In Beaulieu's scato-eroticism, it is precisely this concept of *inter urinas feces* that brings together sexual desire and satisfaction. Without question, it is in part because he derives erotic pleasure from a fecal source that Beaulieu would have been considered a pervert in the Freudian sense of the term. Applying Foucauldian terminology to Beaulieu, one notes that the poet's supposed debauchery derives from the fact that his portrait of sexuality has neither the "tempérance," nor the "sagesse" (Foucault 1984:45) associated with conventional Western sexuality since the Greeks. At the beginning of Foucault's discussion on the use, or *chrēsis*, of sexual desire in a social context, he poses the question: "comment prendre son plaisir « comme il faut ? »" (1984:63). Underlying this question, of course, is the Western tendency to impose limits on pleasure, especially those of a sexual nature, in the construction of social mores. Beaulieu's purpose is to abuse these mores, inverting them figuratively through the anus in order to "prendre son plaisir"—poetic, sexual, and satirical—"comme il *ne* faut *pas*."

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9. Dollimore 256–57 citing Freud.

### Politics and Religion: The View from Behind

If anal sex is the realm in which Beaulieu can show sin and indulge in it on a private level, then politics and religion reveal the bung-hole's role in exposing sin and/or abuse in the public sphere. As mentioned, Beaulieu's explicit critique of society begins with his mockery of doctors who rely on the anus as a gauge of human health (vv. 35–38). The poet's assault on presumably sophisticated practitioners of science escalates into a more spiteful attack on the upper classes when he observes how "tout Prince & grand Seigneur" (v. 40) must kiss the bung-hole immediately superior to him. Structurally, the term "Seigneur" is significant because it recalls what Beaulieu describes earlier in the poem as the "haulte seigneurie" (v. 8) the ass enjoys in the physical and political arenas. Beaulieu's scatologically satiric perspective is such that the "seigneur" that is "Monsieur le Cul" (v. 23) wields considerable control over the noblemen who run society.<sup>10</sup> The "tribut" (v. 43) accorded to the bung-hole is democratic in that "tout Filz de Mere / Soit paovre ou riche" (vv. 43–44) must pay his respects. Beaulieu's suggestion that self-humiliation affects rich and poor alike becomes part of his overall strategy of eliminating discrepancies between classes by finding the most vilely human point in common between social categories. In Beaulieu's world, where the distasteful is to be prized for its primitive insight into human relationships, there is no question of finding transcendent truths which unify humanity. The ethos and aesthetic of the disgusting are such that one must plumb the depths of the repulsive in order to establish equality between those whose lives ordinarily bear little to no resemblance to one another. Within Beaulieu's socio-scatological mind-set, part of the goal is to strip, if not purge the upper classes of their pretension by emphasizing that just as everyone defecates, so everyone participates in some sort of self-debasement as a means of recognizing the authority (corporeal or political) in place.

In several respects, political functions, like sexual functions, are reduced to a scatological interpretation. For Beaulieu, all human classification and activity become scatological, as he states that the ass maintains indiscriminate power over all social classes, be they "Seigneurs, Serfz, Folz & Sages" (v. 91). Among these classes, rank is determined by those who have others wipe them ("Dont les ungs ont pour te moucher des Pages" [v. 92]). While Beaulieu's mockery of the upper classes does, to a degree, support Pegg's argument that the poet sides mainly with the popular classes, one could conversely argue that Beaulieu's references to the "Serfz" and "Pages," who tend to the excretory needs of their superiors, reinforce the order as it already exists. At moments throughout the *blason*, Beaulieu is ambiguous about the bung-hole's power. On the one hand, it acts as an equalizer forcing everyone to stop and take account of the earthiness of human existence. On the other, though no one is excluded from heeding the commands of his own anus or that of another, some must pay more homage than others. For those at the bottom of the scale, so to speak, the various forms of the ass's "puissance" (v. 89) will come to define their lives more than for those at the higher end. From a social standpoint, the reader sees in Beaulieu's mockery a smutty and rather simplistic challenge to authority. But at the same time, this authority is not threatened because the lower classes are portrayed in a manner just as unflattering and offensive as for those in power. Accordingly, it is difficult to find a consistently humanistic strain in this poem because Beaulieu defines human nature in terms of its scatological nature. As a result, while the tone of Beaulieu's *blason* ostensibly favors the dispossessed, the poem does, perhaps in spite of itself, deride those with whom it purportedly sympathizes.

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10. One notes an echo in *Du pet et de la vessie*, where Beaulieu mentions that neither "Pappe, Roy, Duc, ne Prince" (v. 33) are exempt from gaseous emanations. See p. 304 of Pegg's edition.

When pondering the issue of humanism, readers of French Renaissance scatological literature will invariably compare Beaulieu to Rabelais and ask what similarities, if any, exist. At the outset, it must be stated that while scatological references are the mainstay of Beaulieu's work (at least in this poem), the same obviously cannot be said of Rabelais. In this vein, few stylistic links emerge between the two because the former attacks his targets directly, while the latter's scatological satire often takes the form of a digression from the principal narrative. On a thematic level, however, one can draw a parallel between Beaulieu and Rabelais in that both authors, to use M. A. Screech's commentary on *Gargantua*, rely on scatological references as a means of "comic condemnation" (50), which, at least in an initial sense, leads to "uncomplicated laughter" (51). In addition, Screech's observations on Panurge at the end of the *Quart Livre* hold, at least nominally for Beaulieu's poet, in that both find "glor[y] in the grossest, foulest, ugliest aspects of our common humanity" (460). Yet, it would be extremely difficult to think of Beaulieu's poet as someone who, like *Gargantua*, has "passed from befouled ignorance to clean enlightenment," or, in the manner of Pantagruel, "enshrine[s] [...] the higher qualities of man, both spiritual and physical" (460). The apparent universal baseness of *Du cul* is such that one has trouble detecting a philosophical progression that represents an intellectual or ethereal counterpoint to the grossest characterizations of human existence. Very little in Beaulieu's poem can seemingly be considered "moral and corrective" in tone, as he fails to put forth a sustained "vision" of humanity that even remotely resembles that found in *Gargantua* and the *Quart Livre*.<sup>11</sup>

Curiously, however, Beaulieu does try, in both a satirical and serious manner, to "sanitize" the bung-hole by discussing the anus in direct relation to the depiction of the body in the Bible. There emerges a marginally transcendent dimension to Beaulieu's scatology that in its own way briefly lends an air of unexpected intellectual sophistication to this *blason*. Early in the poem, Beaulieu gives the following explanation for why the anus should not be considered "sale et ord":

Car j'ay raison pour toy tout au contraire,  
Dieu sçait de qui, & voicy l'exemplaire.  
Ne lit on pas aux Livres anciens  
Ce qu'ung grand Clerc mande aux Corinthiens ?  
Ne sçay si c'est en l'Epistre premiere. (vv. 47–51)

Specifically, Beaulieu refers to chapter 12 of Paul's first letter to the Corinthians. In general, Paul's message centers on the organic nature of the body as it reflects the organic nature of God's kingdom: all parts are necessarily interdependent and homologous in order to make the whole function properly. What is particularly relevant to Beaulieu's poem are verses 22–26, where Paul states:

[...] it is precisely the parts of the body that seem to be the weakest which are the indispensable ones; and it is the least honorable parts of the body that we clothe with the greatest care [...]. God has arranged the body so that more dignity is given to the parts which are without it [...]. (304)

By citing Scripture, Beaulieu accomplishes two goals. First, he finds authority for his literary and aesthetic "exaltation" of the ass from an unlikely, but respected institutional source. Secondly, and more importantly, he succeeds in challenging that institutional source by signaling potentially embarrassing passages in the Church's principal text. The quotation from Corinthians, which would appear to support Beaulieu's *éloge*, also calls

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11. I take the terms "moral and corrective" from Lee who employs them when describing Juvenal's *Satires* (16). The word "vision" comes from Lee's discussion of Rabelais's use of scatology to form a "new vision of the world" (19).

into question the Church itself which, while presumably agreeing with Paul's observations, has historically often attempted to deny the body and its functions, thus committing its own sin against humanity. Despite the frequently scabrous tone of Beaulieu's social commentary, *Du cul* is not devoid of measured, carefully-selected allusions that point out more nuanced forms of social hypocrisy.

The religious tenor of *Du cul* becomes much more abstract in Beaulieu's next reference to the Bible, a passage yielding problematic issues concerning the ass and religion. Specifically, Beaulieu alludes to chapter 24 of the First Book of Samuel, where David spares Saul's life:

Le Roy Saul (qui poursuyvoit David)  
Si tres forcé, que à David se vint rendre  
Sans y penser, Lequel ne le vint prendre  
Ny ne le occit, quoy qu'il le eust en sa main,  
Plus ayment paix que espandre sang humain. (vv. 94–98)

In Samuel's text, David, rather than kill his pursuer and chief adversary, bows to the ground and shows reverence toward Saul. Unlike Paul, Samuel makes no mention of the body, let alone the body's least honorable parts. Samuel's message of charity toward one's enemy appears to have nothing to do with Beaulieu's previous commentary on religion's hypocritical stance toward the body. Indeed, this passage seems almost entirely out of place given the nature of Beaulieu's *blason*. Why, then, does Beaulieu cite Samuel, and what is the relation to the ass? From the standpoint of the body, verse 97 describes David as having Saul "en sa main." As a result, it is possible to assert that the phrase could indicate a kind of sexual tension between David and Saul, with the phrase "ayment paix" in verse 98 phonetically suggesting anal/scatological desire.<sup>12</sup> Such an idea, though certainly plausible, is for self-evident reasons couched in the rather lofty language and tone the passage assumes. A more clearly discernible interpretation of David's unexpected show of respect and mercy is found in the notion that Beaulieu illustrates the most noble aspect of the social protocol characterized by what we would now call "ass-kissing." Here, Beaulieu gives an example of how power relationships can be conducted with humility rather than humiliation. In describing David's effort to avoid bloodshed, Beaulieu, if only for an instant, seeks to transcend the bawdy nature of his language and theme in order to interject a moment of humanistic, if not spiritual, enlightenment. To do so, he must abandon any concrete depiction of the buttocks in order to give a more abstract representation of how codes governing rank and behavior can actually have a salutary effect. Without question, the change in tone is abrupt and almost nonsensical, especially given the next strophe which emphasizes that anal sex can be repulsed by farting. Nonetheless, if there is a moment in *Du cul* where, in the manner of Rabelais, the salacious is counterpoised by the spiritual, these verses would appear to be the best example.

While reliance on biographical explanations for a poet's selection of forms and themes should always be advanced cautiously, readers are within their interpretive rights to bring up these issues with respect to Beaulieu, whose afflicted past could at least partially explain the shift in tone from David's beneficence to the invasion and defense of the anus. The inconsistency of Beaulieu's life, as evidenced by his conversion from a Catholic priest to a Reformist minister who later renounced his profane poetry, but who, at about the same time, came under charges of wife-beating and pederasty, shows an erratic individual whose desire for spiritual inspiration conflicted with his need to threaten and rebel against what he perceived as social and personal restraints.

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12. I am indebted to Dora Polachek for this suggestion.

With respect to the religious and personal dimension of *Du cul*, one observes that near the end of the work, Beaulieu passes from an almost reverent view of the Bible in his mention of Samuel, to a merciless attack on the Church five lines later. Quite plausibly, this shift in tone can be explained by a quasi-Calvinist subtext in the poem in which the Bible is revered, but the Catholic Church itself is assailed.<sup>13</sup> Here, Beaulieu underscores and summarizes the most powerful, if not offensive aspects of the relationship he establishes between the anus and Catholicism:

Las, si feray, car tu peulx clans l'Eglise  
 (A ung besoing) souspirer & peter,  
 Quoy que le Nez s'en vueille despiter,  
 Et que on te dist que tu es sacrilege,  
 Qui est à toy ung tresbeau Privilege. (vv. 104–08)

As if to cast a parting shot in the direction of the Church, Beaulieu praises the ass's ability to release large stinking farts during mass. Flatulence, which on one level constitutes a "sacrilege" (v. 107), emerges in Beaulieu's mind as a "privilege" (v. 108) in which the anus should indulge. In his blasphemously farcical effort to mock Catholic liturgy, Beaulieu transforms the fart into a kind of anti-incense, with the bung-hole becoming a scatological censer. Even in church, the body can fight the repression it must endure at the hands of ecclesiastical authorities. Beaulieu's scorn for the Church is such that he transforms what is ostensibly a place of worship into one where the faithful come not to pray but to relieve themselves. The poetically exposed anus once more inverts the world as it suggests the iconoclastic overtones of the narrator's discourse.

### The Anus and the Æsthetic of the Ugly

Ultimately, the anus's ability to transgress literary and social norms is what gives the bung-hole its "grand valeur" (v. 113). From an aesthetic point of view, this "grand valeur" is maintained by the bung-hole's brown color. As the poem concludes, Beaulieu returns to the body, claiming that while the whiteness of other body parts will fade and turn ugly, the asshole will retain its original dark color, with the longevity of this color proving its superiority as an organ. From a generic standpoint, Beaulieu's praise of the bung-hole's brunette color is meant as a satire of other *blasonneurs'* equation of whiteness with beauty. One need only think of Marot's use of the color white in *Le beau tétin* to apprehend Beaulieu's mockery. The poet's derision of more standard expressions of the genre is reinforced when considering that the permanence of the bung-hole's brown color undermines the *carpe diem* motif implicit in most *blasons*. In the *blasons* of Marot, Scève, and Saint-Gelais among others, attention often centers on the "moment," with poets emphasizing the fleeting beauty of the woman's body. As a result, beauty must be taken advantage of in a timely way. For Beaulieu, the anus's power to excrete, to offend, and to excite lasts the entire lifetime of the person to whom it belongs. It is thus the constancy of the anus which gives this organ its "Empire" (v. 124) over the rest of the body. By mentioning this idea, Beaulieu echoes his opening verses: the other parts of the body owe their health, performance, and beauty to a well-functioning bung-hole. In an especially vulgar conclusion that reinforces the scatological *thématique* of the poem, Beaulieu, using the term "chiant" (v. 134), argues that crapping reigns supreme among bodily functions because all else breaks down without it. Defecation underscores the artistic paradox that constitutes a final inversion at the end the poem. Specifically,

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13. The Calvinist subtext of Beaulieu's *blason* is not without its own irony given that the poet celebrates heterosexual buggery in his text, but was accused of the homosexual equivalent of the crime. It is well known that male-male sex was a sin the Reformers often attributed to "Papists."

Beaulieu's satirical adaptation of the *blason* puts forth an aesthetic of the ugly where the reader, in a quasi-religious sense, must "confess" (v. 135) that the beauty of the body described in most other *blasons* remains dependent on what many consider its most unclean and disgusting feature. Because of its ability to preserve physical beauty, and to illustrate the ugliness of the social and religious body politic, the bunghole attains beauty in and of itself.

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