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## Honey, Wax, and the Dead Bee

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# Honey, Wax, and the Dead Bee

KEITH M. BOTELHO

Never have bees become more “real” to humans than when their absence is made the stuff of headlines. Since 2006, when Colony Collapse Disorder first was reported in the news after beekeepers witnessed an alarming decrease in bee populations (CCD itself being an umbrella term for multiple causes, including the use of pesticides, the invasion of the harmful varroa mite and hive beetle, fungal and microsporidian diseases, and the agricultural practices of monoculture), there has been a renaissance of bees in the modern imagination.<sup>1</sup> As a reaction to such dire reports, backyard and urban beekeeping have become everyman and everywoman pursuits, and beekeeping societies throughout the United States have begun to skew younger, with vibrant online communities enlivened by the latest digital forms connecting beekeepers—both commercial to those with single hives—in their pursuits.<sup>2</sup>

Yet bees are certainly not becoming extinct, and reports of an oncoming “beemageddon” or “beepocalypse” have been greatly exaggerated.<sup>3</sup> In fact, according to a recent study by the USDA, honeybee colonies have risen in number since 2006, and the number of commercially managed colonies is now the highest it’s been in 20 years.<sup>4</sup> What explains the resurgence? It is all too easy to look to humans as the answer to the problems of bees. But there is something very wrong with coming to that conclusion too quickly. It is precisely *because* of human practices that some scientists believe honeybees have experienced the problems that have recently faced hives across the world. Again, renewed attention and intervention on the behalf of *apis mellifera* is occurring because of the potential effects on humans—we sometimes pay attention to the nonhuman world only when it forces its way into our collective consciousness. For instance, the White House’s Office of Science and Technology announced in May 2015 new steps to promote pollinator health because “Pollinators are critical to the Nation’s economy, food security, and environmental health,” while their “tremendously valuable service” to humans is often noted.<sup>5</sup> This is nothing new, of course—beekeeping treatises from 400 years ago detail similar things about the excellence and vital power of honey and wax in the service of humanity.<sup>6</sup>

This essay, then, offers a series of provocations to thinking about animal (in particular, apian) materialisms, specifically asking: what is the logic of bee things, especially those that humans have taken from the hive? How are we to imagine bee presence in these materials once they become commodities? What does it mean to be an ingredient? And, concurrently, what does it mean to ingest the materials of the hive? And how are we to understand the early modern consumption of bees? Where is the bee in bee things? Do these materials contain shadows or specters of the beast that still is or once was? And in what ways does

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an individual dead bee (as opposed to dead hives of bees) matter to individual humans or the human multitude?

The resurgence of interest in the lives (and deaths) of bees, and their intimate connection to humanity, allows us to pause over the stories we have told—and those we continue to tell—about these marvelous creatures. Bees fit nicely into the early fifteenth-century definition of the *fabulous*, “mythical, legendary, rich in myths” (from *fabula*, “story, tale”).<sup>7</sup> Yet they also emerge as “astonishing, incredible” to early moderns and moderns alike (*OED* 5b.).<sup>8</sup> Fables, of course, were often animal stories that were at their heart morality tales about or for humans, structuring the stories humans themselves told. Beryl Rowland discusses this symbolic economy that stretched across centuries, stating, “[m]any of the supposed characteristics of animals were repeated by Greek and Roman writers as facts of natural history, and they passed almost unchallenged into the medieval world, where they were reinforced by Biblical symbolism.”<sup>9</sup> She continues: “In the Renaissance, when a great many animal symbols were secularized, the basic symbolism usually remained,” noting that despite “a growing concern with the concrete and the particular....the conception of nature as allegory persisted.”<sup>10</sup> Edward Topsell, in the Epistle Dedicatory to his *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (1607), speaks of the virtues and worth of nonhuman creatures, noting that one of the holy uses of beasts in Scripture was “for reproof and instruction” of man: “And so all the world are bid to learne the natures of all Beasts, for there is always something to be learned in them.”<sup>11</sup> He cautions against believing too easily in fables, for his aim is “to follow truth and not deceivable Fables” although he does note that while he has collected those things that were essential to every beast, “yet I have delivered in this treatise many strange and rare things, not as fictions, but Myracles of nature”<sup>12</sup>

The question, however, remains: do myths allow us to see real animals more or less clearly? Emma Phipson speaks about how early modern writers gathered their information about bees from classical authors like Aristotle, Pliny, and Varro, perpetuating “ancient lore,” and noting that “[i]t is remarkable how long writers on natural history were content to repeat at second hand, without caring to verify by experience, the conjectures of their predecessors.”<sup>13</sup> The mythos of bees, stretching back centuries, still occupies a central place in our current moment, although, as Rosi Braidotti notes, “Animals are no longer the signifying system that props up humans’ self projections and moral aspirations.”<sup>14</sup> For early moderns, the symbolic registers of the bee are not replaced, but rather co-exist with an emerging attention of the co-presence of bees, a desire to see them up close (through observation hives and microscopes), to partake in their sweetness and light. Inheriting a tradition of animal allegory from the ancients and the potent medieval bestiary tradition that often co-opted the animal for moral and ethical means, Renaissance Europeans, despite a growing awareness of their co-presence with bees, continued to return to the apian metaphor and admire the seeming perfection in the bee’s diminutive form.

Some of the earliest beliefs about bees—for instance, that they were able to generate spontaneously out of the carcass of an ox, what was known as *bugonia*—can be found in Ovid, Pliny, and perhaps most famously the fourth

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book of Virgil's *Georgics*, where Virgil gives a full account "of an Arcadian / Bee-master, the process by which he often made / A culture of bees from the putrid blood of slaughtered bullocks" (283-285) and "from the oxen's bellies all over their rotting flesh / Creatures are humming, swarming through the wreckage of their ribs" (554-555).<sup>15</sup> Such thinking continued throughout the Renaissance, as writers conceded their uncertainty, some believing that drones impregnated the worker bees, who would then lay all the hive's eggs. John Worlidge, even as late as 1676 in his *Apiarium; or a Discourse of the government and ordering of bees*, would endorse *bugonia*, writing that it is "not improbable" that "out of their Carcases Multitudes of Bees may be engendred" (B3r). Writers on agricultural matters often looked to the ancients for their understanding of the hive. The ancient Greeks and Romans—from Aristotle, Virgil, Hesiod, Varro, Pliny the Elder, Columella—asserted a continued influence on works concerning apiculture in the Renaissance. The earliest English translation of Virgil's *Georgics* (*The bucoliks of Publius Virgilius Maro*) was published in 1589, newly translated into English verse by A. Fleming. However, according to Margaret Tudeau-Clayton, thirty-eight editions of the *Georgics* were published on the continent in Latin from the beginning of Henry VII's reign to the end of Queen Elizabeth's reign.<sup>16</sup> Thus, while Shakespeare might have read *Georgics* in Latin in school, he could have referenced it again in translation at the start of his theatrical career. Virgil's *Georgics* were granted some measure of curricular space by schoolmasters throughout the sixteenth century. T.W. Baldwin, in his 1944 *William Shakespeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, remarks that, "Probably no Elizabethan schoolboy ever escaped those bees."<sup>17</sup>

Shakespeare's own references to bees in fact often seem to be recalling Book IV of Virgil's *Georgics*, although contemporary bee treatises and perhaps his own rural upbringing might factor in to the playwright's understanding of these creatures.<sup>18</sup> Canterbury's speech in *Henry V* gives us the best extended-reference to Virgil's *Georgics* of the numerous bee references found in Shakespeare.<sup>19</sup> In 1.2, Exeter, Westmoreland, and Canterbury make the case before King Harry for war with France. Canterbury begins by claiming that heaven divides "[t]he state of man in diverse functions" (184) to which endeavor and obedience are his principle aims. Canterbury then exacts a Virgilian awareness of bees: "for so work the honeybees, / Creatures that by a rule in nature teach / The act of order to a peopled kingdom" (187-89). Canterbury outlines a hierarchy of the hive: the king (queen), the magistrates at home, the merchants (abroad), the soldiers, masons, civil citizens, porters, justices, and drones. His is an anthropomorphic vision of the hive, aligning the many functions and the "continual motion" of the inhabitants of the hive with humans (185). The multiple roles that bees perform "may work contrariously" (206), but, as is evident in Canterbury's understanding of the hive, "So may a thousand actions once afoot / End in one purpose, and be all well borne / Without defect" (212-14).

The echoes to Virgil are clear. Virgil, at the outset of Book Four, asserts he will "tell of a tiny / Republic" of "Great-hearted leaders, a whole nation whose work is planned, / Their morals, groups, defenses" (1.1-3). Virgil discusses bees and their work in the summer and how they "put their winnings

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into a common pool,” pointing to the numerous functions that bees undertake in and out of the hive (1.127). Some labor in the fields, some stay behind to protect the hive, others tend to the young bees, “the hope / Of their people” (4.162). Some are “wardens,” others warriors, while others—the drones—remain “that work-shy gang” (4.168). As a 1628 translation of the *Georgics* puts it, “Each in his function Bees of Athens take” or “Each to his own office” (line 177).<sup>20</sup> Shakespeare also seems to have borrowed for Canterbury’s speech Virgil’s explicit likening of bees to man (“If little things with great we may compare”).<sup>21</sup>

Canterbury’s logic rests on making the King see England through the example of the hive, emphasizing that England can maintain its sovereignty at home if the King divides the kingdom and takes “one quarter into France” to “make all Gallia shake” (216, 217). Interestingly, it is Canterbury’s speech on bees that is the decisive example for King Harry, who is now resolved to go to France and “bend it to our awe” (225). Canterbury claims that the example of bees teaches “The act of order to a peopled kingdom” (189). As Cristopher Hollingsworth has remarked, Canterbury has merged the characteristics of man and bees not to argue men *are* bees, but rather that both “naturally participate in a Divine order and according to their place in the chain of being.”<sup>22</sup> The bees, like in Virgil, are working independently in their roles but for one purpose, and derive a collective power and sovereignty, which Joseph Campana has recently argued might best be understood through scale variance.<sup>23</sup> In using bees as a model of good governance and policy, Canterbury naturalizes a particular political system that signals that humans, like bees, depend upon one another. Nonetheless, Canterbury uses the example of the hive for the benefit of England, noting that Heaven ordains the similarity between man and bee, a likeness embedded in nature. Bees and their hives for both Shakespeare and Virgil provided humans with an approved model for the ordering of human society.

Yet can we (or should we) talk about an individual bee?<sup>24</sup> I posed this question in a 2012 SAA seminar led by Laurie Shannon and Andreas Hoefele, and it might be useful to briefly pause over its ramifications for insect life in general and bees in particular. Erica Fudge has discussed how “the ecological argument, in which the species rather than the individual is emphasized, sits at the heart of much literary ecocriticism, in which landscape and nature in general are the focus and animals perceived only as part of that landscape”<sup>25</sup> We might here recall Derrida’s encounter with his cat in *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, where he writes of “a real cat, truly, believe me, a little cat. . . . It doesn’t silently enter the room as an allegory for all the cats on earth, the felines that traverse myths and religions, literature and fables.”<sup>26</sup> To focus on the individual bee amid the swarm seems like the material of fable or allegory, yet early modern bee treatises often spoke of bees in the collective, not necessarily concerned with the individual bee (other than the Queen) but rather with the maintenance of the stock of bees in the hives, of the swarm, of the many.<sup>27</sup> Samuel Purchas, for one, in his *A Theater of Political Flying Insects*, writes, “And *una Apia, nulla Apis*, one Bee is no Bee, but a multitude, a swarm of Bees, uniting their forces together is very profitable, very comfortable, very terrible, profitable to their owners,

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comfortable to themselves, terrible to their enemies.”<sup>28</sup> Entomologists today claim that it is best not to think of bees as individual units but rather as one collective unit, a single living thing, a superorganism steeped in complexity.<sup>29</sup> Thomas D. Seeley, in his *Honeybee Democracy*, examines the collective decision making of swarms and bee colonies, showing how “the collective wisdom of the scout bees chooses the best available option” of new potential home.<sup>30</sup> He writes, “the amazing feat of democratic decision making performed by the scout bees offers us deep lessons about how a group of individuals with common interests can structure their group so that it functions as an effective decision-making body,” notable without the guidance of a leader.<sup>31</sup> Bees are remarkable because of their seeming ability to communicate in terms that early moderns never could quite grasp. It is the power of the hive—that collective body most resembling a *polis*—that functions to provide a model for human communities. Yet to what extent does the individual bee intensify what is human? What does the notion of scale in relation to insects tell us about humans in a world swarming with multitudes of diverse life forms?<sup>32</sup> The individual worker bee lives three to six weeks in the summer, but that bee is a small yet necessary component of the hive, that collective or multitude housed in honeycomb. As such, hives possess a much longer life. It may be that it is the hive, not the singular bee, which possesses the ultimate potency in the early modern imagination.

There is an ethical dimension in this discussion, of course—do we pay attention to animals out of fear for their potential demise (as a species, say) or are we more concerned with the livelihood of one animal, creature, or beast (a panda in a zoo, say, or that ant crawling across your desk)? Are animals thus more “real” when we take them out of their swarms or hives or herds and get up close and personal with them? And if this is the case, does using bee products, or does consuming a bee, make us more attuned to this insect, of seeing it not as some symbol but rather as a fellow creature in the world? When we encounter the remnants of bee production, or even the bee itself, how is the human “charactered” at that moment? How does understanding our dependence on that little bee complicate notions of human sovereignty? As we will see, in early modern recipes, the individual bee reappears, becomes significant outside of the swarm or the hive, its little body imbued with sizeable benefits.

Early modern receipts (recipes) for food, drink, and curatives often called for the use of honey or wax, both of which are substances that might be usefully classified as what Roland Barthes called “resilient totems,” or objects that support varied mythologies.<sup>33</sup> Not only did writers of the Renaissance imbue the materials of the hive with an uncanny reverence, but they also repeatedly elevate the hive and its bees as possessing enviable virtues, what Edmund Southerne in 1593 identified as their “Knowledge, Order, Government, Art, and Industry.”<sup>34</sup> Bees were “laborious Animals” that were also “Curious, Industrious, and Profitable Insects,” for the materials within the hive, honey and wax, provided “profit and pleasure” to English men and women.<sup>35</sup> In his opening chapter of *The Theater of Insects*, Thomas Moffet writes, “Of all Insects, Bees are the principal and are chiefly to be admired, being the only creature of that kinde, framed for the nourishment of Man” and also the “most serviceable and most

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profitable;” he claims that “there is nothing in Bees but what doth serve for our health and welfare.”<sup>36</sup> And Charles Butler declared how the “singular virtues” of wax and honey were “for the use and comfort of man.”<sup>37</sup> Humans become central in these articulations, and bees are deemed exceptional creatures because of what they offer humankind—models for good governance and material products for sweetening and soothing their lives.

Indeed, bees were a part of the Renaissance everyday, present in a range of products from candles to food to drink to medicines. However, I want to think further about to what extent the bee remains embodied in the materials it produces. There is a crucial vitality in honey and wax, products that have undergone their own transformation within the hive as bees have first mixed pollen they have collected with enzymes in their bodies to produce those materials. As Erica Fudge has noted, the agency of animal stuff derived from beasts lingers even after that animal is dead and has become a commodity.<sup>38</sup> I would also claim that the material presence of the bee, despite (or, perhaps, because of) its diminutive proportions, lives on in those things that it has transformed within the hive; these materials continue to have potency when they go into the human world. The apian spectre in the products produced of honey and wax point to the material afterlife of the bee and its hive. We might think about the notion of the imprint left in relation to early modern notions of “character,” the imprint or qualities of a person left behind.<sup>39</sup> The constitutive qualities of the bee remain, and in these early modern receipts, the essence of the bee is preserved, affecting the value of the products it haunts.<sup>40</sup>

According to Southerne, “for the use of Wax, how pleasant it is both for lights and medicines, there is none can deny.”<sup>41</sup> Wax, often dyed and used for seals, models, and other images and impressions, was also a staple in early modern receipts.<sup>42</sup> Take, for example, Mrs. Sarah Longe’s receipt book (c. 1610), which includes a receipt “For sore nipples” that calls for Beeswax boiled in fresh butter along with the likes of marigold leaves and plantine ribwort.<sup>43</sup> Here, the material properties of beeswax become a salve upon the human body, investing the bee with healing properties even in its absence. Butler called wax “a celestial or divine medicine” that works miraculously, for it is “the ground and foundation of cerecloths and salves” and it “healeth a wound, be the same never so wide & big being afore wide-stitched up, in the space of 11. days or 12. at the most.”<sup>44</sup> And Richard Remnant, in his *A Discourse or History of Bees* (1637), points to “the singular use of wax in salves and surgery, for cures both within and without, and for use in making candles for sweet and dainty burning, and the diverse other uses, is well known.”<sup>45</sup> Candles in the Renaissance were intimately associated with animals, made either of tallow (animal fat) or wax (bees). Here the creature registers with the human primarily in terms of scent, thus foregrounding humanity’s co-presence with bees. Furthermore, the use of wax candles seems to have been connected to class, for “the wax candle was a luxury; the tallow candle...made at home, gave a feeble guttering light.”<sup>46</sup> According to Holly Dugan, tallow candles were widely used in the period and emitted a strong stench;<sup>47</sup> we can recall Iachimo’s words in *Cymbeline* that “the smoky light / That’s fed with stinking tallow” (1.6.110). By all accounts, tallow candles burned

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unevenly, and the presence of the animal spectre could be experienced through the nose. In the indoor playhouses and at court, the more expensive beeswax candles were often used, and this light source certainly did affect the experience of performance (producing a stronger light source and a sweeter smell for the audience). In fact, as Andrew Gurr tells us, illumination of the theaters was one of the most substantial costs associated with the King's Men at Blackfriars, and in the indoor halls, the practice of breaking off the performance between each act was necessary "if only to keep the candles that lit the stage trimmed."<sup>48</sup>

Honey, unlike wax, was often consumed, and because it also had a multifaceted set of uses, it was a valued commodity in early modern culture.<sup>49</sup> Edmund Southerne notes "how far English honey passeth that of other countries," while Charles Butler details how to boil and clarify honey, that "celestial nectar," for "a most pleasant & delicate taste."<sup>50</sup> Harvesting of the honey in such a way, straining and skimming it during the boiling process, points to the presence of bee larvae and wax that could find its way into the honey. Honey, a natural sweetener and less expensive than imported sugar, was regularly used in various culinary confections, some of which Butler describes: "marmalade, and marchpane, preserved fruits, as plums, & cherries: & c. Conserves of roses, violets, &c. with syrups of the like matter" which, "being made with honey, do continue longer, & do more kindly work their effects."<sup>51</sup> The "marvelous efficacy" of honey in the preservation of health was also well documented, for "honey is as necessary in every respect as Sugar, both Surgeons, Apothecaries, and Physicians know"<sup>52</sup> One example we find is from the recipe book of Lady Ann Fanshawe, compiled in 1651, where "two Spoonfulls of honey" are the primary ingredient in the recipe "To Make a Suppository Effectually," furthermore, Mrs. Sarah Longe's receipt book (c. 1610) calls for a pound of honey in "A sirrope for a Cough of the Lungs."<sup>53</sup> Considering that a worker bee makes approximately one-and-a-half teaspoons of honey in her lifetime, it is important to consider the sheer amount of honey used here as well as the co-presence with bees that the recipe creates through its pound of honey. As Butler makes clear, honey

openeth obstructions, it (6) cleareth the breast & lights of those humors which fall from the head to those parts, it (7) looseth the belly (8) purgeth the foulness of the body & (9) provoketh urine, it (10) cutteth and casteth up phlegmatic matter, and therefore sharpeneth the stomachs of them which, by reason thereof, have little appetite, (11) it purgeth those things which hurt the clearness of the eyes (12) it nourisheth very much (13) it breedeth good blood (14) it sirreth up and preserveth natural heat.<sup>54</sup>

Honey's virtues are further detailed, for not only can it, according to Butler, heal wounds and sores, clear up oral inflammations, prolong old age, and be a remedy against a surfeit and the falling sickness, but it also "keepeth all things uncorrupt," for "the bodies of the dead being embalmed with honey have been thereby preserved from putrefaction."<sup>55</sup> The human is thus centrally intertwined and

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entangled with bees in the promotion of his or her health, livelihood, and well-being.

But what occurs when the (dead) bee itself becomes a part of the recipe or cure, and how might we then read the relationship between the early modern individual and the fragile body of the singular bee?<sup>56</sup> If the bee is only a specter in the commodities humans use from the hive, then we are forced to encounter the embodied bee anew in these instances. First, let us begin with a striking moment from Thomas Moffet's *The Theater of Insects*:

But what their bodies and their labours do work upon our bodies, it is now worth the pains to relate. . . . First of all, their bodies as soon as they are taken out of the Hive, and pounded and drank with some diuretick, or wine and milk, do strongly cure the dropse, dissolve the stone or gravel, open all the passages of the urine, cure the stopping of the bladder. Bees that die in the honey, cure impostumes, and help the dulnesse of sight or hearing. Also being pounded together they cure the griping or wringing of the belly or guts, being applied to them. If poisoned honey be drank, they themselves being drank down after it, do expel it: they soften hard ulcers in the lips; being bound to a carbuncle or running sore, they heal it; they cure the bloody flux. Honey being strained with them, helps the crudities of the stomach, or specks or red pimples in the face. . . . Take Bees dead in the combs, and when they are thorough dry make them into powder. . . . mingle them with the Honey in which they died, and anoint the parts of the head that are bald and thin haired, and you shall see them grow again. Pliny in like manner teaches to burn a great company of Bees together, and mingle the ashes with oyl, and anoint the part; only with this caution, that the adjacent parts be not touched therewith; yea, Honey scraped of Bees that are dead, he affirms to be very sovereign in all diseases.<sup>57</sup>

The dead bee bodies are put into the service of aiding the human body; the fact of their deceased state seems to imbue them with a power that might surpass the positive effects of those products they produce while alive and active in their labor. Ingestion or application of the dead bee (strained, pounded, burned, crushed) shows the extent to which early moderns believed in the all-encompassing powers of the bee, both in life and in death.<sup>58</sup>

Honey is the key ingredient in the making of mead and its spiced equivalent metheglin, of which Butler writes “the ancient Britains [who, above all other nations, have ever been addicted to Meth and Metheglin]. For under heaven there is no fairer people of complexion, nor of more sound and healthful bodies.”<sup>59</sup> Its qualities and virtues increased from its purification during the boiling process—it was believed to be able to nourish the body, restore

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youthfulness, recover lost appetites, and cure a cough and yellow jaundice.<sup>60</sup> These drinks were originally made by boiling the entire hive, a practice that can be found in some Renaissance recipes. Recipes for mead and metheglin appeared in numerous receipt books, from Sarah Longe's 1610 book ("To make Metheglen" which calls for the "best and purest honey you can get") to Sir Kenelme Digby's 1669 *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digby Opened*, which contained over one hundred recipes for the drink.<sup>61</sup> One recipe of note in Digby is "To Make White Metheglin," with its ingredients that include 5 gallons of water, 1½ gallons of honey, and one ounce each of propolis, bee pollen, and royal jelly.<sup>62</sup> What are we to make of imbibing the internal materials of the hive—perhaps even the dead bees—after they had been boiled? Early moderns might also have envisioned internalizing those qualities bees were thought to possess—industry, order, diligence—in consuming the bee. Following Erica Fudge, the animal "can transform the human both from without and from within."<sup>63</sup> In turn, humans come closer to "becoming apian" than before.

Christopher Hollingsworth, in his *Poetics of the Hive*, details the calendar of the Renaissance beekeeper: "in late summer, he killed the bees in most of his hives, cut out the combs, and strained the honey and wax; and in the fall, if necessary, he provided food in the remaining hives, which he overwintered. Burning sulphur was commonly used for killing the hives."<sup>64</sup> The bee didn't have to be killed in order to reap the rewards of its making; in fact, the major bee treatises from the period all indicate a desire to keep the bee alive; humans "rob the hive" to use the honey and wax for profit and pleasure. For beekeepers, who fashioned themselves as stewards of the hive and often recounted that bees needed man, keeping the hive trimmed for the benefit of the bees was paramount.<sup>65</sup> The paradox, of course, is that the straw hives (skeps) popular in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries normally had only a single entrance at the base, and removing the honey often meant destroying the entire hive.<sup>66</sup> Remnant describes the killing of the bees in detail, noting that it is important to "take" (ie. kill) the bees if the hive is full of bees or overflowing with honey:

keep in the air round about the Hive with an old cloth and so the steam or vapor of the brimstone will kill the Bees stone dead: then take out the combs, and brush off the Bees, if any hang on, and break out the dead brood, if any be: then put all those combs that have honey in them, into a pan or kettle, and bruise them together: and strain it through a thin cloth-bag: or if you will have your honey very fine, let it run through a sieve without crushing.<sup>67</sup>

Certainly, bees and other parts of the hive remained even after straining and boiling occurred; bee presence is inescapable and tests notions of beastly sovereignty.

I conclude by turning to three curious seventeenth-century recipes that bring to light these issues about the use of bees, calling into question the logic of

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bee things. In Jane Barber's *Book of Receipts*, compiled in 1625, a recipe "To Make Muske Cakes" (a remedy for an unspecified disease) calls for gum dragon or Tragacanth to be laid "3 days in Bee water." This recipe might be a reference to another early modern recipe for "An Aproued medesen" to cure urinary blockages, which calls for drinking the strained juice of bees that have been pulverized with a mortar and pestle.<sup>68</sup> Such a recipe, uncommon as it is, points to an interesting exchange, where the bee is no longer a spectre, but rather it is transformed into an ingredient. Another recipe book with the ownership inscription "Anne Layfield / her booke of Physicke & / Surgery /1640" gives a variation of an oft-repeated recipe "To make oyle of Swallowes good for Sinewes that be strayed" (which also appeared in, among others, Thomas Dawson's 1587 *The Good Huswifes Jewel* and Gervase Markham's 1623 *Countrie Contentments, or the English Huswife*). The Layfield variation adds an intriguing ingredient to this recipe: "2 handfull of yong bees before they be ready to fly."<sup>69</sup> This particular recipe is attributed in the manuscript to one Elizabeth Downing; another recipe in this collection attributed to her, "To provoak urine," begins, "Take dead bees." It is not out of the question to imagine, as Rebecca Laroche does here and I do in another context,<sup>70</sup> that women were actively engaged in using the materials of the hive in their everyday domestic lives. In fact, John Levett, in his 1634 work *The ordering of Bees*, remarks that it is "good women, who commonly in this Country take most care and regard of this kind of commodity."<sup>71</sup> The dead bees that are pulverized and dismembered in the above recipes were, according to Renaissance bee treatises, a common sight around an apiary. Southerne notes how bees, sensing that there are too many Drones in a hive, "will kill so many as they think good, so that I have seen at least a pint lie dead under a Hive at once."<sup>72</sup> The utilitarian beekeeper, then, whose own industriousness is mirrored in the honeybee, might find a use for all those individual dead bees after all.

## Notes

1. There has been a corresponding uptick in scholarly work on bees since this time as well, including work by Claire Preston, *Bee* (London: Reaktion, 2006); Mary Baine Campbell, "Busy Bees: Utopia, Dystopia, and the Very Small," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36:3 (Fall 2006): 619-642; Jonathan Woolfson, "The Renaissance of Bees," *Renaissance Studies* 24:2 (2009): 281-300; Joseph Campana, "The Bee and the Sovereign? Political Entomology and the Problem of Scale," *Shakespeare Studies* 41 (2013): 94-114, and "The Bee and the Sovereign (II): Segments, Swarms, and the Shakespearean Multitude," in *The Return of Theory in Early Modern English Studies*, eds. Bryan Reynolds, Paul Cefalu, and Gary Kuchar (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 59-80; my "Thinking With Hives" in *Object Oriented Environs*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Julian Yates (New York: Punctum Books, 2015); and my book-in-progress, *Little Beasts: Cultures of the Hive in Renaissance England*.

2. For more on urban beekeeping and human-insect relations, see *Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2013).

3. Bryan Walsh, "Beepocalypse-Redux: Honeybees are Still Dying –and we don't know why," *Time*, accessed February 9, 2016, [www.science.time.com/2013/05/07/beepocalypse-redux](http://www.science.time.com/2013/05/07/beepocalypse-redux);

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and Todd Worley, “America is one bad winter away from a food disaster, thanks to dying bees,” *Quartz*, accessed February 9, 2016, [www.qz.com/81558/america-is-one-bad-winter-away](http://www.qz.com/81558/america-is-one-bad-winter-away).

4. “Honey,” *National Agricultural Statistics Service*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://usda.mannlib.cornell.edu/MannUsda/viewDocumentInfo.do?documentID=1191>; Christopher Ingraham, “Call off the bee-pocalypse: US honeybee colonies hit a 20-year high,” *Washington Post*, accessed February 15, 2016, [www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/07/23/call-off-the-bee-pocalypse-u-s-honeybee-colonies-hit-a-20-year-high/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/wonkblog/wp/2015/07/23/call-off-the-bee-pocalypse-u-s-honeybee-colonies-hit-a-20-year-high/).

5. “National Strategy to Promote the Health of Honey Bees and Other Pollinators,” Pollinator Health Task Force, accessed February 9, 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/Pollinator%20Health%20Strategy%202015.pdf>.

6. In fact, the speaker in George Herbert’s poem “Providence” nicely summed up early modern sentiments about the human/bee relationship, claiming “bees work for man.” See George Herbert, “Providence,” *The Temple: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations* (Cambridge, 1633), sig. B7r - sig. B9v, sig. B8r.

7. See entries 2,3, and 4 in “fabulous, adj.” OED Online, December 2015, Oxford University Press, accessed February 15, 2016.

8. See entry 5b, “fabulous, adj.” OED Online, December 2015, Oxford University Press, accessed February 15, 2016.

9. Beryl Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1973), xvi.

10. Rowland, *Animals with Human Faces*, xvi.

11. Topsell writes, “Where is there such a sluggard and drone that considereth the Labours, paines, and travels of the Emmet, Little-bee, Field-mouse, Squirrel, and such other that will not learne for shame to be more industrious, and set his fingers to work?” He discusses the virtues that are traditionally attached to animals—love and faithfulness in dogs or the chastity of the turtle, as well as “the justice of the Bee which gathereth from all flowers that which serveth their turne, and yet destroyeth not the flower.” See Edward Topsell, *The Historie of Foure-footed Beastes* (London, 1607), sig. A5r. In the Preface to *The Theater of Insects* (London, 1658), Thomas Moffet applies the same level of wonder to the earth’s smallest creatures, asking, “Do you desire Justice? regard the Bee.” Moffet’s book was appended to the 1658 edition of Edward Topsell, *History of Four-footed Beasts and Serpents* (London, 1658), sig. Ffff6.

12. Topsell, *The History of Foure-footed beastes*, (London, 1607), sig. A5v. Theseus in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* says, “I never may believe / These antique fables, nor these fairy toys” (5.1.2-3). See William Shakespeare, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” *Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 839-896.

13. Emma Phipson, *The Animal Lore of Shakespeare’s Time* (London, 1885), 410-11. John Worldige writes, “Profane Authors also have not pasted these Insects over in silence, the most ancient Poets and Naturalists having written largely of them; as Hesiod, Philisius, Menecrates and many others. Aristomarchus for fifty eight years did little else but keep Bees, and Philisius employed his whole Life-time about them, as Pliny relates.” See *Apiarium; or a Discourse of Bees* (1676), sig. B1v.

14. Rosi Braidotti, “Animals, Anomalies, and Inorganic Others,” *PMLA* 124:2 (March 2009): 526-32, 528.

15. All quotations are found in *The Georgics of Virgil*, trans. C. Day Lewis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1947). See also Judges 14.8 “[Samson] turned out of the way to see the carcass of the lion, and behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in the carcass of the lion.” Worldige notes that “Others on the contrary, wanting that Reason and Experience they pretended to, have abused the World with their fictitious Notions concerning Bees, which have made a greater Humm than all the Bee-books that have been published before.” See *Apiarium*, sig. A2v.

16. Margaret Clayton-Trudeau, *Jonson, Shakespeare, and Early Modern Virgil* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 22.

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17. T. M. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 331.

18. Of course, it is also tempting to think of Shakespeare himself as having had some experience with bees in Stratford, his father a dealer in wool and other agricultural goods, his mother the daughter of a prosperous farmer (and his later purchase of the second-largest home in Stratford, complete with its own large garden). It is also important to note that Shakespeare is not alone in his use of the apian metaphor; dramatic texts by his contemporaries are similarly abuzz with references to honey, wax, and bees.

19. All citations are from William Shakespeare, "Henry V," *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume 1*, 3rd Edition, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 1533-1612.

20. Virgil, *Virgil's Georgicks Englished*, trans. Tho. May (London 1628), sig. H4r.

21. Virgil, *Virgil's Georgicks Englished*, sig. H4r.

22. Cristopher Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive: Insect Metaphor in Literature* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2001), 193.

23. Campana writes, "The scale of the insect, particularly the sovereign bee, requires that so-called human values and measures be tested with respect not merely to the obvious differences between human and non-human but with respect to the cohabitation of and perceived similitude between creatures of variant scale living in scalable degrees of proximity in the same environment." Joseph Campana, "The Bee and the Sovereign? Political Entomology and the Problem of Scale." *Shakespeare Studies* 41 (2013): 93-113, 109.

24. In *Titus Andronicus*, Titus thinks of the individuality of the dead fly: "But how, if that fly had a father and mother?" (3.2.60) in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al. (New York: W.W. Norton, 2008), 399-463.

25. Lucinda Cole, Donna Landry, Bruce Bocher, Richard Nash, Erica Fudge, Robert Markley, and Cary Wolfe, "Speciesism, Identity Politics, and Ecocriticism: A Conversation with Humanists and Posthumanists," *The Eighteenth Century* 52:1 (2011): 87-106, 93.

26. Jacques Derrida, *The Animal That Therefore I Am*, trans. David Wills, ed. Marie-Louis Mallet (New York: Fordham University Press, 2008), 6.

27. The title pages of the major bee treatises attest to the focus on the multitude: Edmund Southerne, *A Treatise Concerning the Right Use and Ordering of Bees* (1593); Charles Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie* (London, 1609); John Levett, *The Ordering of the Bees* (1634); Richard Remnant, *A Discourse or History of Bees* (1637); Samuel Hartlib, *The Reformed Commonwealth of Bees* (1655); Worldidge, *Apiarium* (1676); John Gedde, *A New Discovery of an Excellent Method of Bee Houses and Colonies* (1677); Moses Rusden, *A Further Discovery of Bees* (1679).

28. Purchas, *A Theater of Political Flying Insects* (London, 1657), 16.

29. See, for instance, Jürgen Tautz, *The Buzz About Bees: Biology of a Superorganism*, trans. David Sundeman (Berlin: Springer, 2009).

30. Thomas D. Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2010), 233.

31. Seeley, *Honeybee Democracy*, 233.

32. The buzz of the bees often discussed in early modern texts is impossible to create by one individual but only in the collective. Virgil speaks of the sound of the hive—"Thick is their humming murmur" (4.216) while William Lawson, in his *The Country Housewifes Garden for Herbs*, writes, "Being shut up in calme seasons, lay your care to the Hive, and you shall here them yarme and yell," see William Larson, *A New Orchard and Garden* (London, 1631), sig. H5v. And in Thomas Middleton's *The Spanish Gypsy*, Sancho sings, "O that I were a bee to sing / Hum, buzz, buzz, hum!" (2.1.178-79), in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 1723-1765.

33. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies* (London: Vintage Books, 2009), 65.

34. Southerne, *A Treatise concerning the right use and ordering of bees*, 4.

35. Worldidge, *Apiarium*, 20, 4; Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, sig. N1v.

36. Thomas Moffet, *The Theater of Insects* (London, 1634, 1658), 900, 905-6.

37. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, sig. K5r.

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38. Erica Fudge, "Renaissance Animal Things," in *Gorgeous Beasts: Animal Bodies in Historical Perspective*, eds. Joan B. Landes, Paula Young Lee, and Paul Youngquist (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2012), 21-56, 42.

39. We see monarchs, for instance, "charactered" on coins, as in "to stamp or mark," see "'character, v," 5.a, OED Online, December 2015, Oxford University Press, accessed February 22, 2016.

40. I want to thank Dan Brayton, who read and commented on an early draft of this essay, for this probing insight. Three moments from Shakespeare are of interest here: in *As You Like It*, Orlando exclaims, "O Rosalind! These trees shall be my books, / And in their barks my thoughts I'll character" (3.2.5-6), William Shakespeare, "As You Like It," in *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume 1*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 1613-1683, 1650; in Sonnet 108: "What's in the brain that ink may character / Which hath not figured to thee my true spirit?" (1-2), in "The Sonnets," *The Norton Shakespeare: Vol. 2*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: WW Norton, 2016), 537-598, 582; and in "Timon of Athens," where the Soldier says, "What's on this tomb / I cannot read; the character I'll take with wax" (5.4.6-7), in *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume 2*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 867-930, 928.

41. Southerne, *A Treatise concerning the right use and ordering of Bees*, sig. A4r.

42. Imogen in *Cymbeline* speaks of the wax that fastens the letter she has received from Leonatus: "Good wax, thy leave. Blest be / You bees that make these locks of counsel" (3.2.35-36), in *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume 2*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016), 1321-1500, 1367.

43. Mrs. Sarah Longe Her Receipt Booke, in *Fooles and Fricassees: Food in Shakespeare's England*, ed. Mary Anne Caton (Washington, D.C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1999): 106.

44. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 223, 225. Thomas Moffet, in *The Theater of Insects*, also discusses the use of wax, drawing on numerous writers who outline the best uses of it (Columella, Pliny, etc.). "No man that is not an enemy of truth, will deny but that oyl of wax is of principal use to cure pains of the Gout, to soften hard swellings, and to heal wounds and ulcers." He remarks that beeswax "not only preserves the living, but it keeps the dead also from putrefication, for which cause, as now it is used by us, to wrap up persons of great fortunes in wax," 915-16.

45. Richard Remnant, *A Discourse or History of Bees* (London, 1637), 36.

46. G.E. Fussell, "The Elizabethan Farmer," *History Today* 3.11 (Nov. 1953): 762-770, 763.

47. Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 221, n. 50. For an alternative usage, see *The Pilgrimage of the Soul* (Westminster, 1483): "The wex candel smellith werse aftir it is quenched than the candell þat is maad of talughe," 2.24, 46a, cited in "tallow," n., *Middle English Dictionary*, accessed February 22, 2016.

48. Andrew Gurr, *The Shakespeare Company 1594-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 106; and *The Shakespearean Stage, 1574-1642*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 177. In my book-in-progress, *Little Beasts: Cultures of the Hive in Renaissance England*, I further discuss the use of candles in churches, showing how the Protestant Reformation interestingly intersects with the charter of the Worshipful Company of Wax Chandlers in London. The work of the Company was affected by Henry VIII prohibiting tapers and the devotional uses of candles in the late 1530s.

49. Jane Bennett, in writing about edible matter, proposes that nonhuman materiality is not essentially passive stuff, citing the agency of food. She asks what would happen if we recognized "a greater sense of the active vitality of foodstuff?" See *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2010), 51.

50. Southerne, *A Treatise concerning the Right Use and Ordering of bees*, 5; Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 220, 214.

51. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 216, 220. He also rails against "some quaint & ladylike pallets (whom nothing but that which is far fought and dear bought can please)" neglect using honey because of the availability of sugar, 220. Southerne, some fifteen years earlier, critiqued those who would say "Oh honey, fie its fulsome: Sugar, I marry, that's the fellow: and why

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forsooth? because far fetched and dear bought is good for Ladies,” *A Treatise Concerning the Right Use and Ordering of Bees*, 5. By the late seventeenth century, John Worldidge, in his *Apiarium*, would remark that sugar currently had more repute than honey, for now sugar was prescribed for “Conserving, Preserving, or other Confectionating” (1-2).

52. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 220; Southerne, *A Treatise concerning the right use and ordering of Bees*, 6.

53. See Hillary Nun, “Ann Fanshawe,” Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://emroc.hypotheses.org/ongoing-projects/ann-fanshawe>; see also Heidi Hackel, “Mrs. Sarah Longe Her Receipt Booke,” in *Foales and Fricassees: Food in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. Mary Anne Caton and Joan Thirsk (Washington, D.C.: The Folger Shakespeare Library, 1999), 118.

54. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 210.

55. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 215, 210. See also Thomas Middleton, “The Lady’s Tragedy,” in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, eds. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 833-906 where Tyrant speaks of one of Herod’s lovers: “Yet he preserved her body dead in honey / And kept her long after her funeral” (4.3.120-21). Furthermore, Butler tells us, honey is “drunk against the biting of a serpent or mad dog” and “is good for them which have eaten mushrooms or drunk poppy; against which evil yet, rosed honey is taken warm” (210). Moffet also outlines the medicinal virtues of honey recalling the commendations of it by Hippocrates, Pliny, and Galen, among others; see his *Theater of Insects*, 911-912. Recent scientific discoveries have confirmed the antimicrobial effects of honey; see Tavano, R., Segat, D., Gobbo, M., & Papini, E., “The Honeybee Antimicrobial Peptide Apidaecin Differentially Immunomodulates Human Macrophages, Monocytes and Dendritic Cells,” *Journal of Innate Immunity* 3:6 (2011): 614-622.

56. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, Bottom addresses Cobweb and advises him to “kill me a red-hipped humble-bee on the top of a thistle; and, good monsieur, bring me the honey bag” (4.1.12-13), in *The Norton Shakespeare: Volume I*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt et al (New York: W.W. Norton, 2016): 1037-1096.

57. Moffet, *Theater of Insects*, 906.

58. See also Hildegard von Bingen’s *Physica*, where she writes, “take bees that are not alive, but which have died, in a metallic jar. Put a sufficient amount on a linen cloth, and sew it up. Soak this cloth, with the bees sewn within, in olive oil, and place it over the ailing limb. Do this often, and he will be better. And, if a worm eats the flesh of a person, he should take bees, which have died, in a metallic jar, and put this powder on the place of the wound, and the worm will die,” *Hildegard von Bingen’s Physica: The Complete English Translation of Her Classic Work on Health and Healing*, trans. Priscilla Throop (Rochester, VT: Healing Arts Press, 1998), 200.

59. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 222. He also relates “One excellent receipt. . . which our renowned Queen of happy memory did so well like, that she would every year have a vessel of it,” sig. L5r. For more on the history of drinks made by the fermentation of honey in Europe, see Eva Crane, *The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 514-19.

60. Butler, *The Feminine Monarchie*, 221.

61. Heidi Hackel, “Mrs. Sarah Longe Her Receipt Booke,” 98, and Sir Kenelme Digby, *The Closet of the Eminently Learned Sir Kenelme Digby Opened* (London, 1669), reprinted in Stephen Buhner, *Sacred and Herbal Healing Beers: The Secrets of Ancient Fermentation* (Boulder, CO: Brewers Publications, 1998).

62. Digby, *The Closet*, 458-59.

63. Fudge, “Renaissance Animal Things,” 51.

64. Hollingsworth, *Poetics of the Hive*, 225.

65. Southerne himself notes that “yet for want of guiding by man, how soon do they go to wreck and decay” (5). This is a common sentiment in the period, as expressed in William Hunnis’s religious text *A Hive Full of Honey* (London, 1578) in which he describes the bee “whose little Limmes with Laboures longe / Still stryvet for our sake” (3-4).

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66. According to Keith S. Delaplane in *First Lessons in Beekeeping* (Hamilton, IL: Dadant Publishing, 2007), hive designs before the Langstroth hive of the mid-nineteenth century “were exercises in fancy designed with little or no understanding of the biology of bees” (29).

67. Richard Remnant, *A Discourse or History of Bees* (London, 1637), 34. Moses Rusden, who at one point remarks about accidentally killing a bee, would later lament “the miscarriages of Bees, as the cruelty exercised upon them, by killing them when their Honey is taken away,” in *A Further Discovery of Bees* (London, 1679), 13. Also in *The Country Housewives Garden*, Lawson writes that “Smoking with rages, rozen, or brimstone, many use: some use drowning in a tub of cleane water, and the water well brewed, will be good botchet,” (from the French *bouchet*, a spiced honey and clove mead) (107).

68. Casey Mitchell, “To Make Muske Cakes,” Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, accessed February 21, 2016, <http://recipes.hypotheses.org/1369>.

69. Rebecca Laroche, “A Source for Young Bees: On the Oil of Swallows, Part 2,” Early Modern Recipes Online Collective, accessed February 22, 2016, <http://recipes.hypotheses.org/308>. Laroche has thoughtfully written about this recipe and notes that “the tops of young bays” (bay leaves) in earlier versions metamorphoses into “yong bees” in this version—while this may be an error in transcription or oral transmission, Laroche concludes that we still cannot account for “before they be ready to fly.” Pulverized bees and the tops of young bees—the bodies of bees get put into use for medical purposes for the benefit of humans.

70. See my chapter, “Thinking With Hives,” in *Object Oriented Environs*, eds. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen and Julian Yates (New York: Punctum Books, 2016), 17-24.

71. John Levett, *The ordering of Bees*, np [v].

72. Southerne, *A Treatise concerning the right use and ordering of Bees*, 15.

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