

London Stench

The streets stank of manure, the courtyards of urine,
the stairwells stank of mouldering wood and rat droppings.
the kitchens of spoiled cabbage and mutton fat.
The unaired parlors stank of pale dust,
the bedrooms of soiled sheets, damp featherbeds,
and that pungently* sweet aroma of chamberpots.*
The stench of sulphur rose from the chimneys,
the stench of caustic* lyes* from the tanneries,
and from the slaughterhouse came the sweet sickly stench of congealed* blood.
People stank of sweat and unwashed clothes;
from their mouths came the stench of rotting teeth,
from their bellies that of onions,
and from their bodies, if they were no longer very young,
might come the stench of rancid cheese, sour milk and tumorous* disease.
The rivers stank, the marketplaces stank, the churches stank.
It stank under bridges and in palaces.
The peasant stank as did the priest, the apprentice did as his master's wife,
the whole aristocracy stank.
The King himself stank, stank like a rank lion,
and the Queen like an old goat, summer and winter.

pungently - caustically, chamberpot - a receptacle for urination or defecation in the bedroom,
caustic - corrosive, lye - a highly concentrated, aqueous solution of potassium hydroxide or sodium hydroxide, congeal - to coagulate; jell, tumorous - cancerous