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RENAISSANCE PLAY THINGS:
THE MAKING OF GENRE IN PERFORMANCE

A Dissertation in

English

by

Joshua S. Smith

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The dissertation of Joshua S. Smith was reviewed and approved* by the following:

Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr.
Professor of English
Director of Graduate Studies for the Department of English
Dissertation Advisor
Chair of Committee

Dan Beaver
Associate Professor of History

Patrick Cheney
Edwin Erle Sparks Professor of English and Comparative Literature

Laura Lunger Knoppers
Liberal Arts Research Professor of English

Marcy North
Associate Professor of English

*Signatures are on file in the Graduate School.

Abstract

This dissertation focuses on stage properties—rings, crowns, skulls, and the philosopher's stone—as potent actants in the creation of early modern theatrical genres. Western literary criticism has long assumed that dramatic genre stems solely from the text, but attending a play is a patently different experience than reading its script. While a dramatic script is obviously an important element to performance, that script is invisible to the spectator; determining a work's genre from its script is akin to looking at a skeleton and deeming it a person. To the audience, the genre of a play is instead realized by an assemblage of performative components such as actors, sets, costumes, lights, and props. My dissertation utilizes concepts from object-oriented ontology to argue that theatrical genres are functions not of the page alone, but of all the various elements that come together in performance. *Renaissance Play Things* examines the cultural history and the theatrical presence of significant props in a range of plays by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Middleton, Dekker, and Jonson. In doing so, the dissertation illustrates the fundamental problem with treating dramatic genre as a function of text alone and demonstrates how object-oriented concepts may be appropriated in order to more fully conceptualize theatrical genres.

The dissertation's introduction establishes the tendency to elide textual with performative genre, using *A Warning for Faire Women* to illustrate how theatrical genre was conceptualized in terms of props on the Renaissance stage. The first chapter scrutinizes the interplay of tragedy and comedy in *Romeo and Juliet* through the lens of the ring that Juliet sends to Romeo. In recalling both a wedding ring and memento mori token, this ring evokes comedy and tragedy—as well as distinct temporalities associated with each genre. The second chapter examines history plays by Shakespeare and Marlowe in the context of kingship. After the Reformation, the role of the crown in the English coronation rite was drastically modified from a source of power to a

confirmer of innate majesty. Marlowe and Shakespeare blend these theories, simultaneously exposing the theatrical nature of the monarchy and undergirding its claims to divine right through the depiction of kingship as a relationship between the king's body and the crown.

This relationship is taken up more explicitly in the third chapter, which focuses on skulls in *Hamlet*, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*. While in the danse macabre, memento mori, and *ars moriendi* traditions the skull is commonly associated with the anonymity of death, in onstage tragedy it serves as the locus for examining relations between subject and object, identity and anonymity. As such, the onstage skull has not only come to mark tragedy; it helps to create the genre through its evocation of the individual's role in the face of annihilation. The last chapter argues that the role of the philosopher's stone in *The Alchemist* is the vehicle through which Jonson expresses his own ambivalence towards comedy and theatrical performance. In folklore, scientific tradition, and the play, though the stone is a catalyst capable of perfecting matter and benefitting mankind, it is always intended for more corrupt purposes. The stone's absence from the stage neatly parallels Jonson's explicit belief that his scripts, though capable of perfecting their reader, are inevitably corrupted through performance. The dissertation thus brings together New Historicism and elements of object-oriented ontology to argue that props are at once both representations of literary genres and active elements of tragedy, comedy, and history on the Renaissance stage.

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Introduction

Enter at one doore, Hystorie with Drum and Ensigne:

Tragedie at another, in her one hand a whip, in

the other hand a knife.[1]

Though critics have long tended to understand genre as if it were solely an attribute of the text, early modern theater audiences would have experienced genre through the various material objects that help to make up performance. This is made plain in the induction of the anonymous sixteenth-century drama *A Warning for Faire Women*, whence my epigraph is taken. The play is the story, the title page reveals, of "*the most tragicall and lamentable murther of Master George Sanders of London Marchant, nigh Shooters hill, Consented vnto By his owne wife*." Before this plot begins, however, Comedie joins the figures of Hystorie and Tragedie onstage, much to Tragedie's consternation, for it quickly becomes clear that she wishes to have the stage to herself. Upon seeing Hystorie, Tragedie had ordered "peace with that drum: / Downe with that Ensigne which disturbs our stage / out with this luggage, with this fopperie"; Comedie's appearance, apparently with fiddle in hand, causes Tragedie to complain of the "Cats guts . . . filthie sound." Tragedie resents Comedie, the former explains, for Comedie's "filthie fiddling trickes, / Able to poyson any noble wit: / Avoid the stage or Ile whip you hence."

[1] *A Warning for Faire Women* (London, 1599), A1^{r}. For a full exploration of the play's uncertain date and authorship, see Charles Dale Cannon's introduction to *A Warning for Fair Women: A Critical Edition* (The Hague: Mouton, 1975).

Comedie is unafraid, arguing that Tragedie may banish her competitors for a few days, "But once a weeke if we do not appeare, / She shall find few that will attend her heere." Tragedie counters that while Comedie has "some sparkes of wit, / Some odde ends of old ieasts scrap't togither, / To tickle shallow iniudiciall eares," only Tragedie has "passions that must moue the soule, / Make the heart heauie, and throb within the bosome, / Extorting teares out of the strictest eyes." Comedie remains unimpressed, and proceeds to break tragedy down into stereotypical elements:

> How, some damnd tyrant to obtaine a crowne,
>
> Stabs, hangs, impoysons, smothers, cutteth throats,
>
> And then a Chorus too comes howling in,
>
> And tels us of the worrying of a cat,
>
> Then of a filthie whining ghost,
>
> Lapt in some fowle sheete, or a leather pelch,
>
> Comes skreaming like a pigge halfe stickt,
>
> And cries *Vindicta*, reuenge, reuenge:
>
> With that a little Rosen flasheth forth,
>
> Like smoke out of a Tabacco pipe, or a boyes squib:
>
> Then comes in two or three like to drouers,
>
> With taylers bodkins, stabbing one another,
>
> Is not this trim: is not here goodly things?

Fed up with their barbs, Tragedie finally begins to whip her competitors, complaining that they have "kept the Theatres so long, / Painted in play-bils, upon euery poast, / That I am scorned of the multitude."[2]

This induction is remarkable in its incisive explication of how genres, especially tragedy, are composed. Tragedie, Comedie points out, is largely a matter of content: the genre tends to depict the violent acts of a tyrant in search of rule, and to feature a chorus that provides exposition, a vengeful ghost, and a swordfight. These plot tropes, though, are interspersed with explanations of how these elements are, in practice, staged: the ghost will be wrapped in a dirty sheet or leather garment; the explosion used to underscore the cry for revenge, achieved by igniting resin,[3] will be as small as the smoke from a pipe or a small firework; and the swordfight will consist of raucous men armed with little more than needles. Comedie denigrates Tragedie by explaining these practices rather disparagingly, but in doing so, nonetheless points to a subtle fact of the theater that is often overlooked: theatrical genre is composed not only of plot, but also of costumes, special effects, and objects. An audience attending a tragedy would expect to see a tyrant attempting to usurp the crown through murder, a chorus, and a ghost, but it would also expect dirty sheets wrapped around that ghost, pyrotechnics, and a battle staged with inadequate props. Tragedy on the stage, Comedie suggests, is constituted not only by a play's content, but

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[2] *A Warning for Faire Women*, A1^{r}–A3^{r}.

[3] The *OED* defines "rosen" as an adjective "relating to roses," or "resembling or suggestive of a rose, esp. in colour." The context of "Rosen flasheth forth," therefore, seems to indicate that "rosen" is, in fact, "resin," given it was early modern stage practice to produce fire "by igniting powdered resin or sulfur as it was thrown onstage through doorways and windows or between the wings." See *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "rosen, *adj.*"; and B. Donald Grose and O. Franklin Kenworthy, *A Mirror to Life: A History of Western Theater* (New York: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1985), 165.

also by the various tangible, visual elements of performance. Such a notion seems to be an obvious one; of course specific objects represent and connote specific genres. The Greek masks of comedy and tragedy are still in popular usage, both individually and as a general indicator of theater, and when Hystorie enters the stage with a drum and a flag, Tragedie with a whip and knife, and Comedie with a fiddle, these props make clear to the audience of *A Warning for Faire Women* exactly who these figures are.

The very fact that Hystorie enters with a drum and ensign is of course set forth in the script, a document that often designates any props that are to be used and indeed establishes a set of generic coordinates for the play. The importance of the script, however, should not lead us to assume that props are correspondingly unimportant, or that they are mere representations of pre-existing genres enshrined in scripts. The prominence of the text need not blind us to the agency of props on the stage. For centuries, though, one of the few constant features of literary criticism has been to conceive of genres as being constituted solely by words, as if in accordance with an early definition of "literary": "relating to letters."[4] Under this model, a play's genre is determined simply by reading its script: if a protagonist is killed, the work is a tragedy; if lovers overcome obstacles and wed, it is a comedy. Categorizing according to content may make sense for literature that is constituted solely of words—but when it comes to the theater, this system is lacking.

A script is certainly important, usually paramount to a theatrical production: like the show's narrative, its genre originates in the script. The script, though, is not what a playgoer experiences. A play's words, after all, are hardly a stand-in for the play itself; as performance theorists remind us, the script is merely "a kind of catalyst, burned off in the act of performing,

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[4] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "literary, *adj*. and *n*."

transformed into something else rich and strange: an event, theatre."[5] For this reason, I argue that printed copies of *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and so forth are dramas—but they are not plays. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a drama is "a composition in prose or verse, adapted to be acted upon a stage"; a play is "a dramatic or theatrical performance," thus reflecting the sense of motion emphasized in the primary meaning of "play": "exercise, brisk or free *movement or action*."[6] Strictly speaking, a script is a drama, a literary composition whose very definition emphasizes text over performance, but a play exists only in performance.[7] Accordingly, there is a difference between "dramatic genre"—the genre of the printed *Hamlet*, the script, the letter—and what I will term "dramatic genre in performance," or hereafter simply "enacted genre": the genre of a play, a genre as it is realized in performance and not through the agency of the word alone.

If enacted genre is not constituted solely of words, then what is it made of? *A Warning for Faire Women* depicts Tragedie as carrying a whip and a knife, but these are far from the only elements one might expect to see at a performance of a Renaissance tragedy: bloody handkerchiefs, skulls, a hell's mouth, assorted weaponry, a tomb, candles, poisons, black mourning garb, severed limbs, coffins, and ghostly paraphernalia might also make appearances.

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[5] W. B. Worthen, *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 24.

[6] *OED*, 3rd ed., s. vv. "drama, *n.*" and "play, *n.*," italics mine.

[7] To this point, David Scott Kastan argues that *Hamlet* "is perhaps best considered not something in itself at all but, rather, the name for what allows us comfortably to consider as some metaphysical unity the various instantiations of the play." See Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 133; as well as W. B. Worthen's *Shakespeare and the Authority of Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997) and *Shakespeare and the Force of Modern Performance*.

All of these props might not appear, of course—but the absence of all of them would be surprising. These objects, then, do not merely represent the genre: in performance, they help to create it. Whips, knives, skulls, and so forth are not mere accessories to or signals of tragedy; from the perspective of anyone sitting in the theater, they are constitutive elements of that enacted genre.

Within this framework, the genre of a play is articulated not only through its words and props, but on all of the varying elements of performance: the curtains, costumes, lighting and technical effects, even the audience members (as anyone can attest who has attended a play with someone who laughs at the 'wrong' moment) can alter an enacted genre, can change a tragic moment to a comic one, or, more rarely, a comic moment to a tragic. Many of these components have already been taken up in some capacity by early modern critics, but all too often, they have been treated as incidental aspects of performance subservient to the genre as determined by the text alone.

Renaissance Play Things: The Making of Genre in Performance attempts to complicate this critical tendency through its examination of four stage properties that appear in—or, in one case, is pointedly elided from—various Elizabethan and Jacobean plays. Like many of its critical predecessors, *Renaissance Play Things* takes the sociocultural and historical resonances of stage properties into account, but it does so with an eye to concepts from object-oriented theory in order to argue that stage properties in performance actively help to constitute theatrical genres. *Renaissance Play Things* begins with an idea that seems obvious, but whose dramatic, literary, and ontological ramifications are frequently ignored, if realized at all: what happens on the stage is fundamentally different from what happens on the page.

The remainder of this introduction will be divided into three sections. The first will review object-oriented criticism, an increasingly popular and promising field whose principles, though increasingly incorporated into Renaissance criticism, have not yet been applied to genre. In the second, with this in mind, I will return to *A Warning for Faire Women* and explain how attention to theatrical objects can further the field's conception of genre itself. The last section will forecast the dissertation's structure and provide a short summary of each chapter.

OBJECT-ORIENTED CRITICISM: A SURVEY

Just as literary critics have long neglected the generic role of things in performance, object-oriented critics have similarly neglected the notion of genre. Object-oriented ontology, or OOO, is an offshoot of Thing Theory; both focus on the relationship between objects and humanity. This section will explore the history of these theories generally and then in relation to literary criticism.

Thing Theory is rooted in Martin Heidegger's 1949 lecture *Insight Into What Is* and 1950 essay "The Thing." Thing Theory accepts as its basic principle a radical shift in philosophical ontology: that things exist independently of human subjectivity. Things obviously still exist when humanity is not around them, but they are also, according to Heidegger, entities that are independent of humanity. To use his example, a potter may make a jug, but the jug does not exist because it was made; "rather the thing must be produced because it is this vessel. The producing lets the jug freely enter into its own." Things, Heidegger suggests, are merely temporal representations of Plato's Ideal: every object is constituted by "a twofold standing-here," the production of said object and "a standing here in the sense where what is brought forth stands

here in the unconcealment of what is already presencing."[8] The jug has always existed; the potter simply unveils that existence.

A focus on the materiality of objects has long been a topic of study among anthropologists and sociologists working in the tradition of Marcel Mauss' *The Gift* (1923). Though Mauss interrogates from the start "what power resides in the object,"[9] he is hardly a proponent of animism, focusing instead on how the exchange of things creates networks of social obligation. This caution is shared by Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (ANT), a method of filling a sociological gap in science and technology studies. ANT is not "a reversal in the direction of influence" between subject and object, Latour underscores, but rather a call to recognize that "there might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer inexistence. In addition to 'determining' and serving as a 'backdrop for human action', things might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on." An object may not have intentionality, but there is nonetheless a difference between "hitting a nail with and without a hammer, boiling water with and without a kettle." Such implements, Latour writes, "are actors, or more precisely, *participants* in the course of action waiting to be given a figuration."[10]

Heidegger has more recently been the springboard for Graham Harman, who inaugurated OOO in his 2002 book *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects*. Harman calls for

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[8] Martin Heidegger, "The Thing," in *Bremen and Freiburg Lectures:* Insight Into That Which Is *and* Basic Principles of Thinking, trans. Andrew J. Mitchell (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 6, 7.

[9] Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. W. D. Halls (New York: W. W. Norton, 1990), 3.

[10] Bruno Latour, *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network-Theory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 71–72.

the demise of "the long dictatorship of human beings in philosophy," to be replaced by "a ghostly cosmos in which humans, dogs, oak trees, and tobacco are on precisely the same footing as glass bottles, pitchforks, windmills, comets, ice cubes, magnets, and atoms." Despite this ostensible ontological leveling, Harman later takes care to discard the notion that every object is perpetually related to every other, postulating that dormant objects "exist, but currently affect nothing."[11] The possibility of dormancy is argued against in Jane Bennett's inclusive call for "a more horizontal representation of the relation between human and nonhuman actants." In *Vibrant Matter*, she aims "to theorize a vitality intrinsic to materiality as such, and to detach materiality from the figures of passive, mechanistic, or divinely infused substance." Bennett picks up on Latour's notion of an actant—an operator, either abstract or tangible, that, simply by "being in the right place at the right time, makes the difference, makes things happen, becomes the decisive force catalyzing an event"—but, in a critical difference, emphasizes that, in a horizontal ontology, actants can be objects. Challenging the hierarchizing impulse that typically undergirds human and non-human relations, Bennett convincingly argues that existence should be thought of as a series of interlocking, ever-changing assemblages, "ad hoc groupings of diverse elements, of vibrant materials of all sorts" in which human intentionality is "a pebble thrown into a pond, or an electrical current sent through a wire or neural network: it vibrates and merges with other currents, to affect and be affected."[12]

An awareness of objects has long been a part of the early modern field. The 1996 collection *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* heralded a literary interest in the

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[11] Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 2; Harman, "The Road to Objects," *Continent* 3, no. 1 (2011): 177.

[12] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 98, xiii, 9, 23, 32.

philosophy of subject-object relations, positing that if "we do not assume the unidirectional power relationship from top to bottom, then the linkages of subject to object may differ from those of subversion and containment."[13] This phrasing, of course, speaks to the degree to which New Historicism (and cultural materialism[14]) had dominated the field's interest in objects, and productively so. Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, for example, powerfully argue that "fabrics were central both to the economic and social fabrication of Renaissance Europe and to the making and unmaking of Renaissance subjects" in their landmark book *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*,[15] while Andrew Sofer examines the communion wafer of the medieval, the bloody handkerchief and skull of the Renaissance, the fan of the Restoration, and firearms of the nineteenth-century stage to argue that "in the hands of skilled playwrights, the prop becomes a concrete vehicle for confronting dramatic convention."[16] More recently, Elizabeth Williamson has taken on Stephen Greenblatt's theory of subversion-and-containment in her study of Renaissance theater companies' adoption and implementation of religious props and actual artifacts, "arguing that the strategies employed by theater practitioners in turn

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[13] Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass' introduction to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

[14] See Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[15] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 14.

[16] Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), vii.

reflected the remarkable shifts in value that occurred as religious objects left English churches and were destroyed, repaired, and reincorporated into new contexts."[17]

Though Jones, Stallybrass, Sofer, and Williamson have productively focused on the cultural connotations of specific objects in the early modern period, the call of *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* has not gone unheeded: a more abstractly philosophical approach that tackles the relationship between human subject and object has also emerged. In the early 2000s, for instance, several collections of essays on various Renaissance objects appeared,[18] from which notable monographs have since emerged. Will Fisher examines handkerchiefs, codpieces, beards, and hair as items that "played fundamental roles in forming masculine and feminine identity" in early modern England;[19] and Catherine Richardson argues that "objects draw the language of the plays into themselves" throughout Shakespeare's oeuvre.[20] Julian Yates anticipates both Fisher and Richardson in his examination of miniature portraits, relics, toilets, the printed page, and priest-holes, objects both natural and cultural whose success "may be gauged by their relative invisibility" and whose failures allow Yates to "recover the silent work

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[17] Elizabeth Williamson, *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), 2. See also Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988).

[18] See, for instance, *Material Culture and Cultural Materialisms in the Middle Ages and Renaissance*, ed. Curtis Perry (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001); and *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

[19] Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 3.

[20] Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

of ‘things.’”[21] In this, Yates returns to Latour and Heidegger, who emphasize a difference between objects and things: humans tend to recognize the “thingness of objects when they stop working for us: when the drill breaks, when the car stalls, when the windows get filthy”[22]—when, in short, we must consciously pay heed to the physicality of an object we have previously used a hundred times without thinking.

This attention to objects in early modern criticism has also fascinatingly resulted in examinations of non-material things. Gina Bloom expertly employs dramatic texts, sermons, experiments, and medical treatises to argue that “in the early modern period words were imagined to *be* things, rather than just to refer *to* things,”[23] while Rayna Kalas argues that “a predominant strain of poetic language and theory in the English Renaissance recognized poesy as techne rather than aesthetics, and figurative language as framed or tempered matter, rather than verbalized concepts.”[24] Even more recently, Holly Dugan demonstrates that “scents are cultural materials” and examines early modern English perfume in the context of “historical relationships among materiality, perception, and representation.”[25]

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[21] Julian Yates, *Error, Misuse, Failure: Object Lessons from the English Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), xix.

[22] Bill Brown, “Thing Theory,” in *Things*, ed. Bill Brown (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 4.

[23] Gina Bloom, *Voice in Motion: Staging Gender, Shaping Sound in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 1.

[24] Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English Renaissance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), xi.

[25] Holly Dugan, *The Ephemeral History of Perfume: Scent and Sense in Early Modern England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011), 2.

Deeming the field's fascination with things to be "a critical trend that, in studying material objects, has largely ignored the theoretical question of materiality," Jonathan Goldberg suggests that early modern scholars should be concerned not "with what things appear in Renaissance texts and how they might relate to questions of production and consumption but with how there are things at all."[26] Goldberg's critique is both rooted in and emphasized within the work of Jonathan Gil Harris, who questions a focus on material objects that "cleaves to the same understanding of temporality" as New Historicism. The problem, Harris explains, is that scholars tend to view early modern objects as belonging wholly and univocally "to a foreign moment-state whose supposed integrity and singularity are guaranteed by that moment's difference from our own"—when in fact "many 'Renaissance' objects were not of the Renaissance as such but survivals from an older time."[27]

Despite this wealth of criticism and the ways in which early modern critics have studied objects, the full import and potential of OOO's lessons to the Renaissance stage has not yet been addressed, especially when it comes to enacted genres. *Renaissance Play Things* aims to correct this lapse. What OOO can teach us, my dissertation demonstrates, is that stage props do not merely mark the genre of a play, but help to make it.

OBJECTS AND GENRE

My dissertation relies most heavily on Latour's conception of an actant—the object whose mere presence affects the course of events—and, more obliquely, on Bennett's theory of assemblages,

[26] Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in Renaissance Representations* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), 2.

[27] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1, 2–3.

the ever-changing series of networks that disperses agency amongst subject and object alike whilst flattening such ontologies. Latour's and Bennett's ideas allow, indeed encourage us to see the various elements of the theater as an interlocking set of actants whose interaction creates a dynamic assemblage of performance. Every element of performance has the ability to alter every other element, and to thereby alter the overall performance itself. One of the recurring acclamations of theater is that it allows an actor to play with interpretation, to perform the same scene with varying inflections from performance to performance and consequently affect how the other actors react and perform themselves. By seeing theatrical performance as a network, however, the import of non-human performative elements is more easily perceived.

Tiffany Stern has greatly contributed to this concept of theatrical actants. In *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England*, Stern demonstrates how the prologues, epilogues, songs, arguments, and playbills of early modern plays "shaped understanding of the performance in the theatre"—even when, like the playbills, they never appear on the stage.[28] Theater, she illustrates, is not limited to the stage: it exists in a network made of patchwork elements both on the stage and off of it. An audience's perception of a play, after all, is influenced well before an actor appears onstage: a playbill, a poster, another audience member, and the very structure of the theater itself can shape an attendee's generic expectations. Even the very frequency of playbills can make a difference, as evidenced by *A Warning for Faire Women*: one of Tragedie's final complaints before putting her whip to use is that Comedie and Hystorie have used so many "play-bils, upon euery poast, / That I am scorned of the multitude."

[28] Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 2.

Andrew Gurr points to a line in *A Warning for Faire Women* to support his remark that when a new play premiered, Elizabethan players "could hang black curtains across the tiring-house wall at the back of the stage" for tragedies or "a figure of Cupid with his bow" for comedies in order to "give their customers an advance signal of what to expect."[29] The play's black curtains, as Gurr suggests, surely represent tragedy; an audience member familiar with theatrical tradition would presumably recognize them as indicators of the play's plot. If we see the curtains, however, as actants in the play's theatrical network, they do not only represent tragedy—they help to create it. Their presence, that is to say, is a constituent element of the genre. Comedie and Hystorie notably do not leave the stage when Tragedie whips them, but after Comedie sees these curtains:

> HYSTORIE. Look, Comedie, I markt it not till now,
> The stage is hung with blacke: and I perceiue
> The Auditors preparde for Tragedie.
> COMEDIE. Nay then I see she shall be intertain'd,
> These ornaments beseeme not thee and me.[30]

That curtains "beseeme not" comedy or history is a poignant word choice. "Beseem," "to suit in appearance; to become, befit, be in accordance with the appearance or character of,"[31] has obvious ties to decorum—a central precept of Horace's *Ars Poetica*.[32] Like genre, decorum, or 'fitness,' has tended to be thought of in terms of plot, but as Comedie recognizes, there is a

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[29] Andrew Gurr, *Studying Shakespeare: An Introduction* (London: E. Arnold, 1988), 50.

[30] *A Warning for Faire Women*, A3^r.

[31] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "beseem, *v*."

[32] "Horace," in *Sources of Dramatic Theory, Vol. 1: Plato to Congreve*, ed. Michael J. Sidnell et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 63.

active visual element to "beseeming." The stage's black curtains both suit and befit tragedy; they are garments that the genre wears, but these same garments help to make the genre. The curtains, along with the expectations they have fostered in the audience, drive other genres from the stage.

As *A Warning for Faire Women* progresses, Tragedie appears in several dumb shows to move the plot along. In the first, she remarks:

> Al we have done, hath only beene in words,
> But now we come unto the dismall act,
> And in these sable Curtains shut we up,
> The Comicke entrance to our direful play.

Tragedie herself recognizes that the play's black curtains have an active part to play in the plot: even as they herald the tragedy of the play, they swallow its comic elements and possibilities, furthering one genre while negating another. Nor are the curtains the only elements of the genre: the stage directions later instruct that "*some strange solemne musike like belles is heard*," whereupon Tragedie remarks that these "fearefull chimes of night . . . fill the roofe with sounds of tragedie." These bells are not only audible representatives of tragedy, but actants in bringing it about: when the play's characters enter and perform a dumb show that depicts adultery, Tragedie explains that the bells "Do ring them in."[33]

Though *A Warning for Faire Women* is unique in its explicit awareness of the performative elements that aid in the composition of enacted genre, actants are present in every theatrical assemblage. A play's genre emerges from its script, but that genre in performance is composed of other elements as well: it makes a difference if a physical dagger actually appears before Macbeth, if *Hamlet*'s set depicts a realistic Denmark or a minimalist limbo, if Ragusine's

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[33] *A Warning for Faire Women*, C4^{v}, D1^{r}.

head actually resembles Claudio's, if Mercutio wields a sword or a pistol, and on and on in the dynamic assemblages that are remade in every performance. New Historicism has encouraged the early modern field to consider the historical and cultural context of literature, and *Renaissance Play Things* attempts to take these lessons to heart. The dissertation adds another consideration, however: stage props carry cultural connotations onto the stage, but ontologically they are also actants, objects in a network of theatrical performance that are partly constitutive of enacted genres.

FORECAST

The dissertation comprises an introduction, four chapters, and a conclusion. Chapters are arranged in a loose chronological order according to the latest play that each examines, so that while the second chapter takes up earlier plays than the first, it also covers later plays. Each chapter focuses on a specific stage prop—a ring, a crown, a skull, and the philosopher's stone—and provides a sociocultural history of each object before examining its role in a single play or a range of plays. In its interest in cultural history, my dissertation incorporates the lessons of New Historicism while reaping the benefits of OOO: instead of asking "what on stage *isn't* an object" in a need to demarcate subject and object, or having to define a stage property as an object intrinsically dependent on human agency,[34] my work is able to rely on the notions of actancy and assemblages set forth by Latour and Bennett. This cognizance of props as actants allows *Renaissance Play Things* to focus on how specific props and their sociocultural meanings work within the contexts of performance to contribute to theatrical genres. *Renaissance Play Things*, in short, examines what these props represent and what they do.

[34] See Sofer's *Stage Life of Props*, 8, 11.

Chapter 1, entitled "The Ring's the Thing: Temporality and Genre in *Romeo and Juliet*," focuses on the ring that Juliet sends to Romeo through the nurse. The chapter proposes that props can be polytemporal, in the vein of Michel Serres and Jonathan Gil Harris—and that this polytemporality in turn contributes to the play's polygenericity. The ring, in other words, evokes multiple, yet simultaneous conceptions of time, an idea that the chapter explores in the context of the ring's place in comedy and tragedy alike. These temporalities, each integral to their respective genres, both collide in and are confirmed by the play, and so despite the underwhelming presence of *Romeo and Juliet*'s ring, the prop actually manifests the play's confusing interplay of comedy and tragedy.

Instead of focusing on a single play, Chapter 2 examines a range of them. "'No Encreasements of Their Dignity': Crowns and Kingship in Marlowe and Shakespeare" explores how crowns are used to portray a theatrical iteration of kingship in history plays. The chapter delves into the role of the crown in the English coronation ceremony before looking at moments in Christopher Marlowe's *Tamburlaine 1* and *Edward II* and William Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *2 Henry IV* in which the monarchy is transferred from one person to another. In history, the chapter demonstrates, the crown is one part of many in the coronation ritual, and is viewed categorically: it either confirms or creates the monarch. In Marlowe and Shakespeare, though, coronation is radically simplified. Kingship in these plays requires only the king's body and the crown, but it requires both, a relationship that each playwright explores more and more explicitly in the course of their respective careers. The crown, the chapter concludes, is demonstrated by Marlowe and Shakespeare's history plays to be an actant in the composition of onstage kingship.

Chapter 3, "'Diverse Questions of a Dead Man's Skull': Anonymity, Identity, and Enacted Tragedy," begins by breaking down our cultural assumption that a skull is somehow still a vestige of individual subjecthood. Though the skull was a symbol of anonymity in the traditions of the danse macabre, memento mori tokens, and ars moriendi texts, on the Renaissance stage it brings together anonymity and identity, representing both Death and a death. This conflation is tracked through Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton's *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy*. The skull, the chapter concludes, acts as a locus of the relationship between subjecthood and osseous matter, the importance of the individual in the face of annihilation, a theme that the onstage skull brings to tragedy.

Chapter 4 is entitled "'Never Aim to Grieve, But Better Men': The Philosopher's Stone, Corruption, and Theater in *The Alchemist*," and begins with a simple question: if a prop is never seen on the stage, is it a prop? The chapter explores the history of the philosopher's stone and the science of alchemy before turning to Jonson's play, in which the stone is constantly referred to and ostensibly sought after, but never actually present. This prop's relationship to the play's characters, the chapter argues, is akin to Jonson's own perception of his script in relation to the theater: while the offstage object is capable of perfection, that perfection is inevitably corrupted when the object is brought into performance. Jonson's distrust of his audience has been well-documented, but the philosopher's stone embodies another level of suspicion: if the comic genre is meant to educate as well as entertain, *The Alchemist* speaks to the futility of this aim.

The conclusion brings these chapters together in a short coda that underscores the importance of stage props in considerations of literary genre and calls for further study of the potential significance of object-oriented theoretical concepts to early modern theater criticism.

Such an approach has the capability of bridging the critical divide between page and stage, between object and thing, for it demonstrates how props are simultaneously repositories of cultural meaning and actants in their own ontological right.

Chapter One

The Ring's the Thing: Temporality and Genre in *Romeo and Juliet*

Despite the explicit generic designation of *Romeo and Juliet*—"An Excellent conceited Tragedie" reads the title page of its first printed edition[1]—critics have long acknowledged that the play's "preoccupation with love creates a generic instability,"[2] that the play's "competing plot trajectories" create "a hybrid genre intrinsically divided . . . between almost slapstick comedy and unsettling tragic intensity."[3] Both of these arguments, though, seem to define genre as something that stems from the script: in the former, the plot's focus on love is at odds with the play's tragedy, while in the latter, the genre seems to be constituted entirely of incompatible plots. A similar text-based approach to theatrical genre is evident in Douglas Bruster's argument that "knowing the genre of a play can lead one to expect it to feature certain properties."[4] Being

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[1] William Shakespeare, *An Excellent conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Iuliet* (London, 1597).

[2] Michael Neill, "Shakespeare's Tragedies," in *The New Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, ed. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 130.

[3] Tanya Pollard, "'A Thing Like Death': Sleeping Potions and Poisons in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Renaissance Drama* 32 (2003): 95. See also Martha Tuck Rozett, "The Comic Structures of Tragic Endings: The Suicide Scenes in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1985): 156; and James Forse's conclusion that of the drama's scenes, "*twelve* out of twenty-four are almost wholly comedic, and *eleven* out of the remaining twelve contain comedic sections," the only completely tragic scene being the last one (Forse, "*Arden of Feversham* and *Romeo and Juliet*: Two Elizabethan Experiments in the Genre of 'Comedy-Suspense,'" *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 [1995]: 93).

[4] Douglas Bruster, "The Dramatic Life of Objects in the Early Modern Theatre," in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79, 88.

told at the start, in other words, that *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy leads an audience to assume not only that the play will feature certain plot tropes, but that certain stage properties will appear and signify predetermined, unchanging meanings within their genre. Specific props might even define the genre itself: Bruster explains that "certain kinds of properties serve as generic signals: a lute or a hobby horse might signal a comedy, a skull or a dagger a tragedy."[5] I wish to complicate the notion that a prop simply represents a static genre that stems from a playscript. A prop can represent, but just as enacted genre derives from script and performance alike, props also aid in the constitution of theatrical genres. This chapter will examine an important, hitherto neglected prop in *Romeo and Juliet*: the ring that Juliet sends to her lover in the play's third act. In this prop, genres are not divided, but simultaneously manifest. The play's ring both represents and helps create comedy and tragedy through its cultural ramifications and its temporal associations; it is both a polytemporal and a polygeneric actant.

Catherine Richardson captures the agency of onstage objects in her argument that some props "generated stories" and so "we might want to see narratives as being directed into properties and generated by them, might see the props as individual foci in a complex relationship with the linear movement of their stories."[6] Though she is correct to note the importance of the prop in generating narrative, I wish to articulate the nature of the "complex relationship" that props have within this "linear movement" by first considering the props' own temporal dimensions before examining their generic implications. To this point, Jonathan Gil Harris has stressed the multitemporal dimension of Renaissance objects, pointing out that Peter Stallybrass' influential work on clothing in the Renaissance "does not consider how such

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[5] Bruster, "Dramatic Life of Objects," 79.

[6] Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 191.

polychronic traces might be an intrinsic rather than contingent dimension of matter."[7] Harris rectifies this by explicating the latent aspects of temporality in material objects, arguing that Shakespeare and his early modern contemporaries employ things, in the terms of Michel Serres, both polychronically and multitemporally.

Polychronic time is understood linearly, as "the punctual date of chronology"; multitemporal time is "a plane in which the future is behind and the past ahead, and a preposterous folded cloth in which before and after are coeval."[8] *Hamlet*'s famous scene with Yorick's skull provides admirable examples of each of these temporal modes. Producing the skull of the deceased jester, the gravedigger illustrates polychronicity first by remarking that "this / skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years," followed by Hamlet's own reply that "here hung those lips that I have kissed I know / not how oft," each man noting the difference that linear time has made in Yorick's appearance[9]—and Hamlet doing so in the present perfect no less, underscoring a conception of time as a continuum. Hamlet shifts from this, however, to a multitemporal view, lamenting "to what base uses we may return, Horatio!" (5.1.187). In remembering Yorick's death, Hamlet thinks of his own demise, projecting that his own dust will likewise mingle with the earth, and thereby casts the inevitable future into a past that has not happened yet, as if he were folding the times of the past and the future into an indivisible time, a single object evoking "many different understandings and experiences of temporality—that is, of

[7] Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 10. Harris refers to Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass' *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[8] Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 3, 4.

[9] *Hamlet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 5.1.159–60, 5.1.174–75.

the relations between now and then." Hamlet's shift from a polychronic to a multitemporal mode is perceptible; he addresses Yorick's skull from each of these perspectives distinctly. Harris furthermore advances a third temporal mode: when an object is simultaneously polychronic and multitemporal, Harris deems it to be polytemporal, and in these cases, "the past sometimes acquires an explosive power to tear apart the present" in an act of supersession, while "in yet other instances, past matter is also allowed to assume a more dialogic relation to the present, suggesting affinity and proximity." Desdemona's handkerchief, he argues, is polytemporal, for while "it keeps moving from hand to hand at the wrong time," it is also "simultaneously antique Egyptian token and disposable European trifle, old pagan fetish and New Testament instrument of healing, obsolete emblem of true love and present marker of promiscuity," resulting in "an impure, preposterous temporality."[10]

There are no props in *Romeo and Juliet* as iconic as Yorick's skull or Desdemona's handkerchief, but the play's objects have not been neglected altogether: a great deal of scholarship has been devoted to the statues of the lovers "in pure gold" proposed by Montague and Capulet at the play's end,[11] ranging from economic interpretations[12] to symbolistic

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[10] Harris, *Untimely Matter*, 4, 170.

[11] William Shakespeare, *Romeo and Juliet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 5.3.298. All quotations from the tragedy's text will henceforth be cited parenthetically and refer to this edition. I willingly admit the validity of James N. Loehlin's point that even if the First Quarto "is a pirated version, reconstructed from memory (the traditional interpretation), it reflects something of Elizabethan playhouse practice," but the modern preference for the 1599 Second Quarto has been long established, and so I uphold tradition here. See Loehlin's introduction to William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 3. Cedric Watts' general introduction to William Shakespeare, *An Excellent Conceited Tragedie of Romeo and Juliet* (New York and London: Prentice Hall / Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), 13–22, provides an exceptionally lucid and thorough account of the play's publication history and differences between the editions.

readings.[13] One prop, however, has been ignored for centuries: Juliet's ring, an object with temporal and generic ramifications alike. Indeed, an examination of this prop reveals that it is precisely its polytemporality that contributes to the play's polygenericity. In order to explore these ideas, I will first examine Juliet's ring as a wedding token, a status that binds it to comedy, before reading it as a memento mori object, the wedding ring's tragic counterpart. Within each of these discourses, the prop evokes multiple, yet simultaneous conceptions of time. These temporalities, each integral to their respective genres, both collide in and are confirmed by the linear narrative of the playscript, and so despite the underwhelming presence of *Romeo and Juliet*'s ring, the prop is nonetheless an actant that manifests the play's interplay of comedy and tragedy. This small band of metal, the chapter concludes, helps us to fully understand not only the temporalities of *Romeo and Juliet*'s tragic dénouement, but how these temporalities evoke specific genres in order to elicit and subvert narrative expectations.

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[12] Bryan Reynolds and Janna Segal, for example, see the statuary as a "bid for rivalry of the Prince's favor" on the part of the feuding families, the golden statues "serving as a compensation for the loss accrued by the state," while Stanley Wells argues that finding "hollow materialism in Montague's promise" creates "the risk of turning the play into social satire rather than tragedy." See, respectively, Reynolds and Segal, "Fugitive Explorations in *Romeo and Juliet*: Transversal Travels through R&Jspace," *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 5 (2005): 48; and Wells, *Shakespeare: A Life in Drama* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995), 82, 83.

[13] Stephen Greenblatt, for example, sees the statues as apt figures for the restoration of a civic stability that seems beside the point at the drama's end, "inadequate and uncomprehending," while Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., implicitly reaffirms the play's tragic status in his argument that "the projected statues function not only to commemorate but to initiate and develop, for it is under the aegis of remembrance that 'glooming peace' (5.3.305) between the Montagues and Capulets is achieved." See Greenblatt's introduction to *Romeo and Juliet* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 870; and Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 51.

ONE RING TO BIND THEM

The stage directions that call for a ring in *Romeo and Juliet* are implicit.[14] After Romeo kills Tybalt and is banished by Prince Escalus, Juliet begs the Nurse, "O, find him! Give this ring to my true knight, / And bid him come to take his last farewell" (3.2.142–43). Juliet only refers to it as "this ring," but she and Romeo have recently been married offstage between the second and third acts, a fact Juliet emphasizes in her grief at hearing of Tybalt's death and Romeo's banishment: "Shall I speak ill of him that is my husband? / Ah, poor my lord, what tongue shall smooth thy name / When I, thy three-hours wife, have mangled it?" She then designates Romeo her "husband" thrice in the next six lines (3.2.97–99, 101–06). Though Shakespeare does not identify the ring as such, the connection between their recent marriage and Juliet's ring is so strongly suggested in these lines—"I'll to my wedding bed, / And death, not Romeo, take my maidenhead!," she announces a scant five lines before handing the nurse her ring (3.2.136–37)—that the ring cannot help but evoke a wedding ring.

The precise origin of ring use in wedding ceremonies is contested. It has been claimed that "a passage in Ruth (chap. iv. verse 7) gives some reason to suppose that the ring was used by the Jews, as a covenant, in making agreements, grants, &c., whence wedding engagement by a

[14] Philip Butterworth explains that in modern theater, while explicit stage directions determine "specific practical requirements of players and/or others who present the work in performance," implicit directions are those that are embedded in and must be extracted from the text's content. See Butterworth, *Staging Conventions in Medieval English Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 3.

ring may have been derived”;[15] and that the tradition of marriage rings came about through the Romans: as “it was customary to exchange rings to mark the agreement of a business contract, so a ring, the ‘annulus pronubus,’ was given as a pledge of engagement to marriage—though, unlike the wedding rings of later periods, it did not signify that the union was permanently binding.”[16] Our own cultural history has appropriated this logic so wholeheartedly that by now it is nearly intuitive, but the rationale behind this usage deserves scrutiny.

Ruth 4:7 never mentions a ring, let alone one of the engagement variety. It reads: “Now this was the maner in former time in Israel, concerning redeeming, and concerning changing, for to confirme all things: a man plucked off his shooe, and gaue it to his neighbour: and this was a testimonie in Israel.”[17] The circumstances surrounding the verse are these. Ruth, the widow of Mahlon, had accompanied her mother-in-law Naomi to Bethlehem. There, Ruth was shown favor by Boaz, the nearest relative save one of Naomi’s deceased husband. In the fourth chapter of Ruth, Boaz enters Bethlehem, finds this relative, and tells him that Naomi is selling her land: “if thou wilt redeeme it, redeeme it; but if thou wilt not redeeme it, then tell mee, that I may know: for there is none to redeeme it, besides thee, and I am after thee” (4:4). The relative agrees to buy the property, until Boaz reminds him that as Mahlon’s widow, Naomi comes with the land and must be married in order “to raise up the name of the dead upon his inheritance” (4:5). The kinsman backs out for fear of sullying his own inheritance—and it is at this point that Boaz

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[15] William Jones, *Finger-Ring Lore: Historical, Legendary, Anecdotal* (London, 1877), 297. The use of this verse to support the practice of engagement rings is also argued by Henry Ives Bailey, *The Liturgy Compared with the Bible* (London, 1835), 2:91.

[16] Diana Scarisbrick, *Rings: Jewelry of Power, Love and Loyalty* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2007), 61.

[17] *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament, and the New: Newly Translated Out of the Original Tongues* (London, 1613).

removes his shoe, declaring to those around him that they are "witnesses this day, that I have bought all that was Elimelechs, and all that was Chilions, and Mahlons, of the hand of Naomi. Moreover, Ruth the Moabitesse, the wife of Mahlon, have I purchased to bee my wife" (4:9–10).

There is no ring in this story, and Ruth is not given anything, not even Boaz's shoe; the tale rather articulates the deeply seated historical connection between property and bride, as Naomi is explicitly a collateral feature of Boaz's purchase. If this Biblical verse is indeed the origin of engagement rings, it may be simply because the transfer of a physical object symbolically represents the intent to purchase something else. The shoe acts as a deposit of sorts—though it is unclear whether the neighbor keeps the shoe or simply holds it for the duration of the buyer's declaration of intent. The story effectively elides the Roman tradition of using rings in contracts and engagements alike.

The engagement ring is intricate in its temporalities. In a business transaction, a ring might serve as evidence of both past and future action: it serves to acknowledge that a contract exists and that there is a future point at which its terms will be fulfilled. Unlike most business contracts, however, engagement rings evoke another layer of temporality: they encode not only past and future, but also a deferred futurity, a contract to create yet another contract through marriage at a later date. Though a symbol of commitment, rings are hardly guarantees. Prior to the 1477 marriage of the Princess of Burgundy and the Duke of Austria, "a letter was written by the young lady at her father's command signifying her consent to the alliance, and a diamond ring of considerable value was sent as a pledge or token of it," and yet the same princess had ambassadors sent to her to explicitly query "whether she designed to make good her promise."[18]

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[18] Jones, *Finger-Ring Lore*, 283. Elsewhere, Scarisbrick argues that "when linked to the symbolism of the ring, the invincible powers ascribed to the diamond made it the emblem of harmony in marriage," but as Shakespeare does

Conversely, it has been argued that "the acceptance of a ring has always implied a binding commitment, and this was reflected in the design of the rings—clasped hands on *fede* rings, interlocking hoops on gimmal rings—both symbolic of the indissolubility of the marriage bond."[19] Such overwrought designs, though, may be indications of an anxiety surrounding the inherent tenuousness of an engagement ring's deferred futurity. Despite the physical existence of a reified contract, the significance of any gift in the Renaissance "lay in the context of the exchange and the intent of the giver and the receiver rather than in the specific item."[20] This much is readily apparent in countless other works, including Shakespeare's own. The ring that Olivia sends to Cesario in *Twelfth Night* signals her romantic interest in him even as it demonstrates that Malvolio is truly acting on her behalf; when Bassanio chooses the correct casket in *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia explicitly invests her ring with her sovereignty and all of her possessions in order to locate the exact moment in which she surrenders them: "and even now, but now, / This house, these servants, and this same myself / Are yours, my lord's. I give them with this ring." By the play's end, intent becomes all-important. Having surrendered the ring given him by Nerissa, Graziano protests it was only "a hoop of gold, a paltry ring" whose

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not indicate exactly what type of ring Juliet sends, we cannot make any definitive assertions regarding it. See Scarisbrick, "Forever Adamant: A Renaissance Diamond Ring," *Journal of the Walters Art Gallery* 40 (1982): 59.

[19] Charlotte Gere, "Rings from 1500 to 1900," in *Rings Through the Ages*, ed. Anne Ward, John Cherry, Charlotte Gere, and Barbara Cartlidge (New York: Rizzoli, 1981), 96. A gimmel ring, when taken off the finger, could be opened to reveal two equal hoops that "fit closely and exactly together to form a single ring." See Sylvie Lambert, *The Ring: Design, Past and Present* (Crans-Près-Céligny: RotoVision SA, 1998), 76–77.

[20] Loreen L. Giese, *Courtships, Marriage Customs, and Shakespeare's Comedies* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), 84. This interpretation is supported by George Frederick Kunz in *Rings for the Finger* (1917; repr., New York: Dover, 1973), 204.

"posy was / For all the world like cutlers' poetry / Upon a knife—'Love me and leave me not.'" In reply, Nerissa asks:

> What talk you of the posy or the value?
> You swore to me when I did give it you
> That you would wear it till your hour of death
> And that it should lie with you in your grave.[21]

While Graziano reduces the object to its market value (which, he underscores, is hardly increased by the ring's trite motto), Nerissa makes it plain that her investment in the ring is in the promises associated with it. These promises, moreover, are temporal ones: Graziano has sworn to wear the ring not only until his death, but into his grave.

Contemporary evidence confirms the import of intent and temporalities in jewelry. The first lines of Henry Swinburne's *A Treatise of Spousals* make this clear:

> Albeit this word *Sponsalia* (Englished *Spousals*) being properly understood, doth only signifie Promises of future Marriage, yet is it not perpetually tied to this only Sense, for sometimes it is stretched to the signification of *Love Gifts and Tokens* of the Parties betroathed; as *Bracelets*, *Chains*, *Jewels*, and namely the *Ring*; being often used for the very *Arrabo* or assured Pledge of a perfect promise.[22]

Jewelry and contracts are neatly elided here: for the Romans, an "*arrha* or *arrhabo*" was simply money either pledged or deposited "to bind the bargain of sale," and so perhaps Graziano is not

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[21] See *Twelfth Night*, 1.5.270–76, 2.2.1–24; and *The Merchant of Venice*, 3.2.169–71, 5.1.146–53 in *The Norton Shakespeare*.

[22] Henry Swinburne, *A Treatise of Spousals, or Matrimonial Contracts* (London, 1686), 1, italics his. Published well after Swinburne's death, the treatise was written circa 1600.

entirely misguided in focusing on his ring's monetary value.[23] Swinburne is nonetheless intensely aware of the temporalities of love gifts and tokens. These temporalities are crucial, for spousals, "a mutual Promise of future Marriage," could be exchanged *de praesenti* or *de futuro*. The first of these terms, describing vows exchanged in the present tense, effected a marriage union; the second signified a mere promise of marriage, though "not so surely tied, but that it may be loosed, whiles the matter is in suspense and unperfect." Indeed, Swinburne clarifies that context is critical, for if any words were spoken during the ring's delivery, "if the words did import Matrimony, the Ring confirmeth Matrimony, and if the words did import Spousals only, the Ring betokeneth no more but bare Spousals."[24] While the matrimonial future implied by the dispatch and receipt of a ring was not technically legally binding, the connotations of such an exchange were strong enough to be at the center of numerous contemporary court cases;[25] Diana O'Hara persuasively argues that though gift-exchange was not essential "in terms of *legally*

[23] William Hepburn Buckler, *The Origin and History of Contract in Roman Law Down to the End of the Republican Period* (London, 1895), 146.

[24] Swinburne, *A Treatise of Spousals*, 5, 13, 209. *De futuro* vows, Swinburne later stresses, became de facto binding oaths once the engagement was sexually consummated.

[25] Subha Mukherji acknowledges that "the conclusive role of rings in determining judgements has been dismissed by some historians on statistical grounds," but his argument that the depositions extant from 1570–1640 "is not necessarily a proportional indication of the number of uncertain marriages being contracted, given that the Church was trying to regularise and formalise marriage during exactly this period" is persuasive. See Mukherji, *Law and Representation in Early Modern Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 33.

validating a marriage," it did create "a *social* imperative which played a key role in the transacting of personal relationships within the marriage process."[26]

Given the officiation of Friar Laurence, the vows that Romeo and Juliet exchange offstage are almost certainly *de praesenti* wedding vows—but they do not consummate their union until later that night, and so their marriage both is and is not when Juliet gives up, if only temporarily, the ring that serves as the only physical proof of their union. As the ring is in transit, Romeo himself worries "what says / My concealed lady to our cancelled love" (3.3.96–97), a question that not only recalls the doubtful promise inherent in a ring, but further emphasizes the equivocal status of a marriage placed in jeopardy by his having murdered her cousin. The delivery of the ring, then, assures him of Juliet's fidelity and so noticeably calms his fears, Romeo going from "The unreasonable fury of a beast" (3.3.110) and suicidal impulses to declaring himself "revived" through his receipt of the ring (3.3.164). The ring's presence is rendered all the more important by the fact that "though the traditional sequence of espousal, religious ceremony, and then sexual consummation is seen or implied in all of its stages" by the play's end, the very secrecy of Romeo and Juliet's marriage makes it literally clandestine[27]—and this at a time when clandestine marriages "violated not only the tradition of arranged marriages in the upper ranks but also the new marriage rituals of the Book of Common Prayer."[28] The ring

[26] Diana O'Hara, *Courtship and Constraint: Rethinking the Making of Marriage in Tudor England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 64. O'Hara's chapter on the role of gifts and tokens in the courtship process is especially illuminating.

[27] B. J. Sokol and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 104.

[28] Katharine Cleland, "'Wanton loves, and yong desires': Clandestine Marriage in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander* and Chapman's Continuation," *Studies in Philology* 108 (2011): 215.

itself is the only material substantiation of a marriage that is still, in a sense, in progress, a union that reflects the ring's multitemporal circumstances of past ceremony and pledged consummation.

The evolution of contemporary English marriage rituals is worth lingering over. The first Book of Common Prayer, published in 1549, became "the only form of worship" after the 1549 Act of Uniformity, and furnished "the new English Protestant Church with a form of marriage ceremony" for the first time. This ceremony incorporated traditional acts of "handfasting and ring-giving" into its formal structure;[29] in it, the bride pledges her vows after "taking agayn the man by the right hande," while the man is directed to "geve vnto the woman a ryng, and other tokens of spousage, as golde or syluer," saying "With this ring I thee wed."[30] The very structure of this promise is telling, for the ring becomes not only a material manifestation of the spoken vow and a vehicle through which the groom is rendered able to marry, but a veritable agent in the wedding itself—"I marry both this ring and you," in modern parlance. In the revised prayer book of 1552, the suggestion of giving gold and silver was removed, leaving only the ring, and though the Catholic Queen Mary proscribed this book, Queen Elizabeth issued an Act of Uniformity in 1559 that "imposed the use of a slightly more conservative revision" of the 1552 Book of Common Prayer. The mandatory script of the marriage ceremony "met with opposition from both ends of the religious spectrum," and many Puritans "repeatedly and vociferously objected to the obligatory giving of a ring during the Prayer Book marriage ceremony, which they saw as idolatrous."[31]

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[29] Sokol and Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*, 77.

[30] *The Booke of the Common Prayer and Administracion of the Sacramentes* (London, 1549), fol. cxxxvii^{r} .

[31] Sokol and Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*, 82. Richard L. Greaves protests that "that all Puritans opposed wedding rings is a myth that circulated as early as the Elizabethan era," but some certainly did quite

Though Shakespeare often employs rings as symbols of romantic interest and sexual intrigue, his plays deride both sides of the Book of Common Prayer controversy. Throughout his works, "the highly Protestant aspect of the Prayer Book ceremony, the naming of the three purposes of marriage," is either parodied or forgone altogether, but "the required giving of a ring or rings in the church ceremony, which was highly objectionable for Puritans . . . in relation to solemnization" is also never shown.[32] Indeed, while Paul A. Kottman declares that Romeo and Juliet "seem content to celebrate the marriage in the privacy of the confessional, eschewing public acknowledgment,"[33] T. G. A. Nelson casts doubt on the very legality of the union, pointing out that laws issued by the Anglican Church "towards the end of Elizabeth's reign and . . . early in the reign of King James, laid down the restrictions that full marriage could only be effected by a ceremony in church, before a priest, with banns read (or license obtained) in advance, and with parental consent where either party was a minor,"[34] a circumstance clearly not the case here. Nelson goes on, however, to point out that in *Twelfth Night*, the priest who marries Sebastian and Olivia affirms that the union was "Confirmed by mutual joinder of your hands, / Attested by the holy close of lips, / Strengthened by interchangement of your rings."[35] The priest, who "would be expected to know that the essence of the marriage is the verbal exchange of

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vocally. See Greaves, *Society and Religion in Elizabethan England* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1981), 184–85.

[32] Sokol and Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage*, 91.

[33] Paul A. Kottman, "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 24.

[34] T. G. A. Nelson, "Doing Things with Words: Another Look at Marriage Rites and Spousals in Renaissance Drama and Fiction," *Studies in Philology* 95 (1998): 358.

[35] *Twelfth Night*, 5.1.152–54.

consent, clearly feels that the bond is 'strengthen'd' by customary gestures like the exchange of rings," as well as his own officiation.[36] Though Shakespeare's works decline to solemnize rings, then, he does employ them as physical proofs of weddings, reifying the intangible bonds of the marriage ceremony.[37] In this case, the ring reminds Romeo of his offstage *de praesenti* marriage, but it also signals Juliet's fidelity to her husband in the wake of Tybalt's death and reaffirms her promise of consummation. Both proof and pledge of marriage, Juliet's wedding ring carries similar but temporally distinct connotations according to the circumstances of its reception as well as the passage of time. Historical artifact and pledge, the ring simultaneously encodes the past and the future alike.

DEATH IN VERONA

Contemporary defenders of wedding rings listed among its "profitable symbols" the notion that "the ring, having no beginning or end, symbolized the perpetual union of matrimony,"[38] and this interpretation was one among many sophisticated readings of jewelry. This is hardly surprising: judging by both "the number and quality of the rings that were worn,"[39] rings were immensely popular in the early modern period, so much so that in contemporary portraits, "it was not unusual to find eight or nine rings being worn at one time—on the upper joints of the fingers as

[36] Nelson, "Doing Things with Words," 366.

[37] Giese points to this idea of material proof as a possible explanation for why suitors in contemporary legal records "exchanged more gifts during or after a marriage than before." See *Courtships*, 130.

[38] Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), 47.

[39] Nancy J. Owens and Alan C. Harris, "'This Precious Stone Set in the Silver Sea . . .': Literal and Figurative References to Jewelry in the Plays of William Shakespeare," *Semiotica* 123 (1999): 85.

well as on the lower ones and even on the thumbs."[40] Nor were the connotations of rings limited to the marital realm, for one of the most popular types of rings in the Renaissance was the memento mori ring; it was commonly thought that "a skull looking up from the finger was the best means of keeping death in mind." The designs of memento mori rings varied widely: using his signet ring, "Richard Rychardin in 1537 sealed a letter to Thomas Cromwell with the device of a death's head with the motto MORIERIS (thou shalt die)," and one of the more intricate surviving specimens has an opening locket with a skull on the front and, inside, "above a sleeping child, an hourglass and a skull."[41] The ring's design did not always incorporate overt representations of or allusions to death: like the wedding ring, context determined meaning, and so a memento mori ring could simply be a plain gold band.[42] At their most basic level, memento mori rings served to remind the wearer constantly of his or her own impending death, the inevitable future of all our lives—but these rings could also recall the past. "Bequests of rings are frequently mentioned in wills of the middle and later ages,"[43] but these rings did not necessarily belong to the deceased. Rather than being passed down as heirlooms, rings were often purchased and given as gifts. Sir Philip Sidney asks, for instance, "that my Wife cause three Rings to be made, and, in every of them a Diamond, to be presented and given, one to the Right Honourable the Earl of Huntingdon, one other to the Right Honourable the Earl of Pembroke, and the third,

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[40] Gere, "Rings from 1500 to 1900," 89. It seems quite probable that wearing so many rings was not a daily practice, especially given the role of material objects in early modern portraiture, but the importance of rings is nonetheless literally illustrated in their presence. See Jones and Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing*, especially 34–58.

[41] Scarisbrick, *Rings*, 164.

[42] Kunz, *Rings for the Finger*, 42.

[43] Jones, *Finger-Ring Lore*, 355. Jones goes on to provide a fairly substantial list of such bequests; see *Finger-Ring Lore*, 356–77.

to my very good Lady, the Countess of Sussex, in Token of my very dutifull Love to every one of them."[44] Shakespeare himself, in his will and testament, leaves William Reynolds, Anthony Nashe, John Nashe, his godson William Walker, "& to my fellows John Hemynnges Richard Burbage & Henry Cundell xxvi s viii d A peece to buy them Ringes" in remembrance of him.[45] For Sidney and Shakespeare, the rings they leave behind—though they are yet to be purchased and have never been seen by the dying men—materialize and extend the relationship between giver and recipient. Indeed, one of the most common inscriptions on such rings was "Not lost but gone before."[46] The latter half of the motto emphasizes a polychronic viewpoint in stating that one person has gone "before" another in a linear temporality. The former half, though, is multitemporal in its denial of the past's irrevocability in the present and the future: the deceased is not lost as long as he is remembered and another is coming to meet him in death. A single ring can thus simultaneously conjure the memory of a friend or relative from the past as well as provoke thoughts of the future, both culturally (in the popular memento mori tradition) and more personally (their friend has died, and death awaits them as well).

The idea of the ring as memento mori is raised in *Romeo and Juliet* subtly but clearly. Approaching the Capulet tomb, Romeo, in order to get rid of his servant Balthasar, tells him that he is entering the grave partly to see Juliet's face once more, "But chiefly to take thence from her dead finger / A precious ring, a ring that I must use / In dear employment" (5.3.30–32). Romeo has announced his plans to kill himself two scenes earlier, and so the ring's retrieval may seem an obvious ruse to the audience. In Balthasar's eyes, though, the ring's dear employment could

[44] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Complete Works of Philip Sidney*, ed. Albert Feuillerat, vol. 3, *The Defence of Poesie, Political Discourses, Correspondence, Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 374.

[45] "Shakespeare's Will (March 25, 1616)," in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3343.

[46] Kunz, *Rings for the Finger,* 43.

well be to serve as a memento mori for Romeo, the ring being a personal heirloom and a symbol of Juliet's death as well as a reminder of his own inevitable future demise. It may even be the case that Romeo does intend to use the ring as an opportunity to reflect upon his mortality. Though the ring seems practically superfluous—he never mentions it again—Romeo's impromptu excuse brings out the ring's temporal and cultural connotations just before his final scene with Juliet: a morbid reprise of their marriage in a clear example of tragedy colliding and coexisting with comedy.

Judith Haber persuasively argues that "the tragic conclusion of the play is implicit in the lovers' first physical contact."[47] She makes this point by comparing Romeo's dying words with those he speaks immediately after the lovers' sonnet at the Capulet ball. "Thus from my lips, by thine my sin is purged," he breathes after kissing Juliet for the first time; "Thus with a kiss I die" he says after kissing her for the last (1.5.104, 5.3.120). Haber's contention that the lovers' first kiss retroactively assumes a tragic pall, however, is only one side of the equation: by the same logic, Romeo's last kiss is weighted with comic inflection. Consider that once in the Capulet tomb, Romeo laments "my love, my wife!" and seals his death "with a righteous kiss" (5.3.91, 114). This scene reprises the marriage ceremony, but the language also emphasizes Romeo's legal rights as Juliet's spouse,[48] rights that he extends beyond death in his declaration that he will remain with his wife lest "unsubstantial death is amorous," never leaving her "pallet of dim night" (5.3.103, 107). In this, he references two instances of previous dialogue: his own, when immediately prior to marrying Juliet he begs Friar Laurence to "but close our hands with holy

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[47] Judith Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 53.

[48] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "righteous, *adj.*, *n.*, *adv.*, and *int.*"

words, / Then love-devouring death do what he dare" (2.5.6–7); and Juliet's, who laments upon first meeting Romeo that "If he be married, / My grave is like to be my wedding bed" (1.5.131–32). If on the brink of marriage Romeo conjures death, then even in death, he imagines himself to be Juliet's bridegroom—and it is not difficult to interpret the scene in the Capulet tomb as a consummation, the lovers enacting "both the Petrarchan conceit of 'dying for love' and the little death of orgasm," the resting place of the dagger being "inescapably phallic in form."[49] While the ring is not the true object of Romeo's visit and is not even mentioned again, its connotations with past and future dimensions of both death and marriage are strangely present not only here but, in retrospect, throughout the play's love scenes.

It is appropriate that the scene in the Capulet tomb bridges comedy and tragedy, for rings themselves could simultaneously have marital and mortal connotations. Just as "a ring's value lay in the timing of the gift and the intentions of the giver and the receiver," the significance of the ring could be equally multivalent, as people often "gave memento mori, signet, and other types of rings as courtship and marriage confirmation gifts."[50] A legal deposition given on 12 February 1601/02, for example, explains how Katherine Garnett took a ring from Thomas Powell, it "being a gould ryng with a deathes head upon it saying and upon that Condition that I will . . . be your wife and yow shall be my husband."[51] The memento mori theme was often

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[49] Haber, *Desire and Dramatic Form*, 53.

[50] Giese, *Courtships*, 139, 140.

[51] In Giese, *Courtships*, 138. The "bawdy connotation of a ring as female genitalia" of course plays into this, for the ring thus alludes both to marriage and to the inevitable demise of all flesh; indeed, early modern bawds were known for wearing memento mori rings. See Pamela S. Hammons, *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2010), 18; and Gordon Williams, *Dictionary of Sexual Language and Imagery in Shakespearean and Stuart Literature* (London: Athlone Press, 1994), 3:1158. Williams

integrated into wedding rings: gimmel rings given in engagement or wedding ceremonies could sometimes be opened to reveal hidden chambers in which one would see "a skeleton or new-born baby, inseparable symbols of death, life and love."[52] Rings of all sorts, then, could and did signify multiple temporalities on multiple planes, the pasts and futures of marriage and mortuary rituals alike encoded within a single material object.

Shakespeare is not specific enough about the design of Juliet's ring for a detailed analysis of it on a material level. Indeed, in performance practice, the actors may not have even used the same ring from show to show: though Neil Carson explains the "inexplicable absence of some small" props from contemporary theater inventories by suggesting that "these smaller items were probably kept backstage or supplied by the actors,"[53] Natasha Korda has recently expanded W. W. Greg's claim that Henslowe's pawnshop was likely "a useful adjunct to dramatic management, since the articles deposited were in many cases rich stuffs and apparel, which if unredeemed would prove of value in the company wardrobe."[54] Henslowe rented out not only the luxurious items, Korda suggests, but household props like the linens, trenchers, and mugs that Carson notes are absent from inventories yet would have been necessary for bedroom and banquet scenes on the stage. Indeed, a typical household economy required an early modern wife to "routinely expropriate or deposit some of these goods with the pawnbroker" to such an extent that "several of the women in Henslowe's accounts were reduced to pawning their wedding

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connects bawds with memento mori in Marston's *Dutch Curtezan* (1603–04), Dekker's *Northward Ho* (1605), and Middleton's *The Old Law* (ca. 1618), making this practice rather contemporary with *Romeo and Juliet*.

[52] Lambert, *The Ring*, 77.

[53] Neil Carson, *A Companion to Henslowe's Diary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 53.

[54] W. W. Greg's introduction to *Henslowe's Diary*, ed. W. W. Greg (London: A. H. Bullen, 1904), xxi.

rings."[55] It is immensely likely, then, that the ring used in the initial production of *Romeo and Juliet* was swapped out for another within weeks, and that this ring was itself swapped out, and on and on, as the pawnshop's goods were bought or redeemed. Rings were so common in early modern culture that it is hardly a stretch to imagine that an actor might volunteer his own ring, bringing a personal history to an object whose widespread, concurrent cultural connotations of business transactions, engagements, marriages, and death would already have reverberated with an early modern audience. Though *Romeo and Juliet* contextualizes its rings—Juliet calls attention to hers shortly after her marriage, and Romeo calls similar attention to a ring that may or may not actually exist before entering her tomb, dramatic circumstances that respectively recall the wedding ring and the memento mori—in both cases the ring's temporal ramifications recalls the inextricable, multitemporal intertwining of marriage and death. As a wedding band, the ring is both a promise of marital consummation and an artifact of the marriage ceremony; as a memento mori retrieved from Juliet's tomb, it both reminds its wearer of the past and of his or her own inevitable death; and in this play especially, death is recognized to be an inherent aspect of marriage and marriage an aspect of death.

CONCLUSION

The dramatic tension of *Romeo and Juliet* should be nonexistent; it is a story that the majority of Shakespeare's audience would have already known, and the chorus gives away the ending in the first dozen lines: "From forth the fatal loins of these two foes / A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life" (Prologue 5–6). The prologue, though, is immediately followed by Capulet and

[55] Natasha Korda, "Household Property/Stage Property: Henslowe as Pawnbroker," *Theatre Journal* 48, no. 2 (May 1996): 189.

Montague servants hurling insults at one another, the onset of a series of "familiar comic plots involving the impediments to marriage" that so proliferate that "even the protagonists' death scene is teasingly prefaced by the standard comic device of a feigned death and a mock funeral."[56] The play's tension, then, stems not from its narrative, but perhaps from its polygenericity, for *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy that seems to constantly demonstrate its potential for comedy.

This tension is materialized in Juliet's ring, for the object evokes the temporalities and genre of comedy as well as tragedy. In terms of plot, the ring is simply a material object sent to Romeo that helps the narrative to move along: in dispatching her ring, Juliet signals her identity and her intentions to stay with Romeo despite his recent murder. The ring, though, is also an actant, for it carries cultural and temporal connotations that affect both the play's enacted genre and its reception. Within the context of the plot, Juliet's ring can be a wedding ring or a memento mori, and the implications of this within Renaissance culture are manifold. David Scott Kastan writes that in Shakespeare's works, "tragic time is, then, the experiential time of human life—a time that, like life itself to which it is inextricably tied, is directional, irreversible, and finite. It offers neither hope nor consolation." He touches briefly on *Romeo and Juliet*, but only to point to the "dumb, golden statues" as emblems of "the absence of meaningful futurity" in Shakespeare's tragedies.[57] As Kastan defines it, tragic time is polychronic: it moves linearly and perpetually forward. Juliet's ring, however, is multitemporal, for it is at once an engagement ring, a wedding ring, and a memento mori token that reminds Romeo of Juliet's death and of his own impending demise. Placing the multitemporal ring in the framework of polychronic "tragic time" renders the

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[56] Neill, "Shakespeare's Tragedies," 130.

[57] David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare and the Shapes of Time* (London: Macmillan, 1982), 80, 89.

ring polytemporal, and in the object's bringing together of multiple times, it simultaneously evokes comedy as well as tragedy. It is precisely this combination that renders *Romeo and Juliet* such a successful play. The prologue, after all, announces that not only is the play a tragedy, but that it works within the polychronic temporality that Kastan associates with the genre: the show "Is now the two-hours' traffic of our stage" (Prologue 12–14). The play's comic elements, though, seemingly confirmed by the ring's marital associations and concurrent multitemporality, constantly tease the audience with the possibility of a comic resolution, and in so doing, ultimately heighten the effect of the tragic ending.

Of the hundreds of props featured on the early modern stage, rings are one of the most quotidian. Despite their ubiquity both on and the off the stage, however, they play a surprisingly large role in dozens of Renaissance plays. The Tyrant of Middleton and Dekker's *The Bloody Banquet* discovers his wife's infidelity after she gives her ring to her lover; in *Cymbeline*, the ring that Posthumus receives from Innogen serves as the stakes of her gambled-upon fidelity as well as the instrument of Giacomo's undoing; and the titular Duchess of Malfi is convinced of her husband's death by a waxen severed hand with his wedding ring on it, to cite just a few memorable examples. Rings might explicitly signify marriage, property, fidelity, and sexuality, as in *The Merchant of Venice*; they might suggest romantic interest, as in *Twelfth Night*, Marlowe's *Edward II*, or Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize*; or they might be used to identify a thitherto unknown character or as material proof of a story's truth, as in *Pericles*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *A Winter's Tale*, or *Henry VIII*.

Romeo and Juliet takes full advantage of the variegated connotations of this prop, harnessing its cultural associations and their temporal ramifications in order to tease the audience with the possibility of a comic resolution to a narrative that the prologue has already announced

will end in sorrow. In its resonances as wedding band and memento mori, Juliet's ring evokes not only comedy and tragedy, but the temporalities inherent in those aspects: it is a pledge of matrimonial consummation and a sign of the past wedding ceremony; it is a keepsake from a deceased friend or family member and a reminder of the wearer's own mortality. Though it appears onstage for only a few moments, the ring, unspecified in type, perhaps even changing from one performance to the next, whispers of death in the midst of a wedding and evokes marriage even when entombed, heightening and deepening the tragic through comedy's presence. This single ring is a polytemporal actant, a manifestation of the pasts and futures of life and death informing, interrupting, and exploding one another in the play's narrative linearity—and in this polytemporality, the ring is polygeneric, a marker and maker of tragedy and comedy alike. The polygeneric mosaic that is *Romeo and Juliet* is both reflected and embodied in Juliet's ring, for in this one small band of metal, the discourses of love and death are set in eternal tension, exploding the play's temporalities and genres in a violent collision of pasts, presents, and futures.

Chapter Two

"No Encreasements of Their Dignity":

Crowns and Kingship in Marlowe and Shakespeare

Almost by definition, Renaissance history plays as a genre intrinsically reflect, explicitly or no, on the nature of kingship:[1] how it is manifested, administered, and—especially when kings fall—passed on. This chapter will examine moments in history plays by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare (*Tamburlaine 1*, *Edward II*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *2 Henry IV*)[2] in

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[1] Barbara Hodgdon employs Franco Moretti to argue that history plays "represent 'a universe in which *everything has its origins in the decisions of the king*,'" and Martha Hester Fleischer states that "good kingship" is "inclusive in the history play," but the association of kingship with history plays is admittedly a slight generalization. Theodora A. Jankowski argues that that the history play genre might productively be considered one "that records the deeds of capitalists, not traditional sovereigns," so that a history play "in the hands of Heywood, then, becomes rewritten as a genre to accommodate capitalists as heroes, as the 'monarchs' whose deeds these plays are meant to chronicle." See Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All: Closure and Contradiction in Shakespeare's History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 10; Fleischer, *The Iconography of the English History Play*, Elizabethan & Renaissance Studies 10, ed. James Hogg (Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1974), 110; and Jankowski's "Historicizing and Legitimating Capitalism: Thomas Heywood's *Edward IV* and *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*," in *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 7, ed. J. Leeds Barroll (New York: AMS Press, 1995), 329.

[2] *Tamburlaine* of course stands out in this list, but C. F. Tucker Brooke makes the argument that *Tamburlaine* is, in fact, "more than any other drama, the source and original of the Elizabethan history play." See *The Tudor Drama: A History of English National Drama to the Retirement of Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1911), 301–02.

which monarchy is transferred from one person to another.[3] I will first explore how Tudor and Stuart coronation rites, through a series of ceremonies and objects, either create or confirm the monarch. The chapter will then turn to the theater to explore how this historically elaborate transference of power is physically simplified yet ontologically complicated on the stage, producing a distinctly theatrical theory of kingship. In looking at these moments of transfer in the plays of Marlowe and Shakespeare, it becomes clear that while in historical coronations, a series of objects and steps are requisite for the creation or confirmation of the king, the stage demonstrates that kingship is constructed through the relationship between the king's corporeal body and a physical crown; in Latourean terms, the body and crown are actants that create a network of theatrical kingship. This network, the chapter concludes, is an important complication, for much like post-Reformation Stuart theorists, early modern critics tend to view the trappings of theatrical kingship as senseless, albeit occasionally useful, objects which are secondary to the monarch's power instead of active elements in the composition of enacted history.

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[3] Despite their gendered definitions, for the sake of ease this chapter will use "king" and "kingship" throughout as a gender-neutral synonym for the English monarchy. The monarch's gender obviously mattered to ruler and subject alike, as the vast array of criticism on Elizabeth's self-conscious role and the legacies of John Knox and John Ponet demonstrate. All of the theatrical monarchs that this chapter examines, however, are male, and my vocabulary in historical sections takes its cue from Mary I's own procession, in which she presented herself "as both king and queen." See Sarah Duncan, *Mary I: Gender, Power, and Ceremony in the Reign of England's First Queen* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 26.

In 1607, John and William Parkinson attempted to sue Richard and Nicholas Smith on behalf of Robert Colvill. The Smiths, according to the complaint, "unjustly, and without judgment," had "disseised him [that is, dispossessed Colvill] of his freehold in Haggard, otherwise Haggarston, otherwise Aggerston, in the parish of St. Leonard, in Shoreditch."[4] Colvill—"whose family name was sometimes spelled Colvin," or "Calvin, as he subsequently came to be called in the legal annals"[5]—was two days shy of turning two when the Parkinsons, his guardians, had the claim filed with Edward Coke, then-Chief Justice of the Court of Common Pleas.

Rather than argue the merits of the case, the Smiths' attorney instead disputed Colvill's right to sue his clients in the first place, arguing that as a native of Scotland, Colvill had no standing in an English court. The judges of the King's Bench Court, "upon conference and consideration of the weight and importance" of the case,[6] adjourned to talk over the matter for some days, attempting "to define what a foreigner was and at the same time to circumscribe the characteristics and essence of a subject."[7] In the end, Colvill's case was allowed to proceed, but Coke's extensive decision makes an intriguing detour in its discussion of allegiance. Because allegiance is due to the king's natural as well as political body, Coke argues, kingship derives

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[4] Sir Edward Coke, *La Sept Part des Reports Sr. Edw. Coke Chiualer, Ciefe Iustice del Common Banke* (London, 1608). Reprinted with notes, references, and presumably translations by John Henry Thomas and John Farquhar Fraser in their six-volume set *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt, in Thirteen Parts*, vol. 4 (London, 1826), 1. I use Thomas and Fraser's edition throughout.

[5] Richard Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 99.

[6] Coke, *The Reports*, 3.

[7] Marienstras, *New Perspectives*, 105.

entirely from descent, not the coronation rite: "by Queen Elizabeth's death the crown and kingdom of England descended to his Majesty [James I], and he was fully and absolutely thereby King, without any essential ceremony or act to be done *ex post facto:* for coronation is but a royal ornament and solemnization of the royal descent, but no part of the title."

This assertion is a trenchant response to the Bye Plot of 1603, an alleged plot by Roman Catholic priests and several Puritans to kidnap the king "and force him to grant liberty of conscience to his subjects."[8] Coke takes the time to explain this plot:

> In the first year of his Majesty's reign, before his Majesty's coronation, Watson and Clerke, Seminary Priests, and others, were of opinion, that his Majesty was no complete and absolute King before his coronation, but that coronation did add a confirmation and perfection to the descent; and therefore (observe their damnable and damned consequent) that they by strength and power might before his coronation take him and his royal issue into their possession, keep him prisoner in the Tower, remove such counsellors and great officers as pleased them, and constitute others in their places, &c. And that these and

[8] As the name suggests, the Bye Plot was related to the Main Plot, in which, bankrolled by Spain, "Raleigh and Cobham planned to foment internal rebellions and foreign invasions in order to depose James and replace him with his cousin, Arbella Stuart." Several people were involved in both plots, and so the two are rather confusing. Indeed, Francis Edwards casts a great deal of doubt on whether either posed a true threat: both plots, he demonstrates, "show the hallmarks of agents provocateurs" and eliminated notable political rivals of Sir Robert Cecil. See Diana Newton, *The Making of the Jacobean Regime: James I and the Government of England, 1603–1605* (Woodbridge, UK: Boydell Press, 2005), 40; and Edwards, *The Succession, Bye and Main Plots of 1601–1603* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2006), 157.

> other (acts) of like nature could not be treason against his Majesty, before he were a crowned King.[9]

This final phrase is evocative—the dramatic trope of the disguised ruler, after all, relies on the fact that the trappings of power often represent kingship more recognizably than does the king himself—as well as leading: "crowned King" suggests that the crown is secondary, an adjective that the king could easily do without. Coke's tricky rhetoric belies the fact, though, that without his crown, Harry *le roi* appears to be Harry Leroi: to the average citizen, an uncrowned king is virtually unrecognizable, and so the priests' refusal to recognize James' authority before his coronation is understandable. As the rationale behind the Bye Plot demonstrates, "despite England's legal fiction of the 'king's two bodies', meaning that the office of kingship never dies, there remains, nonetheless, the need for and a belief in a moment of 'transference.'"[10]

The notion of transference stems from a simple question: how does one become king in the first place? This difficulty is evident even in the time of Deuteronomy: "Thou shalt in any wise set him king ouer thee, whom the LORD thy God shal chuse. One from among thy brethren shalt thou set king ouer thee: thou mayest not set a stranger ouer thee, which is not thy brother."[11] This king is both chosen by God and rendered a king by the people; he is both selected and elected. Percy Schramm contends that these concepts, though today seemingly opposites, overlapped in the Middle Ages to suggest that "the man who is in a special degree fitted for the office" thereby displayed his selection—and that, conversely, "by whatever means

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[9] Coke, *The Reports*, 18.

[10] Alice Hunt, *The Drama of Coronation: Medieval Ceremony in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 6.

[11] Deuteronomy 17:15, *The Holy Bible, Containing the Old Testament, and the New: Newly Translated Out of the Original Tongues* (London, 1613).

an individual made his way to the throne, it was incumbent upon him to turn his *claim* into a recognized *right*." Through the Middle Ages, this was accomplished by election, an obvious circumstance should the new ruler be from another family, but nonetheless useful even if the claimant were related to the former monarch, "if only to establish his claim as being better than that of his relatives." The Norman Conquest, Schramm argues, was responsible for England's ultimate emphasis on heredity, for "wherever feudalism gained ground—as in England after the Conquest—the conviction was strengthened that, whether his subjects liked it or not, the King inherited his domain."[12] Strengthened, but not entirely dominant, for "the earlier medieval theory that kingship was bestowed at the moment of ritual anointing, and the later medieval theory that kingship was transmitted directly to the heir on the predecessor's death" were apparently maintained simultaneously in the Tudor period: though the law "may state that the king is king from the moment of [his predecessor's] death . . . the coronation ceremony enacts something rather different."[13]

The English coronation has a long history; indeed, "no other coronation-rite in Europe reaches back to so early a period as that of the sovereigns of Britain."[14] In Anglo-Saxon culture, "the making of a new king involved some kind of enthronement, investiture with weapons or regalia . . . [and even] some kind of ancestor of the Coronation oath." In the ninth century, the

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[12] Percy Ernst Schramm, *A History of the English Coronation*, trans. Leopold G. Wickham Legg (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1937), 141–42, 156.

[13] Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 7.

[14] Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, *Historical Memorials of Westminster Abbey*, vol. 1 (New York, 1882), 49. Stanley dates the rite as beginning in 571 A.D., when Aidan mac Gabrain was crowned King of Dalriada by the Celtic saint Columba. See also Roy Strong's *Coronation: From the 8th to the 21st Century* (London: Harper Perennial, 2006), 13.

Vikings added to these traditions "an early form of throne, a stone or high seat" for the king to be enthroned upon after being elected;[15] in 1307, shortly after the Norman Conquest, "the English Church was faced with the task of creating a new Coronation order to meet new conditions arising from the fusion of two races of people." The document that detailed this revised rite, adopted for the coronation of Edward II in 1308, was known as the *Liber Regalis*.[16] Placed in the custody of the Dean of Westminster Abbey, the *Liber Regalis* was used up through the coronation of Elizabeth I; for James I, it was translated into English, and, though every coronation ceremony is different in its own way, it continues to serve as the base text of British coronations.

Under the *Liber Regalis*, the sixteenth-century coronation rite largely consists of four main parts.

1. The coronation oath is administered by the Archbishop of Canterbury. In this, the ruler is asked to swear to "keep peace entirely according to your power, both to God, the holy Church, and the people," to "cause Law, Justice, and discretion in mercy and truth to be executed," and to "hold and keep the Laws and rightfull Customes which the Commonaltie of your Kingdom have."[17] In

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[15] Strong, *Coronation*, 22.

[16] W. J. Passingham, *A History of the Coronation* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Co., 1937), 105. While the *Liber Regalis* is not the first manuscript detailing the coronation—it is, in fact, the fourth recension—it "comprises the foundations for the order of service for every Tudor coronation"—as well as the principle of the king's two bodies. See Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 20.

[17] *A Collection Out of the Book called* Liber Regalis*, Remaining in the Treasury of the Church of Westminster, Touching the Coronation of the King and Queen Together* (London, 1661), 6.

thus swearing, the monarch's power is "conditional upon being faithful to the three pledges given in the oath."[18]

2. Approaching the altar, the king is anointed by the archbishop, first his hands, then "brest, and between the shoulders, and both his shoulders, the bending of his arm to the Crown of his head."[19] This unction, "believed to convey to the sovereign a spiritual jurisdiction and inalienable sanctity,"[20] has roots in the Old Testament and in the seventh- and eighth-century "Christianisation of the barbarian kingdoms" alike. In its early usage, unction made the king "a new man, transmitting through anointing the divine grace by which alone he would be able to fulfill his royal ministerium as defender of the Church," effectively rendering kingship "an office within the Church,"[21] at least at first. Interestingly, Mary I pointedly ordered special oil for her coronation, "anxious

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[18] Strong, *Coronation*, 5. It is worth noting that, before Mary was crowned, the Lords of the Council were considering how to alter the oath "to bind the queen by an especial clause to maintain the independence of the English Church—a precaution, as it proved, not unnecessary, for the existing form was already inconvenient, and Mary was meditating how, when called on to swear to observe the laws and constitutions of the realm, she could introduce an adjective *sub silentio*; she intended to swear only that she would observe the JUST laws and constitutions." Though John Stow reports that Mary's "Coronation and other ceremonies and solemnities then vsed according to the old custome," the exact oath that Mary swore does not survive—but secondhand evidence suggests that Mary's specifications were included. See James Anthony Froude, *History of England from The Fall of Wolsey to the Death of Elizabeth*, vol. 6 (1864; repr., New York: AMS Press, 1969), 99; Stow, *The Chronicles of England, from Brute Vnto his Present Yeare of Christ, 1580* (London, 1580), 1074; and Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 128.

[19] *A Collection Out of the Book*, 8.

[20] Stanley, *Historical Memorials*, 51.

[21] Strong, *Coronation*, 11–12.

that the holy oils consecrated by Edwardian ministers 'may not be such as they ought.'" The effect was that for most witnesses, "Mary would be anointed in Edwardian terms . . . as a divinely ordered English queen independent of Rome," while for herself and a select few others, "she was being consecrated with Catholic oils and according to the authority of the pre-Reformation church."[22]

3. The king is then equipped with the royal regalia, the list of which varies wildly. The *Liber Regalis* details that the king is given spurs, a sword, an armil (or bracelet), a mantle, a crown, a ring, linen gloves, a scepter with the cross, and a rod with a dove before he is finally enthroned.[23] Edward VI was the first to be crowned with three different crowns (the crown of St. Edward, the Imperial Crown, and a personal crown made for him especially[24]), a tradition that Mary and Elizabeth followed.[25]

4. Once enthroned, "all the Peers do their homage to his Majesty, and then put their hands and touch the Crown together."[26] The homage, as 'corrected' by the Privy Council for the coronation of the young and Anglican Edward VI,

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[22] Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 129, 130.

[23] *A Collection Out of the Book*, 8–9.

[24] Strong, *Coronation,* 202.

[25] James Robinson Planché, *Regal Records: Or, a Chronicle of the Coronations of the Queens Regnant of England* (London, 1838), 44nm. Strong calls attention to the oddity of this circumstance, noting that "only the Holy Roman Emperor was crowned with three crowns," and that at three different coronations; "the only other ruler with a triple crown was, in fact, the pope." See Strong, *Coronation*, 202.

[26] *A Collection Out of the Book*, 9.

> consists of an explicit oath for "all the Peres of the realme and Busshopes." After swearing it to him, two by two, they were to kiss his cheek, join hands, and "in token of their fidelite shall with oone voice on their knees saye—'We offre to susteigne and defend you and your Crowne with our liefes, landes and goodes againste all the worlde.' And then with oone [sic] voice to crye 'God save King Edwarde,' which the people shall crye accordingly."[27]

Despite the prescriptive nature of the *Liber Regalis*, the book does not address whether the ceremony is symbolic or dynamic. Nor, if the latter, does it comment on whether the monarchy is transmitted in stages or all at once, or, if at once, exactly at what point the kingship is relocated. Coke's proposal that "by Queen Elizabeth's death the crown and kingdom of England descended to his Majesty" is thus not only an argument for a confirmatory coronation: it is also an attempt to ascertain when the authority of the monarchy is transferred.

How and when the monarchy is passed on is a topic that has been debated for centuries. Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, for instance, proposes that a king "without a coronation was regarded almost as, by strict ecclesiologists, a bishop-elect would be regarded before his consecration, or a nonconformist minister without episcopal ordination"[28]—in more contemporary laic terms, something like a new president before his inauguration. Edward C. Ratcliff argues that certain elements of the rite, "such as the Recognition by the People and the Homage of the Peers, imply that the King is at the beginning of his reign, and that he is made King in and by the Coronation Service," language that suggests that perhaps the monarchy is passed on through the various stages of the coronation—but, Ratcliff goes on, at least in medieval coronations, "the anointing

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[27] *Acts of the Privy Council of England, Volume II: 1547–1550*, ed. John Roche Dasent (London, 1890), 29, 33.

[28] Stanley, *Historical Memorials*, 51–52.

cannot be said to be more than a solemn benedictory act . . . to invoke the special blessing of God upon one who enters upon a task of peculiar difficulty."[29] Schramm specifically counters this in his assertion that "the holy oil separated the King from his subjects, made him like the priest, conjoined him with other kings, and gave him precedence over those who did not enjoy the right,"[30] and Bertie Wilkinson is even more direct in his proposal that despite the ceremony's title, the act of anointing is "at the centre of the Coronation . . . for it is this which confers upon the ruler the divine sanction for his kingship."[31] Even today, the official website of Westminster Abbey attempts to define precisely the instant of transference: when "the newly-crowned Sovereign leaves the Coronation Chair," the site explains, "the Sovereign is placed in the Throne and at that moment takes possession of the kingdom."[32]

Before the Reformation, kings had long used the coronation rite as a secular confirmation of their rule—when Richard I was released from captivity in 1194, he "was crowned again at

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[29] Edward C. Ratcliff also acknowledges that by the twentieth century, the coronation simply ratifies "an accomplished fact," but suggests that the coronation dates of "earlier English Kings" demonstrate the king-making power of the service. See *The English Coronation Service, Being the Coronation Service of King George V and Queen Mary* (London: Skeffington and Son, 1937), 28, 33.

[30] Schramm, *History of the English Coronation*, 115.

[31] Bertie Wilkinson, *The Coronation in History* (London: George Philip and Son, 1953), 9. In passing, Passingham similarly states that "after the Coronation Oath was made, and prayers were said, there came the sacramental rite which changes one of the people into a King"—the anointing. This is specifically in reference to the coronation of Harold II in 1066, however, and Passingham does not address whether unction remains the moment of king-making in more recent centuries. See Passingham, *A History of the Coronation*, 96.

[32] Westminster Abbey, "Guide to the Coronation Service," accessed February 13, 2014, http://www.westminster-abbey.org/our-history/royals/coronations/guide-to-the-coronation-service.

Winchester, as if to reassure his subjects"[33]—but the coronation, both a "ritual in which the heir was anointed with holy oil and transformed into the king, and a constitutional and legal act in which the monarch swore a solemn and binding oath to Church and country," was "in a strange position vis-à-vis the Reformation."[34] When Thomas Cranmer, Archbishop of Canterbury, crowned Edward VI in 1547, Cranmer's sermon explicitly addressed the function of the ritual:

> The solemn Rites of Coronation have their Ends and Utility; yet neither direct Force or Necessity: They be good Admonitions to put Kings in mind of their Duty to God, but no encreasement of their Dignity: For they be God's Anointed; but not in respect of the Oil which the Bishop useth, but in consideration of their Power, which is Ordained; Of the Sword, which is Authorized; Of their Persons, which are elected of God, and endued with the Gifts of his Spirit, for the better ruling and guiding of his People.
>
> The Oil, if added, is but a Ceremony: If it be wanting, that King is yet a perfect Monarch notwithstanding, and God's Anointed, as well as if he was inoiled. Now for the Person or Bishop that doth anoint a King, it is proper to be done by the chiefest. But if they cannot, or will not, any Bishop may perform this Ceremony.[35]

Though ostensibly "incontrovertible proof of the evacuation of the purpose of the coronation, an empty justification for a ceremony," Cranmer's sermon actually transforms the rite, Alice Hunt argues, "into a representation of history, rather than a maker of history."[36]

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[33] Stanley, *Historical Memorials*, 67.

[34] Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 3. Hunt concisely gathers several critics (namely Stephen Greenblatt, Richard McCoy, David Starkey, Paul Kléber Monod, and Helen Hackett) who explore exactly how the Reformation affected Catholic rituals, among them the coronation.

[35] John Strype, *Memorials of the Most Reverend Father in God, Thomas Cranmer* (London, 1694), 144–45.

[36] Hunt, *Drama of Coronation*, 86, 87.

On the stage, however, the representation does make history, for theatrical crowns can both represent and help to create the monarchy. The relationship of crowns to kingship—of the crown to the Crown[37]— is examined in plays by Christopher Marlowe and William Shakespeare alike, the former throughout his oeuvre, the latter in English history plays especially. Neither playwright depicts a contemporary, full coronation rite, the length of which would fill, if not exceed, the length of a play,[38] but their plays nonetheless feature moments wherein monarchy is transferred, and therein explore the question of exactly when and how kingship is passed from one person to another. On the stage, kingship resides in the self as Cranmer remonstrates, but only partly. Significantly, whereas the actual English coronation is largely treated categorically—the coronation either bestows the right to rule, or is reduced to a symbolic level—and always involves a host of objects and several rituals, the histories of Marlowe and Shakespeare essentially eradicate the rituals of coronation, appropriating and investing their cultural resonance into a single prop that both confirms and confers kingship. In Marlowe's *Tamburlaine 1* and *Edward II* as well as Shakespeare's *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *2 Henry IV*, the Crown comprises both crown and king. Crowns alone do not invest power, but neither, as a

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[37] The crown is both related to and different than the Crown; while the first is a cincture worn "as a mark or symbol of sovereignty," the latter is "the monarch in his official character" as well as "the sovereignty, authority, or dominion of which the crown is the symbol." Ernst H. Kantorowicz points out that in twelfth-century France, the "'Crown . . . was something different from king and realm although not separated from either; and it was something that king and realm had in common although it was not quite identical with either." See *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "crown, *n*."; and Kantorowicz, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Mediaeval Political Theology* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 341.

[38] Hunt's *Drama of Coronation* explores accession plays such as Wynkyn de Worde's *The Noble Tryumphaunt Coronacyon of Quene Anne*, John Bale's *King Johan*, and Nicholas Udall's *Respublica*—a focus that necessarily occludes extensive consideration of later, more canonical playwrights.

popular strain of New Historicism has argued, are they mere "visual and verbal symbols of authority."[39] These crowns both represent and participate in kingship, and so are dynamic actants in several Renaissance history plays.

FRUITIONS AND FOOTSTOOLS: KINGSHIP IN MARLOWE

Philip Edwards asserts that Marlowe was "the first man to make full dramatic use of the image of kingship," that crowns act "as a physical symbol" in *Tamburlaine 1* (hereafter simply *Tamburlaine*), and that this prop is "a figurative way of talking about the richness of kingship."[40] While crowns can serve metonymically, to set aside their physicality and see them exclusively as symbols is problematic: while *Tamburlaine* acknowledges the theory that kingship may be inherent in the body (that one becomes king, as Coke argues, through lineage alone), the play demonstrates that the physical crown is also a requisite element of kingship.

In *Tamburlaine* (ca. 1587), crowns seem to carry obvious significance as prized symbols of conquered peoples: "Then fight courageously, their crowns are yours," Tamburlaine promises his followers Techelles, Usumcasane, and Theridamas, "Fight all courageously, and be you

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[39] In his critique of Greenblatt's subversion-and-containment theory, David Scott Kastan argues that history plays simply subvert the monarchical power structure, that they "weakened the structure of authority" on the road to the judgement and execution of Charles I. Shakespeare's histories, Kastan continues, "reveal that the pageantry and props of rule are largely factitious, that their value is strategic rather than sacramental." See *Shakespeare After Theory* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 111, 121.

[40] Philip Edwards, *Threshold of a Nation: A Study in English and Irish Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 54, 56, 57.

kings!"[41] Tamburlaine's explicit message here is that mere possession of the crown renders one a king. This seems to be absurd at first glance, and an argument could be made that the shepherd is simply collapsing circumstances: defeating a nation's army supplies the right to rule that nation, and ruling a nation supplies the right to wear the crown. Notably, however, Tamburlaine and his followers do not display an interest in governance: they wish to become kings, but have little interest in what goes into that position. Their aspirations, therefore, are concentrated in the moment of power transfer—and that moment, Tamburlaine presumes, absolutely requires the crown. Assuming that the crowns won or lost in battle are markers of authority and signs of nations, that crowns are metonymic, is understandable, but this overreaches the play's dialogue: Tamburlaine assumes that possessing the crown makes one king, and this supposition deserves to be taken literally, especially as it is hardly the only instance of *Tamburlaine*'s exploration of the crown's relationship to kingship.

Similar emphasis on the crown's physicality is shown by Mycetes, the ineffectual king of Persia. Mycetes' brother Cosroe has temporarily allied himself with Tamburlaine, and as Cosroe's forces overpower Mycetes' army, "*Mycetes comes out alone with his crown in his hand, offering to hide it*" (2.4.0 s.d.). Even if captured, he declares, "So shall not I be known, or if I be, / They cannot take away my crown from me" (2.4.13–14). On the surface, this is at best a spiteful thought: Mycetes seems comforted by keeping his possession out of the enemy's hands. In the early modern theater, though, his theory makes some sense: if crowns help to make up kingship, then by hiding his crown, Mycetes both preserves his rule and prevents the shepherd

[41] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Great, Part I* in *Tamburlaine, Parts I and II; Doctor Faustus, A- and B-Texts; The Jew of Malta; and Edward II*, ed. David Bevington and Eric Rasmussen, Oxford Drama Library series (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 3.3.30, 101. All references to Marlowe's plays hereafter will refer to this volume and will be cited parenthetically.

from becoming a recognized king, for at least Tamburlaine will not be able to usurp the props of rule.

Mycetes goes on to declare that this crown has made him a target in battle, "For kings are clouts that every man shoots at, / Our crown the pin that thousands seek to cleave" (2.4.8–9). Though Mycetes' assertion seems to render his crown symbolic—it represents his kingship, and marks him as different from the rest of his army—he uses the language of archery to indicate a closer relationship between himself and the object. In the sport, "to cleave the pin is to aim the arrow so deftly that it hits the pin which holds in place the cloth (or clout) at the centre of the target."[42] The crown, in this analogy, is at the center of Mycetes' kingship; the crown holds the kingship to him, and so by hiding it, he diversifies the kingship's locus. This recognition of the crown as a critical part of rule is emphasized when Mycetes buries the crown, only for his opponent to find it:

> TAMBURLAINE Is this your crown?
>
> MYCETES Ay. Didst thou ever see a fairer?
>
> TAMBURLAINE You will not sell it, will ye?
>
> MYCETES Such another word, and I will have thee executed. Come, give it me.
>
> TAMBURLAINE No. I took it prisoner.
>
> MYCETES You lie. I gave it you.
>
> TAMBURLAINE Then 'tis mine.
>
> MYCETES No, I mean I let you keep it.

[42] Ronald Huebert, ed., of James Shirley's *The Lady of Pleasure*, Revels Plays (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 124n161.

TAMBURLAINE Well, I mean you shall have it again.
Here, take it for a while. I lend it thee
Till I may see thee hemmed with arméd men.
Then shalt thou see me pull it from thy head.
(2.4.26–38)

Though comic, this exchange reflects the variegated aspects of the crown. When Tamburlaine discovers it, he considers it first as a thing that intrinsically must be possessed: though the crown is obviously not in Mycetes' hands, nor on his head, the shepherd attempts to connect the object with its owner, as if the very nature of a crown is to belong. Mycetes' reply—"Didst thou ever see a fairer?"—conflates the crown's symbolic value with its visual beauty, but Tamburlaine provokingly casts aside the symbolic resonance and suggests that the crown is a marketable commodity: "You will not sell it, will ye?" The exchange waltzes dizzyingly through several iterations of the crown's character: it is subject (Tamburlaine's "prisoner), object ("I gave it you"), and simultaneously both, in the guise of ward and loan ("I let you keep it").

Mycetes' brother similarly, if less spectacularly, demonstrates the importance of possession. In the play's opening scene, Cosroe reveals that there is a plot afoot "To crown me emperor of Asia," and soon enough, Cosroe's second-in-command announces "Ortyrgius and the rest, / Bringing the crown to make you emperor" (1.1.112, 134–35). There is no mention of assassinating Mycetes; Cosroe's men seem to believe that simply crowning him will make him the ruler. Placing "th' imperial diadem" upon Cosroe (1.1.139), Ortygius declares that "We here do crown thee monarch of the East, / Emperor of Asia and of Persia" (1.1.161–62). This action has a very real power for these characters: the conspirators end the scene by crying "God save the king!" (1.1.188), an obvious allusion to the conclusion of English coronation rites as detailed

in the *Liber Regalis*,[43] as well as a verbal homage, a recognition that the coronation has transformed Cosroe into the emperor. If committing regicide is considered superfluous, then the very existence of such an agreement among the cabal would seem to be all that is necessary for a coup—but Cosroe, Ortyrgius, and the rest all subscribe to the notion that Cosroe simply is not the ruler without a crown being used "to make you emperor" (1.1.135).

Just after Tamburlaine lets Mycetes keep his crown, the next scene begins and the crown—supposedly the source of Mycetes' power—is taken from him. Having won the battle, Tamburlaine asks that Cosroe now "wear two imperial crowns" (the one he was given at the end of 1.1 and the crown just taken from Mycetes), and think himself "invested now as royally, / Even by the mighty hand of Tamburlaine" as if he had been crowned by as many kings as might surround him (2.5.1–3). Tamburlaine's language here is ambiguous: it is unclear whether possessing Mycetes' crown or being crowned "by the mighty hand of Tamburlaine" is what makes Cosroe the new king of Persia. This circumstance is analogous to the role of the bishopric in pre-Reformation English coronation rites: in anointing the king, the Church, which "established a ruler as being sacred and set apart from ordinary mortals, simultaneously demonstrated that that could only be done thanks to their access to supernatural forces." The

[43] The fact that this crown is referred to as an "imperial diadem" is also noteworthy. The 1533 Act of Appeals, passed only a month before the coronation of Anne Boleyn, changed Henry VIII's "jurisdiction from 'royal' to 'imperial,'" articulating the notion that "in his own realm, the empire that was England, the king functioned as an emperor." Strictly speaking, a "crown" refers to a cincture that is open at its top; "imperial" crowns or diadems are arched and closed at their top. Wearing an imperial crown was established in the reign of Henry V, but its symbolism was taken on and altered by successive kings, Henry VIII using imperial kingship to "establish his judicial supremacy in the Church of England." See Dale Hoak, "The Iconography of the Crown Imperial," in *Tudor Political Culture*, ed. Dale Hoak (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 57, 89.

relationship between religion and monarch of course has a long history—bestowing unction during the coronation had effectively created "beings akin to priest-kings" in the medieval period, a circumstance that led the eleventh-century Catholic Church to eliminate royal unction from the sacraments in an attempt to "downgrade the very idea of a priest-king"—but the creation of the Church of England was "a return to theocratic kingship, as Henry VIII was both king and pope within his own realm."[44] The difference between making and marking Cosroe as king, however, is less clear. Tamburlaine is hardly a religious figure, and so receiving the crown from Tamburlaine's hand might seem to destabilize the king's authority; indeed, in his reply to Tamburlaine's blessing, Cosroe calls the shepherd a "thrice-renownèd man of arms," a phrase that, though commendatory, is nonetheless a reminder of Tamburlaine's lesser social class (2.5.6). The new king is understandably determined to emphasize that, though nominally honored to be crowned by Tamburlaine, Cosroe does not derive his rule from the shepherd's hand.

If *Tamburlaine* demonstrates that deriving authority solely from the crown itself is misguided—both crown and kingly body are necessary—it also depicts that it is a mistake for an onstage king to believe that kingship resides in his corporeal body regardless of royal trappings. This is clearly seen in the depiction of Bajazeth, the Turkish emperor who has been defeated and imprisoned by the Scythian shepherd. Tamburlaine abuses Bajazeth's "state, / Keeping his kingly body in a cage," as Bajazeth's wife Zabina characterizes the situation (4.2.60–61), and the Sultan of Egypt later complains that Tamburlaine has "wrought such ignominious wrong / Unto the hallowed person of a prince" (4.3.39–40). Kings remains kings, even when defeated and stripped of crowns and lands alike, Zabina and the Sultan avow—but Marlowe's Tamburlaine is an early

[44] Strong, *Coronation*, 12, 46, 186.

modern realpolitiker, hauling the caged Bajazeth about and forcing the deposed emperor to "be the footstool of great Tamburlaine, / That I may rise into my royal throne" (4.2.14–15).[45] There is nothing special, Tamburlaine demonstrates, in the bodies of kings; indeed, Tamburlaine reminds his footstool that "Thy names and titles and thy dignities / Are fled from Bajazeth and remain with me, / That will maintain it 'gainst a world of kings" (4.2.79–81)—language that is strikingly similar to Tamburlaine's earlier vaunt:

> Though Mars himself, the angry of arms,
> And all the early potentates conspire
> To dispossess me of this diadem,
> Yet will I wear it in despite of them
> As great commander of this eastern world.
>
> (2.7.59–62)

Having a body somehow deemed to be kingly is only one required element of kingship, *Tamburlaine* shows: the crown is a requisite actant as well.

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[45] This may well be a parody of the intensely specialized royal positions that surrounded the monarch for centuries. Mark Twain parodies this, writing that when Tom Canty switched places with young Prince Edward VI, simply dressing was an affair: "a shirt was taken up by the Chief Equerry in Waiting, who passed it to the First Lord of the Buckhounds, who passed it to the Second Gentleman of the Bedchamber, who passed it to the Head Ranger of Windsor Forest," and on through ten more before Canty is actually dressed—but Twain is not far from the mark. By 1377, when Richard II was crowned, there were disputes not only over "the more dignified rights—to carry the swords, the spurs, and the canopy," but even over the lesser positions: "those of handing water for the King to wash his hands, of holding the towel, of offering a cup, and of providing gloves." Arguments over hereditary claims to these positions actually forced John of Gaunt to sit "in Whitehall to hear petitions and decide on them" as Steward of England before Richard's coronation. See Twain, *The Prince and the Pauper* (New York, 1892), 114; and Schramm, *History of the English Coronation*, 86.

Unsurprisingly, Tamburlaine himself successfully fulfills these requirements, though the role that his body plays may be an unconscious one. It falls to Cosroe's companion Menaphon to recognize that the shepherd's physical appearance speaks to his right to rule: Tamburlaine's eyes are "A heaven of heavenly body in their spheres / That guides his steps and actions to the throne / Where honor sits invested royally," his complexion is "thirsting with sovereignty," and even his hair stirs "with wanton majesty" (2.1.16–18, 20, 26). Tamburlaine's body is invested with kingliness, regardless of ceremony. Cosroe replies that "Well his merits show him to be made / His fortune's master and the king of men," and so underscores that Tamburlaine's merits are derived from his composition (2.1.35–36). The shepherd's deeds alone do not make him a king, in other words; Tamburlaine's actions reveal that he has already been "made" a king of men, that his corporeal self is already kingly.

Tamburlaine, though, is intent on winning a physical crown. The shepherd portrays his ambition as the result of Nature's urge to persist "Until we reach the ripest fruit of all, / That perfect bliss and sole felicity, / The sweet fruition of an earthly crown" (2.7.27–29). This wording is important, for though Tamburlaine professes to pursue "the thirst of reign and sweetness of a crown," he is blatantly indifferent to the pragmatics of reigning (2.7.12). Kingship exists for Tamburlaine not in treaties or politics, but in the crown itself: "fruition" signifies, after all, "enjoyment, pleasurable possession, the pleasure arising from possession."[46] The crown in Tamburlaine's eyes is not just a symbol of rule, but a maker of kingship: though he defeats Cosroe's Persian army, it is not until Tamburlaine "*takes the crown and puts it on*" that he asks "Theridamas, Techelles, and the rest, / Who think you now is king of Persia?" (2.7.52 s.d., 55–56). This attitude is seen again when Tamburlaine's forces war with Bajazeth's, each leader

[46] *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. "fruition, *n*."

asking his female companion to hold his crown in the meanwhile. After Tamburlaine has prevailed against Bajazeth, the two kings rejoin their respective romantic partners, Zenocrate and Zabina. "Now let me offer to my gracious lord / His royal crown again," Zenocrate proffers when Tamburlaine returns, but he rebuffs her: "Nay, take the Turkish crown from her, Zenocrate, / And crown me emperor of Africa" (3.3.218–21). Martial victory alone does not confer kingship; for Tamburlaine, the crown is also necessary. Zenocrate has no social power in this environ and does not speak through the rest of the scene, and so it seems clear that, unlike Tamburlaine's crowning of Cosroe, it is the crown itself, rather than the crowner, that makes Tamburlaine the emperor of Africa. Indeed, as Bajazeth's crown is taken from his wife, Zabina complains "Injurious villains, thieves, runagates! / How dare you thus abuse my majesty?" (3.3.225–26); presumably handing the crown to Zenocrate, Theridamas assures her that "Here, madam, you are empress, she is none" (3.3.227). Zabina's "majesty" may refer to Bajazeth himself, but Theridamas' reply seems to indicate that the crown itself reifies majesty. This ambiguity underscores the model of theatrical kingship that *Tamburlaine* demonstrates: kingship exists in the network of the king's corporeal body and the crown.

The significance of the crown is perhaps most succinctly displayed in Marlowe's *Edward II* (ca. 1592). Pressured by Sir William Trussell, the Earl of Leicester, and the Bishop of Winchester to resign his crown in favor of Edward III—so that Mortimer may rule—the titular Edward wavers throughout the first scene of act five.[47] Pressed by Leicester, Edward asks him to

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[47] Pressure was also put on the historical Edward II to see himself as distinct from the Crown. In the Declaration of 1308, the Earls of Pembroke and Lincoln and the Bishops of Durham and Norwich attempted to separate the body politic from the king's corporeal body in an effort to force Edward "to undertake reforms of his own free will"—reforms largely related to Gaveston, it seems. This declaration argues that "Homage and the Oath of Allegiance is more by reason of the Crown, than by reason of the Person of the King, and it bindeth itself more unto the Crown

"weigh how hardly I can brook / To lose my crown and kingdom without cause" before seeming to give in: "Here, take my crown, the life of Edward too! / Two kings in England cannot reign at once" (5.1.51–52, 57–58). Even without his crown, he declares, he would still be king as long as he were left alive; the crown is simply "the latest honour due to" his person (5.1.62). Kingship, Edward heavily implies, resides in his corporeal person—at least until Winchester and Trussell give up and must be called back to accept his resignation, lest Edward III lose the crown as well. Grudgingly, the king thereupon replies:

> Here, receive my crown.
>
> Receive it? No, these innocent hands of mine
>
> Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime.
>
> He of you all that most desires my blood,
>
> And will be called the murderer of a king,
>
> Take it.
>
> (5.1.97–102)

Despite his earlier avowal that he is king no matter what, Edward takes the opposite side here in suggesting that kingship is inextricable from his crown, that taking the crown from him would be tantamount to regicide. He both conflates and entwines the king's two bodies: his body natural, he argues, is inextricably linked to the body politic, and so transferring the latter to another

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than unto the Person"—but Roy Martin Haines points out that the document may have been "an attempt to stave off criticism" of the new king, considering that "the personnel involved could be said to be favourably disposed" towards Edward. See J. R. S. Phillips, *Aymer de Valence: Earl of Pembroke, 1307–1324: Baronial Politics in the Reign of Edward II* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 26; *The Statutes of the Realm, Vol. 1: 1101–1377* (London, 1810), 1:182; and Haines, *King Edward II: His Life, His Reign, and Its Aftermath, 1284–1330* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 56.

person would slay his corporeal body. Much like Mycetes' pin that others sought to cleave, the crown acts as a linchpin in this formulation—the crown is the locus of his kingship. Forced to resign the crown shortly thereafter, Edward prays:

> Now, sweet God of heaven,
> Make me despise this transitory pomp
> And sit for aye enthronizèd in heaven!
> Come, Death, and with thy fingers close my eyes,
> Or if I live, let me forget myself.
>
> (5.1.107–11)

In asking God to make him abhor ephemeral "pomp," Edward reveals the importance of the crown to his conception of kingship; he seems to align himself with Cosroe and Mycetes in viewing the object as the source of his authority. His plea that he might die, or "forget myself" if he survives is a plea that discounts the role of the king's body in kingship. Though Edward's physical body is still the one he had before giving up the crown, he argues that in surrendering the crown, he is divested entirely of kingship.

Despite this, Edward is still recognized to be the king by several characters after resigning the crown: "the king must die, or Mortimer goes down," Mortimer himself declares (5.4.1), and the would-be murderer Lightborn proclaims that "These hands were never stained with innocent blood, / Nor shall they now be tainted with a king's" (5.5.81–82). Perhaps most importantly, even after the surrender of the crown, Edward's son is continually referred to as "the prince" until Edward II is killed; only then does Edward III become "the king" (5.6.15, 17). Nonetheless, despite the evidence that others still consider him to be the monarch—Lightborn has told Edward directly that he considers the deposed king to have retained his position, and

critics agree that the deposed Edward is more kingly than before[48]—Edward still insists on the importance of the crown. Just before he is murdered, Edward protests that "I am a king," but "O, at that name / I feel a hell of grief. Where is my crown? / Gone, gone, and do I remain alive?" (5.5.89–91). Even at the moment of his death, Edward II cannot reconcile the loss of his crown with his continued survival.

Irving Ribner argues that, "since he rejects the providential scheme of the universe which is so basic an element in the orthodox Elizabethan world picture, it follows almost inevitably that Marlowe should reject the notion that kings receive their authority from God. For Marlowe kingship is attained by human merit."[49] *Tamburlaine* and *Edward II* are much more complicated than this, however, for they both recognize the crown to be an actant in kingship. Though possession of the crown alone does not wholly bestow authority, neither does the body alone: Bajazeth's kingly corporeality is reduced to that of a footstool, and Tamburlaine's supporters are well aware that "A god is not so glorious as a king," for gods do not have the pleasurable opportunity "To wear a crown enchased with pearl and gold, / Whose virtues carry with it life and death; / To ask, and have; command, and be obeyed" (2.5.57, 60–62). The straightforward relationship between crown and body in *Tamburlaine* is teased out and broken down in *Edward II*, a play in which everyone believes that kingship resides in the body of the king—everyone but the king himself. In separating crown from body, Marlowe demonstrates the relationship between the actants of kingship to be both fragile and immensely powerful in their composition of monarchy.

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[48] Robert A. Logan, for instance, argues that "it is not until Edward's abdication that he gains in sustained stature and respect." See *Shakespeare's Marlowe: The Influence of Christopher Marlowe on Shakespeare's Artistry* (Aldershot, Hampshire, England: Ashgate, 2007), 92.

[49] Irving Ribner, *The English History Play in the Age of Shakespeare* (1957; rev. ed. London: Methuen, 1965), 62.

Charles R. Forker argues that while there are signs of a "Shakespeare-Marlowe symbiosis" in their early chronicle plays (*Henry VI*, *Richard III*, *Edward II*, and *Richard II*), Marlowe "seems to have been more concerned with individuals than with institutions—more interested in the uniqueness of Edward II as a man than in the cultural symbolism of the crown he is compelled to forfeit."[50] Though Marlowe does seem more concerned with individuals early in his career—Tamburlaine and Faustus stand out as examples here—*Edward II* is greatly concerned with the institution of kingship in material ways. A similar development, I argue, is evident in Shakespeare's histories. Though *Edward II* is roughly contemporary with *Richard III* (ca. 1592), Shakespeare's English histories begin with a *Tamburlaine*-like insistence on the crown being all or nothing, and it is not until the end of the Henriad that a more complex consideration of kingship's actants is evident.

The spectacular pageant that Richard stage-manages in 3.7 of *Richard III*, wherein the monarchy is thrust upon an ostensibly reluctant and religious Duke of Gloucester, has been examined so often and fully in the light of visual staging and metatheater that the oddity of this transfer has been lost.[51] Buckingham's dialogue, though, is decidedly strange: having finally forced Gloucester into accepting the throne, Buckingham declares, "I salute you with this royal

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[50] Charles R. Forker, "Marlowe's *Edward II* and its Shakespearean Relatives: The Emergence of a Genre," in *Shakespeare's English Histories: A Quest for Form and Genre*, ed. John W. Velz (Tempe, Arizona: Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1997), 90, 89.

[51] See, for instance, Elizabeth Williamson, *The Materiality of Religion in Early Modern English Drama* (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2009), 160–63; and Jean E. Howard and Phyllis Rackin's *Engendering a Nation: A Feminist Account of Shakespeare's English Histories* (London: Routledge, 1997), 111–12.

title: / Long live kind Richard, England's worthy king!," but then immediately asks if "Tomorrow may it please you to be crowned?" (3.7.229–30, 232). Though Richard is recognized as the new king, a coronation is still required, a circumstance reminiscent of Cosroe's coup. Even after Richard has been enthroned offstage, though (whereupon the script begins to mark his part as "King Richard" instead of "Richard Gloucester"), he still complains to Buckingham that "I say I would be king." Assured that he is, Richard replies, "Ha? Am I king? 'Tis so. But Edward lives" (4.2.14–15). While Buckingham recognizes the kingship being attached to both Richard's body and the crown—he tentatively recognizes Richard as king prior to the coronation and definitively so afterwards—Richard insists that the monarchy resides in Edward's body natural, and that once invested therein, it resides there until death.

In the end, Richard is slain at Bosworth Field, and the play ends with Henry, Earl of Richmond, declaring victory. Lord Stanley enters this final scene bearing a crown to declare:

> Courageous Richmond, well hast thou acquit thee.
>
> Lo, here this long usurpèd royalty
>
> From the dead temples of this bloody wretch
>
> Have I plucked off, to grace thy brows withal.
>
> Wear it, enjoy it, and make much of it.
>
> (5.8.4–7)

According to Lord Stanley, England's historical crown is not merely a symbol of kingship: the *OED* gives the first instance of "royalty" meaning "emblems or insignia of sovereignty" in 1607,[52] well after *Richard III*'s composition. For Stanley, the crown is the monarchy itself, and Richard's possession of it effectively enabled his usurpation of its majesty. The play's script also

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[52] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "royalty, *n*."

recognizes the importance of the crown here. Though the scene opens with the entrance of "Henry Earl of Richmond," as soon as Stanley gives the crown to Henry, the script begins referring to him as "King Henry VII." The death of Richard III did not make Richmond king: he is elevated by his possession of the crown.

If *Richard III* echoes *Tamburlaine*, we might productively see *Edward II* as a precursor of Shakespeare's *Richard II* (ca. 1595), especially when Richard is forced to resign his "state and crown" to Henry Bolingbroke.[53] Though giving up the crown and, theoretically, its attendant concerns, Richard explains that "The cares I give I have, though given away; / They 'tend the crown, yet still with me they stay" (4.1.198–99). Seemingly frustrated, Bolingbroke forces the issue to ask, "Are you contented to resign the crown?" (4.1.190). Richard replies:

> Ay, no; no, ay; for I must nothing be;
> Therefore no, no, for I resign to thee.
> Now mark me how I will undo myself.
> I give this heavy weight from off my head
>
> (4.1.191–94)

This reply is noteworthy, though it begins with a simple pun on "ay" and "I": if he must be nothing, then "ay" is "no," and so in saying "no, no," Richard is content to resign his selfhood. In giving up the crown, he consents "T'undeck the pompous body of a king, / Made glory base and sovereignty a slave, / Proud majesty a subject, state a peasant" (4.1.240–42). The kingship, Richard argues, is not in his body—it exists in the crown and royal trappings whence he has been

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[53] William Shakespeare, *Richard II* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), 4.1.170. All references to Shakespeare's works hereafter refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

undecked. Without the kingship, Richard argues much like Marlowe's Edward II that he will become nothing and his corporeal body will cease to exist. Whereas Edward dares his enemies to "take" his crown, however (and, in doing so, to commit regicide), Richard explicitly deposes himself: "Now mark me how I will undo myself," he announces (4.1.193), and in this he does Bolingbroke two favors. First, despite protesting being "deposed," of the ten instances of the word in the play, Richard utters half of them, thus figuring "the play's action as something happening to him, rather than something happening to, or being done by" Bolingbroke.[54] Shakespeare's character agrees to renounce his power himself, thereby keeping intact the power of the monarchy, much like the historical Richard II who, in the words of Holinshed's *Chronicles*, was advised to "willinglie to suffer himselfe to be deposed, and so resigne his right of his owne accord," and even read his renunciation aloud himself "for the more suertie of the matter, and for that the said resignation should have his full force and strength," though he "might sufficientlie haue declared his renouncement by the reading of another meane person."[55]

The second favor that Shakespeare's Richard does is to continue to subscribe to the notion that kingship is tied up in the ceremony of coronation:

> With mine own tears I wash away my balm,
> With mine own hands I give away my crown,
> With mine own tongue deny my sacred state,
> With mine own breath release all duteous oaths.
>
> (4.1.197–200)

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[54] Emma Smith, "*Richard II*'s Yorkist Editors," *Shakespeare Survey* 63 (2010): 42.

[55] Raphaell Holinshed, *The Third Volume of Chronicles, Beginning at Duke William the Norman, Commonlie Called the Conqueror* (1586), 503, 504.

In this, Richard attempts to nullify the coronation rite: his unction and consequent holiness, his reception of the crown and regalia, and his coronation oath are each in turn renounced. These lines have been argued to "inscribe a kind of absolutism within kingly discourse": in the very act of being deposed, "the scene recognises the king's exclusive right to depose himself."[56] Indeed, Richard presumes that this verbal renunciation is sufficient to rid himself of his divine right: "when I was a king my flatterers / Were then but subjects," he answers when Bolingbroke calls him fair, but "being now a subject, / I have a king here to my flatterer" (4.1.296–98). In this single sentence, Richard affirms both that his kingship is gone—"I was a king"—and that he believes it has been successfully passed to Bolingbroke.

Whether that transfer of power is truly successful, however, is doubtful—a point of contention throughout the Henriad. Emma Smith suggests that the transition from Richard to Henry is "a process, rather than an event,"[57] and this helps to explain why, unlike Marlowe's Edward, Richard has no trouble conceiving of himself as a king when he is murdered, protesting to Exton that "thy fierce hand / Hath with the King's blood stained the King's own land" (5.5.109–10). Richard II may not have a crown when he dies, but he instinctively conceives of his body as a vessel of royal blood, and of England as his own. Both before and after giving up the crown, Richard seems to imagine that his corporeal body is inextricably a part of the kingship: his declaration to "mark me how I will undo myself" suggests as much; his lamentation that when he remembers that he was once king, he will "by and by / Think that I am unkinged by

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[56] Martin Coyle, "Reading *Richard II*," in *William Shakespeare: Richard II*, ed. Martin Coyle, Columbia Critical Guides (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 17.

[57] Smith, "*Richard II*'s Yorkist Editors," 43.

Bolingbroke, / And straight am nothing" supports it further (5.5.36–38); and yet this sentiment is obviously belied by his continued physical existence as well as his final protestations.

The question of where the Crown resides when the body politic is ostensibly passed onwards without the death of the king's body natural is also taken up Richard's wife, the queen. "Thou King Richard's tomb, / And not King Richard!," she laments when she sees him being escorted to the Tower (5.1.12–13), epitomizing the dilemma: is Richard's body an empty shell of kingship, or is it the final resting place of the true monarch? Both, Richard indicates as he scolds Northumberland:

> Doubly divorced! Bad men, you violate
> A twofold marriage: 'twixt my crown and me,
> And then betwixt me and my married wife.
> [*To the* QUEEN] Let me unkiss the oath 'twixt thee and me—
> And yet not so, for with a kiss 'twas made.
>
> (5.1.71–75)

Though Richard acknowledges that, with the queen being sent away to France and his own incipient imprisonment, they are effectively divorced, he questions whether this can theoretically be so. "Let me unkiss" the marriage vow, "and yet not so" is strikingly ambiguous: the "not so" could simply be a refusal to kiss his wife, to undo their marriage with the same action with which it began.[58] It could also, however, refer to the very idea that kissing her would "unkiss the oath"

[58] The meaning of the word "unkiss" is unclear: the *OED* simply acknowledges it as a prefixed variant. I suspect that it refers to the withdrawal of the lips from a kiss-in-progress, but of course, this does not negate the kiss itself. The *OED* indicates that the first usage of the word was in Arthur Brooke's *Romeus and Juliet* in 1562—when Juliet kneels over Romeo in the Capulet tomb, Brooke tells us that "A thousand times she kissed his mouth, as cold as stone, / And it unkissed again as oft"—while the second usage is in *Richard II* as above. See *OED*, 1st ed., s.v.

between them: one cannot undo an action simply by reversing it, Richard reasons. The same logic might well be applied to the crown itself. In the play's last mention of a crown, Richard compares his relationship with it to a marriage which is being violated; he is "doubly divorced," he complains. While he might be separated from the crown, its comparison to his wife here suggests that perhaps surrendering the crown does not actually "undo the oath." Though physically divorced from his wife, Richard is still married to her; likewise, though uncrowned, Richard implies, his kingship is not wiped away.

What Richard II struggles to grasp is that his kingship is formed by both his crown and his body. In giving up the crown and attempting to undo the coronation rite, he seems certain that he has and is nothing, that he undoes himself: the crown is the monarchy, as far as he knows. His continued existence seems to baffle him—"Was this face the face / That every day under his household roof / Did keep ten thousand men?" he asks, unable to reconcile his unchanged physicality with his altered state (4.1.271–73)—and yet he demonstrates even to the point of his death that he is both king and unkinged. Without the crown, Richard exists in the same liminal space as Edward II: deposed and yet recognized as the monarch, a space in which the relationship between body and crown is all the more visible for being broken.

This space, and the role of the crown in it, is explored at length in *2 Henry IV* (ca. 1598). In perhaps the most famous example of crowns in Shakespeare, a sleepless King Henry laments that sleep visits "the vile / In loathsome beds, and leav'st the kingly couch / A watch-case" (3.1.15–17). His subjects might as well enjoy their slumber, Henry concludes, for "Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown" (3.1.31). It is his position as king that keeps Henry up at night; any

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"unkiss, *v.*"; and Brooke's *"Romeus and Juliet" Being the Original of Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet,"* ed. J. J. Munro (New York and London: Duffield and Windus, 1908), ll. 2731–32.

ruler would be similarly worried, Henry declares, designating the crown to be a symbolic object that marks kingship and its attendant responsibilities: "a crown," not "the crown." Henry's ease is granted in the next act, when he falls ill and asks his sons to put him to bed, to call for soft music, and to "set me the crown upon my pillow here" (4.3.137).[59] Prince Hal then enters the room to find a sleeping King Henry, and decides to wait by his father—though he does find the crown's presence curious:

> Why doth the crown lie there upon his pillow,
> Being so troublesome a bedfellow?
> O polished perturbation, golden care,
> That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide
> To many a watchful night! —Sleep with it now;
> Yet not so sound, and half so deeply sweet,
> As he whose brow with homely biggen bound
> Snores out the watch of night. O majesty,
> When thou dost pinch thy bearer, thou dost sit
> Like a rich armour worn in heat of day,
> That scald'st with safety. —By his gates of breath
> There lies a downy feather which stirs not.
> Did he suspire, that light and weightless down

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[59] Stephen Dickey points out that "it was routine for the crown, when not on the monarch's head, to rest upon a 'state cushion' of some kind," and suggests that, of the 35 cushions ordered for Richard III's coronation, "some of these would have been used, perhaps, for the regalia," but I am unable to find a specific reference to a Tudor crown being presented to the monarch on a pillow during the coronation ceremony. See Dickey, "The Crown and the Pillow: Royal Properties in *Henry IV*," *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007): 105, 112.

> Perforce must move. —My gracious lord, my father! —
>
> This sleep is sound indeed. This is a sleep
>
> That from this golden rigol hath divorced
>
> So many English kings. —Thy due from me
>
> Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,
>
> Which nature, love, and filial tenderness
>
> Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously.
>
> My due from thee is this imperial crown,
>
> Which, as immediate from thy place and blood,
>
> Derives itself to me.
>
> (4.3.151–73)

Where Henry viewed the crown as an object, a marker of someone who has a great deal on his mind, Hal casts the crown as a subject, a troublesome bedfellow, from the start. Such an address seems a fairly typical example of personification—but his insistence that the crown is a "golden care, / That keep'st the ports of slumber open wide" demonstrates how, in Hal's eyes, the crown is an active part of his father's kingship. The "golden care" that the crown endows to its wearer quickly gives way to an address to King Henry—"sleep with it now"—but, though Hal's next words are "O majesty," he has abruptly shifted to speaking to the crown once more, underscoring how entangled the physical object is with Henry's position.

The second half of Hal's speech iterates exactly how kingship is theoretically passed on ("My due from thee is this imperial crown")—but of course, later in the scene his father admits that through "bypaths and indirect crook'd ways / I met this crown," and expresses a hope that

"To thee it shall descend with better quiet, / Better opinion, better confirmation" (4.3.312–13, 315–16). For Henry IV, the crown "seemed in me / But as an honour snatched with boist'rous hand," a marker of his victory and consequent rule—and a constant reminder that such authority, once wrested from another, is all the more susceptible to being questioned, if not overthrown (4.3.318–19). Indeed, Henry's language suggests that while he recognizes the crown's role in the kingship, he is still not quite comfortable with his possession of it: "Set me the crown upon my pillow"; "Where is the crown?"; "But wherefore did he take away the crown?"; and even "I met this crown" all separate the crown from Henry's person and keep it at arm's length (4.3.137, 186, 216, 313). When Henry speaks of the crown, it is always "the" crown—never "his." Only when Hal reenters the sick rooms are the words "your crown" spoken aloud, for the first and only time in the play (4.3.270). In this, Hal reassures his father that the crown is still his, but he also implies a closer relationship between crown and king than his father does.

Admittedly, aside from this instance, Hal's language is much like his father's: "the crown," "this golden rigol," "this imperial crown." Hal recognizes, though, that the crown is more than a garland to be worn; he views it as an actant of kingship.[60] Though the prince may seem naively to assent to his father's dream of a peaceful succession with the declaration that the crown, "as immediate from thy place and blood, / Derives itself to me," he actually hints at a rather complex question of succession and ontology. The phrase "as immediate from thy place"

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[60] Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., argues that Hal's taking up the crown so shortly after acknowledging the toll it has taken on King Henry "attests to Hal's readiness to rule" even as it works through the problem that sleep poses to the theory of the king's two bodies, which "assumes continuity between and the congruity of the body natural and the body politic." While I agree that this scene explores the two bodies doctrine, Sullivan seems to assume that the crown is a marker of monarchy without considering its place in the making of kingship. See *Sleep, Romance and Human Embodiment: Vitality from Spenser to Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 93.

seems to refer to Hal himself, the phrase preceding the sentence's subject—and yet the subject could also be the crown itself. The material crown, in this formulation, is itself "immediate" from Henry: the crown is both "in actual contact or direct personal relation" with the king, and "standing or coming nearest or next" to him.[61] Indeed, this syntax might be taken further yet: though the crown is first deemed an object that becomes Hal's when his father dies ("My due from thee is this imperial crown"), Hal's immediate clarification that the crown "derives itself to me" renders the object an agent in this bequeathing. The crown derives itself: it is an independent reification of kingship with something like a will of its own.

When King Henry wakes, he does not believe that his kingship is lost simply because the crown is gone. Though concerned about its absence—"Where is the crown? Who took it from my pillow?" (4.3.186)—he is not panicked. For Henry, the crown is merely a symbol that marks him as the ruler. Instead, he is hurt that his son so lusts after it that he does not mourn his supposed death, asking if Hal does "so hunger for mine empty chair / That thou wilt needs invest thee with my honours / Before thy hour be ripe?" (4.3.222–24). Hal's defense is that when he did take up the crown:

> I spake unto this crown as having sense,
>
> And thus upbraided it: 'The care on thee depending,
>
> Hath fed upon the body of my father;
>
> Therefore thou best of gold art worst of gold.
>
> Other, less fine in carat, is more precious,
>
> Preserving life in medicine potable;
>
> But thou, most fine, most honoured, most renowned,

[61] *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. "immediate, *n*., *adj*., and *adv*."

> Hast eat thy bearer up.' Thus, my royal liege,
>
> Accusing it, I put it on my head,
>
> To try with it, as with an enemy
>
> That had before my face murdered my father,
>
> The quarrel of a true inheritor.
>
> (4.3.285–96)

Despite Hal's prefatory "as having sense," his speech underscores the agency of the crown. Whereas King Henry's soliloquy to insomnia addresses the figure of sleep, mentioning the crown only once and in its last line (3.1.31), Hal speaks to the crown as the source of his father's care. From a metonymic viewpoint, this argument is sound, for Henry's anxieties are partially due to the responsibilities of the kingdom distilled in the crown. Hal, though, takes care to clarify that he is being literal. Just as other gold is consumed for its medicinal benefits, the prince argues, the crown has "eat thy bearer up," and even the vocabulary accentuates the crown's importance. A "bearer," after all, is simply "one who carries or conveys; a carrier, a porter,"[62] and there is an implicit hierarchy between the bearer and the object that is carried: King Henry, Hal's language implies, is merely a host for monarchy. Donning the crown, Hal explains, was not an act of ambition, but of vengeance: he only meant to wage war against the assassin that had killed his father, striking up a relationship with an object that he views as an active, nearly sentient element of kingship.

In *Tamburlaine*, Marlowe demonstrates how kings relate and are related to crowns: kingship does not wholly exist in the corporeal body or the crown, but in the relationship between them. In more oblique ways, Shakespeare establishes the same in *Richard III* through

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[62] *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. "bearer, *n*."

Richard and Henry Bolingbroke; and *Edward II* and *Richard II* both explore exactly where kingship lies when the king is separated from the crown. In *2 Henry IV*, however, Shakespeare alone explores the exact degree to which the crown participates in kingship. Though King Henry only sees the crown as a marker of his reign, an object that identifies him as king but that he can never fully nor rightly possess, in Hal's eyes, the crown is a bedfellow, a bestower of worry, and, finally, a "most fine, most honoured, most renowned" regicide. To Hal, the crown participates in kingship.

CONCLUSION

Manmade objects such as crowns do not grow on trees, but neither are they like the majority of clothing, weaponry, or the objects of quotidian life: their iconographic status and their comparative rarity force the question of "whose is it?" with an urgency that espying a dropped coin does not. Centuries of tradition, in other words, have cemented a link between crowns and kings. Even after the Reformation, when Protestant theology argued that objects could not confer power and there was a marked "hostility to *objects*," as "props of religious and dramatic ritual alike served . . . to distract attention from more godly, hidden truths, by virtue of their very visibility,"[63] the English coronation ceremony continued to use crowns, swords, and an array of other materials ostensibly reoriented to confirm rather than create the king. David Starkey argues that under the Tudor and Stuart monarchies, the "crown and scepter . . . degenerated into mere signs" while "the imputed magical (and hence symbolic) properties of the royal body survived in

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[63] Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, "Introduction: Towards a Materialist Account of Stage Properties," in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 5, emphasis theirs.

full and may actually have strengthened,"[64] an argument that supports the official party line set forth by Attorney General Coke. The salient presence, however, of the crown, scepter, and a host of other objects in the coronation, theoretically allegorical yet persistently physical, underscores the fact that "those who had grown up in the Catholic church were accustomed to conceiving of their deity in representational terms, using material objects"—and, after all, "old habits of thoughts were hard to overcome."[65] The power of the coronation ritual in the making of kingship was perhaps more alive than not even in Jacobean England.

The early modern stage reduces this network of coronation from oath, archbishop, unction, homage, and dozens of regalia objects to two material actants: the body and the crown. This reduction is understandable from a pragmatic perspective: even established theaters had a budget for their stage property inventory; many of the coronation's objects were unique enough that their creation would have had to be commissioned; and the majority of objects used in coronation rites were not as immediately recognizable as the crown. Transfers of monarchical power enacted on the stage were thus wholly accomplished through crowns; what required dozens of objects in the cathedral demanded only one in the playhouse. This theatrical simplification belies a complex change to the historical coronation ceremony, for whereas Tudor culture presented crowns as either symbols or sources of kingship, Marlowe and Shakespeare depict the crown as a critical actant of monarchy.

The earlier history plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe establish the importance of the crown in inaugurating kingship. *Richard III* touches on the topic briefly but efficiently, with

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[64] David Starkey, "Representation Through Intimacy: A Study in the Symbolism of Monarchy and Court Office in Early-Modern England," in *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-cultural Studies in Symbolism*, ed. Ioan Lewis (London: Academic Press, 1977), 221.

[65] Williamson, *Materiality of Religion*, 6.

three different views: Richard finds the kingship to reside in the natural body of his deposed brother; Lord Stanley only recognizes the victorious Richmond to have ascended to the throne once he possesses the crown; and Buckingham demonstrates that the kingship exists in body and crown, calling Richard king but still anxious for him to be crowned. *Tamburlaine* similarly stages a range of theories[66] that explore the crown's role in the monarchy, but does so more explicitly. Cosroe and Mycetes perform the notion that the crown creates the king—Mycetes hides his crown yet relies on its power, Cosroe's followers pay him homage yet insist on crowning the usurper, and Cosroe is crowned again by Tamburlaine after defeating Mycetes—but are nonetheless defeated. The Turkish emperor Bajazeth performs the opposite extreme, that the crown is an empty symbol and the monarchy resides in his body alone, but Tamburlaine reduces that body to a footstool, a thing, even as Zabina insists that her husband's body is kingly. Tamburlaine alone stages the confluence of crown and body, and yet does so unconsciously. It falls to his enemies to explain that Tamburlaine's merits reveal his body to be that of a king, a neat rhetorical move which stiffens class barriers: the shepherd does not become a king through any merit of his own, but is revealed to be a king by the fact that he has merit.

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[66] Claude J. Summers briefly, yet convincingly argues that *Tamburlaine*'s episodic structure is teleological—"not only is each succeeding opponent stronger than the proceeding one, but each opponent is also a different kind of monarch . . . Mycetes is a hereditary prince; Cosroe is a usurping ' new prince'; Bajazeth is a conquering emperor"—but, though he observes that "the crown is the central symbol throughout the drama," does not credit the crown beyond iconography. See "Tamburlaine's Opponents and Machiavelli's *Prince*," *English Language Notes* 11 (1974): 256, 257.

Later history plays by Marlowe and Shakespeare take up a logical question: what happens when kings, conscious of the importance of their crowns, are separated from them?[67] In *Edward II*, the king is forced to surrender his crown, a circumstance that he explicitly believes will kill him, as if Edward attributes to it not only his kingship, but his very life. He lives on, though—and is still recognized to be the king by Mortimer, his son, and his murderer. Though he does not rule and has no crown, Edward is still, in some capacity, kingly. *Richard II* arrives at virtually the same conclusion. Again, a monarch surrenders his crown; again, he hints that in doing so, he will no longer exist; again, he continues to live; and again, at the moment of his death, he reproaches his killer with the fact that he is the king. Richard, however, ultimately questions whether reversing an action undoes the power of it; he may no longer have his crown, but the fact that he was crowned cannot be altered, and so may somehow still be, in some way, the king. *2 Henry IV* takes the boldest step by far in its interrogation of the crown and kingship. The object's relationship to the king is literally taken up by Hal's seizure of his sleeping father's crown, and in the dialogue that follows, a pattern emerges: while King Henry views the crown as a garland, a prized signifier of status, Hal recognizes its role in the monarchy. The obvious focus of the Henriad is doubly the succession to the throne—that is, not only who will succeed to it,

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[67] Though it seems useful to discuss these plays as a chronological progression, I am not arguing that Shakespeare or Marlowe wrote in any sort of teleology. The question of whether Shakespeare's histories "formed from the outset a unified, cohesive, organic totality of dramatic and historical writing" or were "from the outset a diversified, discontinuous, fragmentary series of historico-dramatic explorations, each individually and independently shaped by contemporary cultural practices" has been argued for decades, but I find Graham Holderness' compromise, that "a linear temporal framework can be used to explore the little narratives of history just as readily as can a deconstructed, episodic and postmodern form" a useful one. See *Shakespeare: The Histories* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 8, 12.

but who will succeed at it, and Hal turns this problem on its head, assuring his father and the audience that he will both become the king and be a good one, by addressing the issue not only through his heredity, but his conscious relationship with the crown.

Several critics of the Renaissance have touched on the relationship of props to kingship in early modern theater. Stephen Greenblatt cites the tavern scene in *1 Henry IV* wherein Hal decries Falstaff's cushion-cum-crown as an instance of the prince's ability to reveal "the emptiness in the world around him." In Hal's eyes, Greenblatt argues, nothing has a truly intrinsic value or "is indifferent to its circumstances. . . . Hal is an anti-Midas: everything he touches turns to dross."[68] Similarly, David Scott Kastan suggests that Shakespeare's history plays "reveal that the pageantry and props of rule are largely factitious, that their value is strategic rather than sacramental."[69] Shakespeare and Marlowe alike, however, appropriate and alter the post-Reformation theory of coronation: in their history plays, the crown does not wholly bestow authority, but neither is it empty, indifferent, or an object of pageantry.

History itself provides evidence of the crown's intrinsic power. While Kastan's argument seems to be upheld by the fact that the historical Henry IV and Richard III both "compensated for the defect of his title by the superior sanctity of his coronation,"[70] William Jones points out that Henry not only "clung with characteristic fondness to his splendid crown, although it was so indirectly obtained," but that he "endeavoured to soothe his last hours by ordering it to be placed on the pillow of his death-bed."[71] To the historical Henry IV, the crown was an actual source of

[68] Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 42.

[69] Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory*, 121.

[70] Stanley, *Historical Memorials*, 88.

[71] William Jones, *Crowns and Coronations: A History of Regalia* (London, 1883), xx.

comfort—not necessarily "although" it being indirectly obtained, but perhaps "because" of this. On his deathbed, a presumably private scenario in which pageantry was hardly a concern, Henry wanted his crown to be as near him as was possible.

The plays of Shakespeare and Marlowe present a similarly complicated relationship between monarch and crown, a relationship that speaks to the enacted genre of *Tamburlaine*, *Edward II*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *2 Henry IV*. They are almost certainly history plays—Shakespeare's are designated as such in the First Folio—and yet the usual problems of genre criticism forbid a precise definition of the term. In sixteenth-century England, "the term *history*, like the modern French word *histoire*, could mean either 'history' or 'story,'[72] and there was an early modern "slippage between plays called 'histories' and plays called 'tragedies.'"[73] As in most discussions of genre, however, many have tried to use content and style as determinants: Barbara Hodgdon argues that "the single constant . . . is the figure of the ruler,"[74] and Graham Holderness attempts to separate tragic history from comic history, which he defines as "a mixed mode, without the stylistic consistency of the chronicle play," its content "fantastic and utopian rather than realistic and historically accurate."[75] Such definitions, though, bypass the importance of the crown.

Crowns are a pragmatic, arguably necessary means of identifying a king on the stage; they provide a material vehicle for the transfer of the monarchy, a means of tracking the

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[72] Phyllis Rackin, *Stages of History: Shakespeare's English Chronicles* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 18.

[73] Colin Burrow, "What is a Shakespearean Tragedy?" in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Tragedy*, 2nd edition, ed. Claire McEachern (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 6.

[74] Hodgdon, *The End Crowns All*, 12.

[75] Graham Holderness, *Shakespeare Recycled: The Making of Historical Drama* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992), 18–19.

transmission of the body politic. Marlowe and Shakespeare, however, treat the crown as more than a representation of monarchy. *Tamburlaine*, *Edward II*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *2 Henry IV* all depict the crown as an actant in kingship, exploiting and simplifying the agential aspect of pre-Reformation coronation ceremonies even as they incorporate and modify the post-Reformation notion that monarchy exists in the king's corporeal body. In this, the playwrights show crowns to be a constituent element of history plays themselves, for if the genre's only consistent element is the monarch, Marlowe and Shakespeare demonstrate that the Crown requires body and crown alike.

Chapter Three

"Diverse Questions of a Dead Man's Skull": Anonymity, Identity, and Enacted Tragedy

In 1982, the renowned classical pianist André Tchaikowsky died of intestinal cancer at the age of 46. His will's thirteenth clause reads:

> 13. I HEREBY REQUEST that my body or any part thereof may be used for therapeutic purposes including corneal grafting and organ transplantation or for the purposes of medical education or research in accordance with the provisions of the Human Tissue Act of 1961 and in due course the institution receiving it shall have my body cremated with the exception of my skull, which shall be offered by the institution receiving my body to the Royal Shakespeare Company for use in theatrical performance.[1]

This much, at least, is theatrical lore. The lesser known part of the story, however, is that it was not until David Tennant's 2008 portrayal of Hamlet that Tchaikowsky's wish was finally fulfilled, a fact only revealed to the public after Tennant had performed with the skull 22 times. "I thought it would topple the play," explained the director Greg Doran, "and it would be all about David acting with a real skull." The curator of the RSC Archives, David Howells, related

[1] Reprinted in David A. Ferré, "The Other Tchaikowsky: A Biographical Sketch of André Tchaikowsky" (unpublished manuscript, 2008), 466, http://andretchaikowsky.com/biography/book/andre.pdf.

that "in 1989 the actor Mark Rylance rehearsed with it for quite a while but he couldn't get past the fact it wasn't Yorick's, it was André Tchaíkowsky's."[2]

Doran's concern here seems understandable; indeed, the very existence of the news story suggests that he was justified in worrying that knowledge of the skull's provenance would overshadow, even overtake the production. The reasoning behind his premise, though, deserves interrogation: exactly how would awareness of the skull's origins "topple the play"? The skull would neither appear nor act any differently on the stage than a plastic facsimile, the prop employed by most productions today; presumably, Tchaikowsky's skull had no defining characteristics, and from an audience's perspective, would have been (and, 22 times, it seems, was) indistinguishable from the artificial object. Once clued in that the skull was the genuine article, though, the audience would supposedly be unable to conceive of the prop as a mimetic object—though identical in appearance to a replica, knowing the skull's hominine origin renders it a "real" skull. Knowledge alone, Doran and the newspaper both indicate, alters the viewer's perception of the prop's ontological status.

Rylance's objection to using Tchaikowsky's skull, though related, is substantively different than Doran's. Rylance surely would have been comfortable ascribing a fictional identity to a plastic object, as so many audiences do as a matter of course. The problem, at least according to Howells, was that the actor knew not just that the skull was real, but to whom the skull belonged, and this knowledge precluded the skull from being wholly—or perhaps even in part—Yorick's, as if the identity of the deceased pianist were inseparable from his osseous

[2] Stephen Adams, "Pianist's Dying Wish Fulfilled as David Tennant Uses his Skull in *Hamlet* Performance," *The Telegraph*, November 25, 2008, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newstopics/howaboutthat/3519640/Pianists-dying-wish-fulfilled-as-David-Tennant-uses-his-skull-in-Hamlet-performance.html.

matter. If the RSC had simply handed the actor a genuine skull without revealing its identity, Tchaikowsky's request may well have been fulfilled years earlier. For Doran, knowing that the skull actually had an identity rendered the audience unable to reduce the skull to a simple prop, but knowing the skull's precise identity rendered Rylance unable to reduce the skull to Yorick.

Alone, each of these anecdotes is worth pausing over; together, they are indicative of something larger. Neither director nor actor voiced ethical concerns, nor worried that bringing a human skull onto the stage was too unsettling or morbid—if anything, Doran's comment hints that the sensational revelation may have made the production even more popular. The issue, rather, is that the skull had an identity at all, as if the osseous matter we leave behind were still tied to, if not an intrinsic part of, an individual's identity. It is understood perfectly, for instance, that "Yorick's skull" and "Yorick" refer to the same thing, though the first phrase involves a possessive that renders the bone an object and the second is a proper noun that equates the bone with the man, the object with the subject. We conflate skull and person without a second thought about the bizarre logic underlying the equation.

On the stage, this conflation of object and subject is further complicated by the skull's relationship to genre. "It is apparent," Douglas Bruster argues, "that certain kinds of properties serve as generic signals: a lute or a hobby horse might signal a comedy, a skull or a dagger a tragedy."[3] Bruster's relegation of props to generic signals is complicated by Tanya Pollard's contention that "revenge tragedies revel in turning bodies, and especially their severed parts, into props to be incorporated into the dramatic action." Pollard points out that "the onstage skull" acts

[3] Douglas Bruster, "The Dramatic Life of Objects," in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 79.

as “a theatrical version of the *memento mori*.”[4] Between these two critics, three perspectives of onstage skulls emerge: they are signals of genre; props used in dramatic action; and theatricalized iterations of a cultural practice. All of these perspectives are valid, but an important one is missing: skulls help not only to signal the tragic genre, but to constitute it. On the stage, they are not merely incorporated into the action; they are actants in the network that is theatrical production, and so help to create enacted tragedy.

Andrew Sofer contends that skulls on the stage “invite the spectator to choose between a conventional memento mori tableau . . . and a second, ‘trick’ perspective (or anamorphosis), in which the skull takes on an active role.” This “trick perspective,” he goes on, breaks down the theater’s fourth wall even as it dissociates the audience from the seemingly stable symbolism of the prop; “in its oscillation between subject and object, the skull exposes the illusion that we can attain a God’s-eye view.”[5] While Sofer accurately identifies cultural convention as a crucial aspect of the prop, skulls are not subject or object, as he implies; such characterizations fall away when we recognize that props, like actors themselves, are actants in theatrical networks. Onstage skulls are simultaneously object and subject, and so there is no “trick” in the perspective that these props have agency in the theater.

This simultaneity is inherently related to the fact that skulls in Renaissance theater materialize a relationship between anonymity and identity, a relationship that is singularly different from the one that we have come to assume or that was in place off of the early modern stage. The related traditions of the danse macabre, memento mori tokens, and ars moriendi texts

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[4] Tanya Pollard, “Tragedy and Revenge,” in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 66.

[5] Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), 92.

largely demonstrate skulls to be anonymous; when these discourses do explicitly recognize skulls as the remains of an individual, rather than mere symbols of death, the identity ascribed to the remains tends to be typical—that is, they serve "as a representative specimen of a class or kind" of identity.[6] On the Renaissance stage, though, skulls are both anonymous and identified; if, in the memento mori tradition, a skull represents death, in Renaissance plays it also evokes a death. Early modern theater, in other words, appropriates the offstage cultural connotations of skulls even as the skulls themselves work as actants in the creation of enacted tragedy. Accordingly, this chapter will first examine these cultural connotations to bring out their differing relations to anonymity and identity. It will then explore the role of skulls in three plays—Shakespeare's *Hamlet* (ca. 1600), Dekker and Middleton's *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* (1604), and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1607)—in order to suggest that though the interiority of the tragic hero has long been the subject of critical scrutiny, it is the onstage skull that embodies the tension between anonymity and identity that materializes enacted tragedy.

THE MATTER OF LIFE AND DEATH: HOW TO GET A HEAD IN LONDON

Barring skeletal damage or deformity, one skeleton looks much like any other: the very anonymity of skeletons is what makes them such an effective symbol of mortality. As Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass note, "the body, given over to death, could be anyone's: the skull may be Alexander's or Yorick's or anyone's. Without a memorial or a gravestone or a gravedigger to tell you whose the skull was, you don't know."[7] The visual anonymity of skulls is

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[6] *OED*, 2nd. ed., s.v. "typical, *adj*."

[7] Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 249–50.

by necessity juxtaposed against their identity: there is no skull without a person, or a person without a skull, but the exact relationship between the two is fraught even in Jones and Stallybrass' sentence. "The skull may be Alexander's" suggests ownership, a relationship between subject and skull that is neither terminated (the sentence does not read "The skull may have been Alexander's") nor wholly extant ("The skull may be Alexander"). Skulls aptly demonstrate what Lina Perkins Wilder terms "present absence,"[8] or perhaps absent presence: the skull both is and was, existing as an object in the moment while acting as a material reminder of a past presence.

Absent presence considers the past and the present, but any consideration of skulls must be rounded out with the future as well. William E. Engel suggests that death, "the elusive but always ready-at-hand possibility of one's own implied future absence," is depicted in the Renaissance as "an experiential act of re-cognizing, of re-membering, one's end" in what Engel later descriptively calls "projective memory."[9] To keep this end in mind, to keep "re-cognizing" it, the people of sixteenth-century England commonly used memento mori tokens, physical objects that encouraged ruminations upon mortality. Meant to remind their user of his or her inevitable death, these tokens were effectively material representations of projective memory: later or sooner but inevitably, death will come—in fact, is always present, as the memento mori token reminds. Memento mori tokens could be virtually anything (rings were quite popular, for

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[8] Though Lina Perkins Wilder uses the phrase in her argument that Will "Kemp's present absence as Yorick's skull recalls not only the actor's role as Clown but a longer view of Kemp's own history and the history of the Lord Chamberlain's Men," the expression is especially apt here. See *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre: Recollection, Properties, and Character* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 133, for more.

[9] William E. Engel, *Mapping Mortality: The Persistence of Memory and Melancholy in Early Modern England*, Massachusetts Studies in Early Modern Culture (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995), 3, 4, 67.

instance), but skulls had long connoted death and were often worked into the token's design, if not used themselves.[10] Such tokens invited people to cultivate different relations to identity and corporeality, one predicated upon the present moment and another upon the future. In the present moment, one's skull is the locus of identity, but the projective remembrance of the memento mori separates that identity from the body, the soul leaving the flesh behind to decompose—and therein become anonymous.

The use of memento mori tokens stems from the traditions of the danse macabre and ars moriendi texts. The danse macabre, a visual representation of "a grinning skeleton that seized people of all ranks and types in the very midst of life," emphasized the necessity of being prepared for death. Though it "developed as part of the response to the Black Death as early as 1345," a date derived from a painting in Paris' Churchyard of the Innocents,[11] the practice originates from earlier traditions. Among these is "the Legend of the Three Living and Three Dead, a series of French poems written toward the end of the thirteenth century" in which a trio of young men "encounter three skeletons or corpses who warn them about the vanities of the world":[12] this image is the subject of "nearly 200 mural paintings . . . dozens of manuscript

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[10] Though Phoebe S. Spinrad suggests that "death's traditional image began to disappear from emblems and be parodied in broadsides as it became more vulgarized in the ubiquitous death's-head jewelry," only to be replaced by the figure of Time, Bettie Anne Doebler notes that "the popularity and power of the skull as an emblem of meditation" was reproduced in the Elizabethan period "in graphics, paintings, design, and even jewelry." The notions of death and time are obviously inseparable, and my argument here attempts to underline how temporality was a part and parcel of skulls on the early modern stage. See Spinrad, *The Summons of Death on the Medieval and Renaissance English Stage* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1987), 24; and Doebler, *"Rooted Sorrow": Dying in Early Modern England* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1994), 85.

[11] Doebler, *"Rooted Sorrow,"* 39.

[12] Spinrad, *The Summons of Death*, 4.

illuminations . . . and about 15" French, German, English, and Italian poems.[13] In every medium, the primary emphasis is on universality: death comes for everyone, regardless of social rank. Indeed, by presenting "a skeletal figure of death accompanying each member of society in order of his rank, from the Pope and Emperor down to the peasant and ploughman,"[14] the skeletons' uniformity depicts not only death's universality, but its ultimate anonymity.

By definition, danse macabre imagery "centered on the idea of confrontation: Death calls and the living respond," in keeping with "a system of belief that interposed between the soul and its destruction a series of second chances." These second chances extended to deathbed sacraments, appeals to angels and saints, and even "the very pains of dying might be offered as penance for sins"—breathing space that could "itself become a danger, in that the living may put all the reordering [of their lives] off until the last minute."[15] By the early sixteenth century, theologians both Protestant and Catholic had begun to encourage the perspective that one's entire life was a preparation for death—an ars moriendi, an art of dying that would better one's chances of salvation.[16] If the danse macabre emphasized the universality of death and the anonymity of

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[13] Ashby Kinch, *Imago Mortis: Mediating Images of Death in Late Medieval Culture*, Visualising the Middle Ages, vol. 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 111–15.

[14] Daniel Rosenfeld , ed., *European Painting and Sculpture, ca. 1770–1937 in the Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992), 93.

[15] Spinrad, *The Summons of Death*, 27.

[16] Though the medieval *Tractatus artis bene moriendi* dates from the early fifteenth century, it was not translated into English until William Caxton's printing of it in 1490 as *The Arte & Crafte to Know Well to Dye.* For more on ars moriendi texts throughout the sixteenth century, see David William Atkinson's introduction to *The English* ars moriendi, Renaissance and Baroque Studies and Texts, vol. 5 (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

the body's remains afterwards, the precepts of an ars moriendi text emphasized the reader's individual death and the desirability of dying well.[17]

Richard Verstagen's 1603 translation of Pietro da Lucca's *A Dialogue of Dying Well* opens in a fashion representative of the ars moriendi genre. As Verstagen writes in the preface, "The remembra*n*ce of death . . . doth neuer come out of season. . . . [T]he remembrance of death tendeth vnto a care to endeuour to dy well, a matter of moste important consideration vnto all that liue." Lucca (or Luccensis) identifies twelve rules of dying well, "The first whereof is this, bee alwayes myndful of death, because therein is conteyned a great secret . . . for that by the onlie meditation of death in due manner often used, sufficient remedie is found against all our spiritual infirmities." What separates Lucca's text from those of Verstagen's contemporaries is a matter of matter: though the authors of most Renaissance ars moriendi texts advise their readers to keep death in mind, Lucca actually provides concrete examples of the ways through which this might be accomplished. "Marke then that by three meanes a man may haue thee remembrance of death," he writes: first, one should listen to preachers and read books on the subject of death's agonies; second, one should visit deathbeds and cemeteries often. The third method, however, is a bit more direct:

> And the better to print this remembra*n*ce in themselues, some haue taken a dead mannes head, and kept it in a secret place, and certaine tymes in the week set it before their eyes, and verie wel and diligentlie considered it, and by way of

[17] Though historically later, Isaak Walton provides a stellar example of this in his description of John Donne's death: "And now he had nothing to do but die; to do which he stood in need of no longer time, for he had studied long, and to so happy a perfection" that he had long been ready to die; "in the last hour of his last day, as his body melted away and vapoured into spirit . . . he said, *I were miserable if I might not die*." See *The Life of John Donne, Dr. in Divinity and Late Dean of Saint Pauls Church, the Second Impression* (London, 1658), 115, 116.

> imagination kept long talk with it, and this not euerie day but once or twice a week, because it so moueth, more our affection, then it would do yf euerie day wee should see the same: for by long custome being once made familiar vnto vs, it would mous vs nothing at all.
>
> A great sinner that some tyme vsed the same, asked diuers questions of a dead mannes skul which he kept, as thus, tel me yf it please the (o lothsome and deformed head [ )], whose head haste thow bene and what cause hath made thee so vglie? . . . The head with lamenting voice & wayling woordes he imagined to answere him thus, I was the head of a young man, beautyful, rich and mightie, which in the short tyme of my flourishing youth gaue my selfe wholie to carnal lust and worldlie pleasures. I took no heed of my fathers admonitions, godlie talk I vtterlie dispised, mocking simple and deuout people: and beleeuing that I should haue bene a lo*n*g tyme happie in the world, I neuer thought vpon death.[18]

The image of a sinner contemplating a skull is effectively a variation on the danse macabre, the living and the dead side by side—but while the danse macabre, memento mori, and ars moriendi traditions all seem to emphasize anonymity, they have significant ontological differences. As a visual trope, the danse macabre represents anonymous and universal death; a memento mori token signifies both anonymous death and one's own demise, and yet could be any physical object so long as this specific cultural meaning is ascribed to it. Lucca's advice here is striking, then, for his "great sinner" does not recognize the skull to be anonymous. This fact is unusual given the nature of a skull: unlike a ring, a skull requires no cultural or personal ascription to call

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[18] Pietro da Lucca, *A Dialogve of Dying Wel . . . Translated First into French, and Novv into English*, trans. Richard Verstagan (Antwerp, 1603): $A2^{v}$, $B2^{v}$, $C2^{r}$, $C3^{r}$–$C4^{r}$.

death to mind; its connotation is inherent, and should materialize both anonymous and individual death.

In Lucca's story, the anonymous skull is instead the wellspring of an identity created by the sinner himself. His lesson is learned not through an abstract symbol or representation, but through a fictional life history: the head used by the sinner implicitly need not actually belong to a young, beautiful, rich, or mighty man. Though this ascribed identity is explicitly imaginary, it is nonetheless rendered typical: the sinner does not think of a name for the skull, but imagines the head to belong to a type of a person, to a prodigal son of sorts, giving the skull a generalized identity that is set up in opposition to and in conjunction with its anonymity.[19] Rather than projectively remember death by means of an innominate skull, Lucca advocates that a typical identity be ascribed to the anonymous memento mori token—for the skull always begs the question of identity. Lucca's advice, then, might simply be an attempt to divert such a question back into the project of the ars moriendi, insisting that the issues of anonymity and identity raised by the skull be subordinated to the genre's purpose: provoking the viewer to think on mortality.

It is difficult to say exactly how challenging it would have been to acquire a human head in early modern England, but it is notable that though Lucca advocates meditating upon the skull, he does not deem it necessary to explain how one might go about acquiring it. Andreas Vesalius, whose influential, seven-volume 1543 work *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* instituted the Western

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[19] This idea is similar to Marcy L. North's notion that in Renaissance religious debates, "anonymity worked to conceal identity, but it could also be used to 'identify' the moral character of the author being concealed." Though her work focuses on anonymity as it relates to authorship, rather than skulls or props in general, it is quite useful in considering anonymity as a concept. See *The Anonymous Renaissance: Cultures of Discretion in Tudor-Stuart England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 4.

world's study of human anatomy, studied briefly in Paris from 1533 to 1536. Though he records having once dissected a hanged prostitute, legally obtained corpses seem to have been a rarity, for he frequently visited "cemeteries where human remains were apparently given the most superficial interment," especially the Cemetery of the Innocents. As part of his studies, "osteology was required and obtaining materials for its study was apparently something left to the resources of the student."[20] Back in England, in 1540, Henry VIII granted the newly merged Company of Barbers and Surgeons "the annual right to the bodies of four hanged felons," a pronouncement through which "dissection became recognised in law as a punishment, an aggravation to execution, a fate worse than death." Four bodies a year seems not to have been enough, however. Executioners sold off hanged bodies themselves and surgeons robbing graves of their corpses "dates back at least to the seventeenth century in Britain," Shakespeare's own epitaph often serving as proof of this estimate, and the practice became commonplace by the early eighteenth century (especially when supply and demand caused the price of the executioners' corpses to rise).[21]

Public executions aside, death was hardly a stranger in early modern London: the city's parishes went from burying 3,000 corpses a year in the 1580s to a high of nearly 12,000 in 1609, with fluctuations in between due to plague outbreaks. Death was both an anonymous statistic and an individual calamity. The dead occupied "important spaces in the urban map, in the parish churches and churchyards that were the focus of the local community, as well as in the ritual calendar." Theoretically, though the Reformation "challenged the belief that holiness could have

[20] C. D. O'Malley, *Andreas Vesalius of Brussels, 1514–1564* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1965), 59–60.

[21] Ruth Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 32, 54, 55.

a physical location, and that association with specific places conferred spiritual benefit," contemporary evidence demonstrates that "sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Londoners were as keen to be buried in traditional places as their Catholic predecessors."[22] There is only so much space in a city, and churches dealt with this in a variety of ways. Bones displaced by the burial of new bodies "were usually placed in a charnel house"[23] or ossuary, a repository of skeletal remains. In the early sixteenth century, St. Dunstan in the West appears to have cleared its grounds completely of remains, removing 59 loads of churchyard earth in 1516–17 and paying the sexton for two days' labor, "removing bones from the charnel house, prior to rebuilding it and the vestry."[24] In 1616, several men worked for four days at St. Margaret's in Westminster "in digging a large pit of twelve foot deepe, thirty foot long, and about ten foot broad to bury the bones in the churchyard."[25] Even if initially buried beneath a headstone, practical demands made becoming anonymous a very real possibility.

In one of the most striking examples, on April 10, 1549, the cloister, monuments, ossuary, and perhaps a chapel in St. Paul's Pardon Churchyard were razed and, at the behest of Reginald Wolfe, a Stationers' Company member, over a thousand full cartloads of human remains dating from four centuries back were emptied onto Finsbury Fields, on the northern edge of the city. Wolfe refurbished the space above the ossuary "to provide space for booksellers' stalls"; the remains on Finsbury Fields were covered with trash and served as the foundation for

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[22] Vanessa Harding, *The Dead and the Living in Paris and London, 1500–1670* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 16, 46, 55.

[23] Claire Gittings, *Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England* (London: Croom Helm, 1984), 139.

[24] Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 64.

[25] J. Charles Cox, *Churchwardens' Accounts from the Fourteenth Century to the Close of the Seventeenth Century* (London: Methuen, 1913), 169.

three windmills.[26] John Stow notes that "About this Cloyster, was artificially & richly painted, the dance of Machabray, or dance of death . . . the like wherof, was painted about S. Innocents cloister, at Paris in Fra*n*ce . . . & with y picture of Death, leading all estates painted about the Cloyster."[27] The anonymity of death represented by the cloister's danse macabre, in other words, was rendered literal by the leveling of the cloister—and the unceremonious purge of the churchyard's ossuary.

The destruction of St. Paul's Pardon Churchyard and the subsequent building of the windmills, Philip Schwyzer argues, may have been a case of Protestants making "a self-conscious show of their new-found contempt for human carcasses." The Reformation "radically transformed the spiritual status of human remains," the bones of Catholic saints desecrated and scattered throughout England as if in derision of "fragmented body parts" acting as religious conduits.[28] The precise relationship between skeleton and subject was a critical consideration in Catholicism and Protestantism alike—indeed, in any Christian culture that promised personal resurrection and immortality. Belief in physical resurrection "dates from the earliest days of Christianity, and formed the basis of the logic of the mediaeval charnel house,"[29] but the Reformation's skepticism about relics and saints dramatically altered this logic. Though the

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[26] Philip Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 108–110; and Peter Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107.

[27] Iohn Stow, *A Survay of London, Contayning the Originall, Antiquity, Increase, Moderne Estate, and Description of that Citie* (London, 1598), 264–65.

[28] Schwyzer, *Archaeologies of English Renaissance Literature*, 110.

[29] Richardson, *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*, 11.

ossuary at St. Leonard's Church in Hythe was a notable exception,[30] many charnel houses "were probably cleared at the Reformation, when the notion of bones as sacred relics . . . and the practice of respectfully storing them was discontinued."[31] Despite even gestures as grand as the clearing of the Pardon Churchyard, Catholic traditions "whose clear rationale was a belief in the ability of the living to ameliorate the condition of the dead" were difficult to wholly displace: "masses, diriges [sic], trentals, singing, ringing, holy water, hallowed places, year's, day's, and month's minds, crosses, pardon letters to be buried with them, mourners, *De profundis*, by every lad that could say it, dealing with money solemnly for the dead, watching of the corpse at home, bell and banner" were all itemized as problematic ongoing traditions by Bishop Pilkington in 1562, and concerns about such traditions were regularly documented through the 1580s.[32] An inextricable relationship between the soul and the body—between the individual self and the flesh, destined to become anonymous—was certainly one of these ongoing traditions.

In early modern Catholic tracts, "an extraordinary agency is granted to the bones of the saints. Relics are transformed from persons to objects and back to persons again. . . . the boundary between subject and object is permeable. The relic functions as both."[33] While many Protestant writers downplayed the significance of skeletal remains, others similarly affirmed the

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[30] Paul Koudounaris, *The Empire of Death: A Cultural History of Ossuaries and Charnel Houses* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2011), 64.

[31] Harding, *The Dead and the Living*, 64. Koudounaris raises a caveat to this point, however, noting that there are charnel houses that still house bones in England, "older Catholic charnels that had been sealed during the Reformation, forgotten, and rediscovered at a much later date." See Koudounaris, *The Empire of Death*, 64.

[32] Marshall, *Beliefs and the Dead*, 127.

[33] Scott Dudley, "Conferring with the Dead: Necrophilia and Nostalgia in the Seventeenth Century," *ELH* 66, no. 2 (Summer 1999): 283.

importance of the body when discussing the resurrection of the dead, though they obviously had no use for saints. French emigrant John Véron, a Protestant and "one of the 'seditious preachers' arrested by Marian authorities in the wake of a riot at St Paul's on 13 August 1553,"[34] suggested in 1561 that material bodies will be resurrected, and so deserve respect:

> And therefore, it is good to haue some honest place, as a common repositorye or storehouse of all the Christians, for a publike testimony of the resurrection of the flesh. For, we shoulde do great wronge unto our bodies, which haue bene the temples of the holy ghost, and in whome God did dwel and inhabite through faithe . . . If we should cast the*m* forth unto the dogges, unto the rauens, and unto the wilde beastes, as the vile carcase of dead horses & deade swine, as thoughe they shoulde no more liue after their corporal deathe.[35]

Christopher Sutton's 1600 ars moriendi work, *Disce Mori: Learne to Dye* (a text noted as a stellar representative of "that group within the English Church who desired to join together all Protestants, indeed all Christians, in the basic principles of Christian faith and hope"[36]), presents the corpse in a similar fashion, valuing the body not for what it is but what it will be: "Now for these corruptible bodies, they take no dammage at all by death. Tis no harme to the seede, though it hath for the time, a little earth raked ouer it, it shall spring againe, and flourish, and bring foorth fruite in due season. No hurt is it to these our bodies, to be cast into the grounde: beeing

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[34] Carrie Euler, "Véron, Jean (*d.* 1563)," in *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/28250, accessed October 22, 2013.

[35] John Véron, *The Hvntynge of Purgatorye to Death, Made Dialogewyse, by Jhon* [sic] *Veron Senonoys* (1561), fol. 33.

[36] Atkinson, *The English* ars moriendi, xxi.

sowen in weakenesse, they shall rise againe in power."[37] Calvinist writers were often more radical, presenting the corpse as "an horrour to all that behold it; a most loathsome and abhorred spectacle"[38] but acknowledging that it would nonetheless be resurrected:

> though the body rott in the grave, or be eaten of wormes, or of fishes in the sea, or burnt to ashes, yet that will not be unto us a matter of discomfort. . . . although the body be severed from the soule in death, yet neither body nor soule are seuered from Christ, but the very body rotting in the graue, drowned in the sea, burned to ashes, abides still united to him, and is as truly a member of Christ then as before.[39]

Calvin himself treats the religious importance of physical remains with ambivalence, noting that despite the "unstedfast, faulty, corruptible, fraile, withering, and rotten tabernacle of our body," "it were a most great absurditie that the bodies which God hath dedicate to be temples to himselfe, should fall away into rottennesse without hope of risyng againe." After all, he goes on, "what should it profit to applie our feete, handes, eyes, and tonges unto the service of God, unlesse they were partakers of the frute & reward?" Whatever happens to the flesh, these writers agree, it is nonetheless a part of the identity: "no lesse monstruous is their error," writes Calvin, "whiche imagine that soules shall not receyue againe the same bodies wherwith they are now clothed, but shal haue new and other bodies," for Christ demands "an accompt of their life:

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[37] Christopher Sutton, *Disce Mori: Learne to Dye. A Religious Discourse, Moouing Every Christian Man to Enter Into a Serious Remembrance of His Ende* (London, 1600), 117–18.

[38] Robert Bolton, *Mr. Boltons Last and Learned Worke of the Four Last Things, Death, Ivdgement, Hell, and Heaven* (London, 1632), 82.

[39] William Perkins, *A Salve for a Sicke Man, or, A Treatise Containing the Nature, Differences, and Kindes of Death, as also the Right Manner of Dying Well* ([London?], 1595), 25.

which could not agree, if newe bodies should be brought before the iudgement seate."[40] Though less important than the soul, the anonymous body is nonetheless inextricable from personal identity.

The danse macabre underscores the universality and anonymity of death; memento mori tokens suggest both anonymous death and an individual's passing; and the ars moriendi tradition emphasizes the importance of the individual being prepared to die by ascribing typical identities to anonymous skulls. These issues are further complicated by their salience in religious debates of the time that, though theoretically abstract, are nonetheless strikingly corporeal: how does, or can, a person conceive of the self without reference to the body? The relationship between the body and the soul, between anonymity and identity, is materialized on the Renaissance stage through the skull. Appropriating the discourses and connotations of the danse macabre, ars moriendi texts, and memento mori tokens, onstage skulls complicate these traditions by manifesting as not only anonymous and typically individualized, but as having specific identities. Off the stage, skulls represent death or the death of a type of person; on the stage, that death is given a specific identity or role to play. In the theater, the skull is an actant that both represents and embodies absence: it represents death as an abstract concept, but materializes the conspicuous loss of a person whose resurrection has not yet come.

HAMLET AND TIME WITHOUT JOINTS

Hamlet 5.1 is not only an iconic scene, but is also "apparently the first known scene in English Renaissance drama to be laid in a graveyard, and the first scene in which skulls are used as stage

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[40] John Calvin, *The Institution of Christian Religion,* trans. Thomas Norton (London, 1561), Yi^r, Mmii^r, Mmii^v, Mmii^r.

properties."[41] Appropriately enough, issues of anonymity and identity are at the scene's heart, especially as they relate to temporality. Lina Perkins Wilder points out that "both referentially and as a physical place on and under the stage, the graveyard is the most concentrated of memory *loci*" in *Hamlet*; the stage's trapdoor is used as Yorick's grave, the space from which old Hamlet's ghost rises, and the grave into which Ophelia is lowered and Laertes and Hamlet jump, so that if "burial has come to suggest forgetfulness, the opposite is the case in the graveyard scene": burial in *Hamlet* suggests remembrance.[42]

Often forgotten, however, are the two skulls tossed from the ground before Yorick's in the fifth act. These apparently do not warrant any attention from the gravedigger, but Hamlet is not content to let them remain anonymous. When the first appears, the prince suggests that "This might be the pate of a politician," or perhaps "of a courtier"; as another flies through the air, he wonders, "Why might not that be the skull of a lawyer? Where be his quiddits now, his quillets, his cases, his tenures, and his tricks?"[43] Rather than accept each skull as an anonymous symbol of mortality or an innominate object that might spur reflections upon his own demise, Hamlet takes Lucca's advice: he ascribes a typical identity to each skull. Whereas Lucca asks that a fictional life history be imagined in order to remember the viewer's death, however, Hamlet stops well short of this: he accepts the anonymous skulls' invitation to create identities for them, but does not derive any lesson from them that could characterize them as memento mori tokens. The anonymity inherent in ars moriendi texts and memento mori tokens is thus referenced on the

[41] Sofer, *Stage Life of Props*, 90–91.

[42] Wilder, *Shakespeare's Memory Theatre*, 127, 128.

[43] William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), 5.1.72, 76, 90–92. All references to the play hereafter refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

stage through the mere physical presence of skulls (especially if this scene is, in fact, the prop's stage debut), but *Hamlet* appropriates this discourse only to carve out a distinctly tragic connotation for the prop. This space is poignantly characterized in Hamlet's famous scene with Yorick, which begins with the clownish gravedigger:

> FIRST CLOWN Here's a skull, now. This
> skull has lain in the earth three-and-twenty years.
>
> HAMLET Whose was it?
>
> FIRST CLOWN A whoreson mad fellow's it was. Whose do you
> think it was?
>
> HAMLET Nay, I know not.
>
> FIRST CLOWN A pestilence on him for a mad rogue—a poured a
> flagon of Rhenish on my head once! This same skull, sir, was
> Yorick's skull, the King's jester.
>
> (5.1.159–67)

Steven Mullaney observes that "the exhumation of Yorick's skull is accompanied by a curious exhumation of the past as well,"[44] but it is even more curious that Yorick's skull also exhumes the future. In this dialogue, the gravedigger briefly ascribes a typical identity to the skull—"a whoreson mad fellow," just as Hamlet imagines the politician, courtier, and lawyer—but goes on to aver the skull's actual identity to be Yorick. Whether mimetic representation or an anonymous property, skulls are innominate objects from the past: this is precisely why they ostensibly serve

[44] Steven Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny: *Hamlet*, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, and the Final Progress of Elizabeth I, 1600–1607," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45, no. 2 (Summer 1994): 155.

as admirable memento mori tokens, though a fictional typical identity must be ascribed to the object in order to evoke its viewer's future, to projectively re-member.

When a skull is identified as a specific person, however, especially one known to the beholder, the past is not merely alluded to, but materialized in the remains of a deceased subject. This specific identification is distinctly a tragic one, as Hamlet goes on to overwrite the lessons of the memento mori in favor of uniting of past, present, and a distant future:

> Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio—a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy. He hath borne me on his back a thousand times; and now, how abhorred my imagination is! My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips that I have kissed I know not how oft. Where be your gibes now, your gambols, your songs, your flashes of merriment that were wont to set the table on a roar?
>
> (5.1.171–77)

The syntax of "how abhorred my imagination is! My gorge rises at it" raises two possibilities. If "abhor" is understood as "to shrink with horror or repugnance from," it is easy to imagine that Hamlet simply drops the object of his sentence: "how my imagination shrinks from this skull!" This is how the passage is typically glossed, if at all. If, however, "abhor" signifies "disgust or hatred,"[45] Hamlet expresses not only loathing, but physical revulsion at his own imagination; grammatically, this is the nearest referent to the "it" at which his gorge rises. Hamlet is upset, then, not because he is holding a skull in the middle of a cemetery, but because the skull has been ascribed a specific identity and his mind has luridly pointed out the difference time has

[45] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "abhor, *v*."

made between the living Yorick and the dead. Yorick is the subject of his meditation—not Hamlet's own mortality.

Considerations of temporality are indispensable to this passage, as the prince shuttles between remembering Yorick as a subject—the present Hamlet thinking upon the past ("I knew him")—and seeing Yorick's skull as an object, as the absence of the jester's lip leads Hamlet to reflect upon the present's grisly physicality ("My gorge rises at it. Here hung those lips"). This oscillation, though complicated, seems almost intuitive, a notion that remains universal today: "Remember when? How times change." The temporalities of this passage, however, are even further complicated by Hamlet's verb tenses. Beginning with "Alas, poor Yorick," in the space of five sentences Hamlet twice begins with a past perfect acknowledgement that Yorick's past manifestation is one that has come and gone: "I knew him, Horatio," "Here hung those lips," verb tenses that indicate a definite shift in status, a conception of time as a line—in a word, polychronicity. In each case, however, Hamlet then employs the present perfect, a tense that specifies an action begun in the past with the potential to reoccur: "He hath borne me on his back," "those lips that I have kissed," rather than "He had borne me" or "that I had kissed." Though Hamlet obviously recoils at the present state of a man he remembers as a living being, the linguistic slippage between past and present suggests that these times collide in Hamlet's mind. Graham Holderness argues that "the point about Yorick's skull is that it is not a mere anonymized object . . . but an individualized skull, the recognizable remains of someone known and loved," thereby occupying "a liminal position . . . between life and death."[46] Hamlet's language, however, suggests that Yorick's position is not quite liminal, but simultaneous: Hamlet does not see Yorick as being in between life and death, but simultaneously as an anonymous

[46] Graham Holderness, "'I Covet Your Skull': Death and Desire in *Hamlet*," *Shakespeare Survey* 60 (2007): 227.

object and an identified subject with a continued presence in Hamlet's life, not in a specific position on a spectrum but in a constant, dissonant state. Just as Yorick's skull both is and was, so Yorick himself. In this, Hamlet derives a distinctly tragic perspective from the skull—it is abstracted death but it is also, and primarily, an individual oblivion that echoes into Hamlet's own life.

As Hamlet continues, he refines his ruminations on the relationship between identity and anonymity:

> HAMLET Prithee, Horatio, tell me one thing.
>
> HORATIO What's that, my lord?
>
> HAMLET Dost thou think Alexander looked o' this fashion i'th' earth?
>
> HORATIO E'en so.
>
> HAMLET And smelt so? Pah!
>
> HORATIO E'en so, my lord.
>
> HAMLET To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till a find it stopping a bung-hole?
>
> HORATIO 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.
>
> HAMLET No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither with modesty enough, and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer-barrel?

(5.1.180–95)

Despite Yorick's skull having been explicitly identified and Hamlet's own ascription of typical identity to the skulls that preceded Yorick's, Hamlet returns to the lessons of the danse macabre by underscoring the anonymity inherent in Yorick's skull here, comparing it to Alexander's. Hamlet proceeds to consider the future, seeming to use the skull (as an Elizabethan audience would likely have expected) as an anonymous memento mori token: "To what base uses we may return, Horatio!"[47] This brief acknowledgement of his own death, however, is undercut by Hamlet's refusal to imagine his skeletal remains: instead, he casts his memory even further into the future, to a time when his remains have disintegrated to the point when they may have such "base uses" as stopping vats of wine. In this, the anonymity of the skull is extended to a logical conclusion that obliterates the practice of the memento mori: if identity and anonymity are tied up in human remains, what is their relationship when these remains are no longer recognizable as human? Even the identity that "kept the world in awe," Hamlet sincerely seems to lament, is reduced to dust, not only anonymous but wholly unrecognizable as a body. If the anonymity of skulls invites the ascription of identity, whether typical or actual, the absence of physical remains is highly problematic. Just as a fictional typical identity is necessary to projectively remember death, Hamlet seems to imply that some sort of material, if not the skull itself, is requisite for remembering a specific death.

The language surrounding Hamlet's thought also indicates the importance of the skull's materiality. Horatio's reply to Hamlet's question "Why may not imagination trace the noble dust

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[47] I would argue that this explicit acknowledgment of his inevitable demise (and Horatio's), though delayed, seems to dispute Andrew Sofer's reading of the scene as a gradual deflation of Hamlet's subjectivity, the prince "refusing the first-person singular, refusing to see himself reflected in the death's-head." See *Stage Life of Props*, 97.

of Alexander?" is that to do so would be chopping logic. This response, though, answers another question: "Why, may not imagination" trace this dust? In this formulation, placing a comma after "why" renders the word an interjection and Hamlet's query practically rhetorical. Without the inserted comma, however, "why" remains an adverb, and Hamlet's question remains a genuine inquiry, the difference between "is it not the case?" and "why isn't it the case?" Though Horatio does not recognize the validity of the possibility, the question Hamlet actually asks, the answer is implicitly in Hamlet's hand: imagination tends not to trace the noble dust of Alexander precisely because his physical remains are dust, rather than an anthropomorphous object. The skull is necessary not only to remember death, but to remember the dead as well.

In the danse macabre, skulls are anonymous symbols of mortality; Lucca's *Dialogue of Dying Well* advises that a typical identity be ascribed to an innominate skull in order to derive a lesson from the juxtaposition. Hamlet appropriates both of these discourses and adds a third—that of the specific identity recognized in a skull—to explore interrelated models of identity. From typical skulls to Yorick's own head, from Hamlet's past to a distant future in which the body is not only anonymous but altogether nonexistent, *Hamlet* emphasizes how the materiality of skulls invites interrogations of the nature of identity. In this, the skull becomes an actant in a distinctly tragic investigation of identity's nature, the prop uniting the danse macabre, ars moriendi, and memento mori traditions while overwriting them with the importance of individual identity: Yorick's skull effectively embodies the present absence of the court jester, underscoring the anonymity of his remains in contrast with his simultaneous past, present, and future role in Hamlet's life.

AFTER THIS, NOT LIKE THIS: *THE PATIENT MAN AND THE HONEST WHORE*

The skull in Dekker and Middleton's *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* evokes anonymity, typical identity, and specific identity—and in doing so, reveals itself to be an actant of tragedy in a network of enacted comedy. The play opens with the Duke of Milan holding a mock funeral for his daughter, Infelice. She and Hippolito, the son of the Duke's sworn enemy, are in love, and so, with the help of a doctor, the Duke has given Infelice a sleeping potion so that she will appear dead long enough to convince Hippolito of his beloved's demise. When she wakes, her father tells her that she had fainted upon hearing the news of Hippolito's death, and immediately sends her away to Bergamo. Distraught at Infelice's death, Hippolito threatens the Duke, but is eventually calmed by his friend Matteo, whereupon he declares that once a week he will lock himself in his room so that he will not even glimpse another woman. There, he plans to "meditate / On nothing but my Infelice's end, / Or on a dead man's skull draw out mine own."[48] This sentence is striking in its possibilities. In the first clause, Hippolito plans to remember Infelice's death. As an alternative to this, though, he suggests in the sentence's second clause that he could instead use a skull to "draw out mine own" end. "Draw" has a host of meanings: "on" could be a synonym of "of," a usage "common in literary use to c1750,"[49] and so it could be the case that Hippolito plans to derive his own ending from the skull itself, to use it, in effect, as a memento mori token. The possibility also exists, though, that "draw" might be a synonym for "extract": Hippolito might plan to use the skull as a weapon, the means of his own suicide or the Duke's murder, just as Pollard suggests in her declaration that revenge tragedies tend to turn

[48] Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, ed. Paul Mulholland, in *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2007), 1.129–31. All other references to the play refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

[49] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "on, *prep*."

severed body parts into props.[50] The traditional uses of the skull, in other words, collide with and expand into its theatrical uses: the promise to "on a dead man's skull draw out mine own" is simultaneously philosophical and dynamic, as Hippolito suggests that he will not only think of his own death but use the skull to bring murder or suicide about somehow, as if he were an avenger in a revenge tragedy.

Nine scenes later, though the connotation of revenge tragedy lingers, the philosophical aspect seems to win out as Hippolito's servant opens the scene by setting out "a skull, a picture [of Infelice], a book, and a taper" (10.0 s.d.). Hippolito's meditation on Infelice begins with a comparison of the portrait's merits with those of the supposedly deceased woman's, a juxtaposition that quickly moves into a consideration of the longevity of the picture's material:

> here the worms will feed,
> As in her coffin. Hence, then, idle art,
> True love's best pictured in a true-love's heart.
> Here art thou drawn, sweet maid, till this be dead,
> So that thou liv'st twice, twice art buried.
>
> (10.54–58)

Setting aside Infelice's portrait, Hippolito next turns to the anonymous skull. Though he has previously promised to hide himself away and use the skull to "draw out" his own end, and though the reflection on his lover's portrait suggests a natural segue into taking advantage of the skull's anonymity and using it as a memento mori token, Hippolito is not content to let the skull remain anonymous. Instead, he questions the skull's identity from the start: "Perhaps this shrewd pate was mine enemy's. / 'Las! Say it were, I need not fear him now," for no matter the man's

[50] Pollard, "Tragedy and Revenge," 66.

qualities: "See, see, they're all eaten out; here's not left one! / How clean they're picked away! To the bare bone!" (10.60–61, 66–67). Like Lucca and Hamlet before him, Hippolito views the skull's anonymity as an invitation to ascribe an identity to it; in the absence of any concrete information, he gives it a typical one, wondering if "perhaps" it belonged to a nameless enemy.

In Hippolito's eyes—indeed, in the audience's as well—the portrait and skull are clear indicators of identity and anonymity, respectively, for there is no indication that Hippolito has any enemy besides the Duke. By placing the two in such close proximity, however, the props and their connotations are provokingly conflated. The very objects themselves, placed on a table with a book and a candle, are the matter of emblematic portraiture: if "certain kinds of scenes . . . are more likely to produce emblematic stage pictures" that an audience would have been expected to interpret,[51] then surely the tableau of these four iconic objects would have invited an analysis of their interrelationships. Just as the objects' spatial relation encourages conflation, Hippolito's own language likewise blends the innominate skull with Infelice's portrait: in noting that the worms "will feed" on the picture "as in her coffin," Hippolito mirrors Matteo's language in the play's first scene. "Where is the body?" Hippolito asks a few lines after the mock funeral has passed over the stage; "The body, as the Duke spake very wisely," Matteo replies, "is gone to be wormed" (1.67–69). *The Patient Man* thus emphasizes that just as the anonymous skulls in Lucca invite the ascription of a typical identity, identity itself is inexorably tied to anonymity.

Having created a fictional identity for the anonymous skull, Hippolito goes on to use the prop as a memento mori token. In this, however, he only touches on his own death in passing. Instead, he compares the portrait and the skull so closely that their similarities, rather than their differences, are underscored:

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[51] Janette Dillon, *Shakespeare and the Staging of English History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 8.

> And must all come to this? Fools, wise, all hither?
> Must all heads thus at last be laid together?
> Draw me my picture, then, thou grave, neat workman,
> After this fashion, not like this; these colours
> In time, kissing but air, will be kissed off.
> But here's a fellow—that which he lays on
> Till doomsday alters not complexion.
> Death's the best painter then; they that draw shapes,
> And live by wicked faces, are but God's apes.
> They come but near the life, and there they stay.
> This fellow draws life too; his art is fuller:
> The pictures which he makes are without colour.
>
> (10.80–91)

The "heads" that must be laid together refers to those of the foolish and wise alike, but in immediately shifting his focus to the picture again, Hippolito draws attention to the skull and Infelice's image as two heads that, no matter whether anonymous or individualized, end up together. Hippolito returns, then, to the notion of death "drawing" out his demise, the audience completely reliant on the actor's gestures to differentiate the referents of "this fashion, not like this," and so drawing attention to the skull and the portrait once more. In the very last words he speaks alone on the stage before being interrupted, Hippolito plays with a different definition of "draw" by casting Death as an artist who "draws life too; his art is fuller." Death draws the life from a living being, of course, but this meaning is subordinated to the notion of Death as an artist

in Hippolito's prolonged insistence on comparing the portrait with the skull—the representation with the actual, a materialization of death and the dead, of anonymity and identity.

The scene is soon broken up by Bellafront, the local courtesan, disguised as a male messenger in order to gain entrance. In an effort to cheer him, Matteo had introduced Hippolito to her, the woman whose virginity Matteo had long ago taken, but Hippolito's castigation of her lifestyle has since resulted in her renunciation of prostitution for love of Hippolito. Bellafront reveals her gender to her beloved's outrage, and assures Hippolito that she will reform her ways: "If not, and that again sin's path I tread, / The grief be mine, the guilt fall on thy head" (10.178–79). In reply, Hippolito flourishes the skull and advises:

> Stay, and take physic for it: read this book,
>
> Ask counsel of this head what's to be done;
>
> He'll strike it dead, that 'tis damnatïon
>
> If you turn Turk again. O, do it not!
>
> (10.180–83)

Just as the skull has been conflated with the portrait, it is now deemed to be a "book" in which Bellafront might read her own demise—but it is also recognized to be an anonymous male with agency, a "he" that "will strike" Bellafront's sin dead should she ever return to prostitution.

Hippolito's indecision in perceiving the skull as an anonymous object with a fictional backstory or as the remains of an individual is all the more salient for the scene's conflation of skull, portrait, and finally book. Redolent of a tableau, the stage picture these objects compose and the dialogue surrounding them invites a perspective in which the skull lives and the portrait dies, in which the anonymous is imagined as a fictional and a specific individual alike, and in which the individual becomes anonymous. This stage picture, however, proves to be a false lead

in much the same manner as the funeral at the play's open is revealed to be a sham: in the end of *The Patient Man*, the doctor, spurned by the Duke, informs both Infelice and Hippolito of the truth; the lovers meet in Bedlam Monastery, and are married despite the last-minute arrival of her father, who then forces Matteo to marry Bellafront. This comic ending, though surprising, is actually in keeping with the play's primary genre: *The Patient Man* is, it seems, a comedy with a tragic framework.

In the first published editions of this drama, the title is *The Honest Whore, with, The Humours of the Patient Man, and the Longing Wife*[52] or *The Converted Curtezan*, with the same subtitle.[53] Editorial convention "since 1840 has assigned the play the title *The Honest Whore, Part I*"; in fact, the recent Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino compendium of Middleton's works is the first to adopt *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* as the play's title, in an attempt to recover the name "that on the testimony of contemporaries had currency at or near the time of the play's original stage performance."[54] Until 2007, in other words, every published edition of the play emphasized the plot of Bellafront—but the bulk of the story is that of the merchant Candido, a man so imperturbable that his wife attempts, in increasingly outlandish ways, to force him to lose his temper, only to repent when she places him in Bedlam and must appeal to the

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[52] Thomas Dekker [and Thomas Middleton], *The Honest Whore, with, The Humours of the Patient Man, and the Longing Wife* (London, 1604).

[53] *The Converted Curtezan, with the Humours of the Patient Man, and the Longing Wife* (Folger Shakespeare Library, title page missing, 1604).

[54] Mulholland's introduction to *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* in *Thomas Middleton*, ed. Taylor and Lavagnino, 280. Mulholland goes on to point out that this collection is the first to adopt *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* as the play's title in an attempt to recover the name "that on the testimony of contemporaries had currency at or near the time of the play's original stage performance" (280).

Duke to set him free. The original published titles of the drama, as well as the opening of the play itself, frame the play as a tragedy: the story of Hippolito and Infelice is so similar to *Romeo and Juliet* that the parallel would inevitably have resonated with an early modern audience. Both plots, after all, involve two lovers kept apart by familial prejudice, prominently feature a sleeping potion that produces a deathlike state, and include a helpful friar. The audience, set up by title and opening to expect a tragic end, must have felt their expectation shored up in Hippolito's interactions with the skull and Infelice's portrait. Hippolito's promise to "meditate / On nothing but my Infelice's end, / Or on a dead man's skull draw out mine own" is nearly the oath of a revenger, a promise to generate a plan of action—perhaps Hippolito's own end or the Duke's, perhaps even to use the skull itself as a weapon. The skull's appearance later in the plot furthers this expectation, for the prop both represents and materializes anonymity and identity, and so though the play ends on a comic note, the skull of *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* is a salient actant of tragedy in the play's generic network.

THE "TRAGIC BUSINESS" OF *THE REVENGER'S TRAGEDY*

The script of *The Revenger's Tragedy* begins with Vindice carrying Gloriana's skull onto the stage, addressing it as "Thou sallow picture of my poisoned love, / My study's ornament, thou shell of death."[55] At first, Vindice treats Gloriana's skull as an innominate symbol of mortality,

[55] Thomas Middleton and Cyril Tourneur, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, ed. R. A. Foakes, Revels Student Editions (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 1.1.14–15. All references to *The Revenger's Tragedy* refer to this edition and will henceforth be cited parenthetically. I have chosen to treat the play as authored by Middleton alone, following the lead of MacDonald P. Jackson, who notes that "criticism has been bedevilled by the wholly unreliable Edward Archer's mistaken ascription . . . of Middleton's play to Cyril Tourneur." See Jackson's introduction to *The Revenger's Tragedy* in *Thomas Middleton*, ed. Taylor and Lavagnino, 546.

even a mimetic representation, as if forgetting or ignoring its identity, "addressing this as-yet-anonymous skull as an icon"[56]: the skull is a "picture," as well as "My study's ornament." It is, in other words, both the subject of "study" and, quite possibly, an ornament taken from his physical study, where it could act, as Lucca prescribes, as a memento mori token. From here, though, Vindice acknowledges that the skull was "Once the bright face of my betrothèd lady" (1.1.16), an instance of "semiotic instability"[57] that is, in fact, a keen awareness of the skull's identity.[58] Vindice remembers:

> When life and beauty naturally filled out
> These ragged imperfections,
> When two heaven-pointed diamonds were set
> In those unsightly rings.
>
> (1.1.17–20)

From this reminiscence of "when thou wert apparelled in thy flesh" (1.1.31), Vindice pivots back to representing the skull as an anonymous icon, remarking that in its stark reminder of death, the

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[56] Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny," 159.

[57] Karin S. Coddon, "'For Show or Useless Property': Necrophilia and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," *ELH* 61, no. 1 (Spring 1994): 77.

[58] Peter Stallybrass points out that Gloriana is "the name not only of Vindice's beloved but also of the nostalgic idealization of Elizabeth I," a connection that Steven Mullaney takes up to discuss female aging sexuality as a memento mori with regard to Elizabeth's waning years and Middleton alike. See Stallybrass, "Reading the Body: *The Revenger's Tragedy* and the Jacobean Theater of Consumption," *Renaissance Drama* 18 (1987): 143; and Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny." Gloriana's skull also has resonances outside of the play that an educated audience may well have recognized: while Mullaney connects the skull with the idealized Elizabeth I, this iteration stems from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*. This skull is not only Gloriana and Death, but Spenser's Gloriana and as well as Spenser's Elizabeth.

skull acts as a "terror to fat folks, / To have their costly three-piled flesh worn off / As bare as this" (1.1.45–47)—a reference, perhaps, to the danse macabre. Vindice's brother Hippolito further emphasizes the skull's anonymous features: his first words are to ask if Vindice is "Still sighing o'er death's vizard?" (1.1.50), and though "vizard" primarily indicates a disguise, it also connotes "a face or countenance suggestive of a mask."[59] The skull, then, is both the disguise and the face itself, a mimetic representation of death and Death's own countenance.[60] In the former case, Hippolito implies that Gloriana's skull wears the mask of death, the individual becoming anonymous; in the latter, he ascribes the identity of Death to the skull. Like the tableau in *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, the brothers' language conflates anonymity and identity—though here, neither brother ascribes a typical identity to the skull, whether for practical or philosophical reasons (unlike the skull of *The Patient Man*, this skull's identity is known; unlike Hamlet, Vindice is more of a scheming than a thinking man). Both Hippolito and Vindice, then, simultaneously recognize the skull's symbolic resonances in its anonymity while underscoring that it does have an identity—though whether that identity is Gloriana or Death itself is left ambiguous, especially since the name "Gloriana" is not uttered until the skull's appearance in Act Three.

When Gloriana's skull returns in the third act, it has been dressed up by Vindice to trick the lecherous Duke into kissing it. Once again, the skull's anonymity is highlighted as Vindice provides a blazon of the prop—"Here's an eye / Able to tempt a great man," and there is "A pretty hanging lip" (3.5.54–56)—before its former being is recalled by Hippolito: "Is this the

[59] *OED*, 1st ed., s.v. "vizard, *n*. and *adj*."

[60] To this point, Michael Neill points out that "in late medieval and Renaissance art Death is not merely imagined, but in the most literal sense *envisaged*, given a face." See *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5.

form that living shone so bright?" (3.5.67). And once again, Vindice then chooses to view the skull in the light of anonymity, lighting into a speech that illustrates how "a cosmetically enhanced visage figures not as a sign of sexual allure but of the skull."[61] "Does the silk-worm expend her yellow labours / For thee? For thee does she undo herself?" he asks; "Does every proud and self-affecting dame / Camphor her face for this?" (3.5.72–73, 84–85). From here, though, the skull's status takes a novel turn:

> Now to my tragic business. Look you, brother,
> I have not fashioned this only for show
> And useless property; no, it shall bear a part
> E'en in its own revenge. This very skull,
> Whose mistress the Duke poisoned, with this drug,
> The mortal curse of the earth, shall be revenged
> In the like strain, and kiss his lips to death.
> As much as the dumb thing can, he shall feel:
> What fails in poison, we'll supply in steel.
>
> (3.5.99–107)

Vindice's language is obviously metatheatrical, but it is also an interrogation of ontology. "This very skull, whose mistress the Duke poisoned" indicates the fraught relationship between body and identity: the word "mistress" refers to both "the female head of a family, household, or other establishment" and "a female possessor or owner *of* something."[62] Whether Gloriana's skull is a person (that is, a servant to her) or a thing owned by her is ambiguous. Vindice's declaration that

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[61] Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny," 148.

[62] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "mistress, *n.* and *adj*."

"As much as the dumb thing can, he shall feel" is similarly enigmatic, for the referent of "the dumb thing" is unclear. The thing could well be the skull—it cannot speak, and is seemingly an object—and in this instance, Vindice would seem to look into the Duke's future, remarking that as much as Gloriana's skull can feel anything, so shall the Duke in time. The declaration that the skull is no mere "useless property" weakens this argument, though, and so the "dumb thing" might well be the Duke: the poison will test the limits of the hated man's ability to feel anything. Karin S. Coddon argues that "the whole of *The Revenger's Tragedy* is given over to 'show and useless property'—props, things of nothing, theatrically manipulable but inherently meaningless. What if, the play seems to be brutally suggesting, the body itself were no more than a prop?"[63] Though a skull is hardly inherently meaningless, Coddon raises one side of the issue; the other is not to ask what if the body were a prop, but what if the prop acted like a body. Like the language in the play's first scene, Vindice here sees the skull as both object and subject, anonymous and individual. The Duke is certainly made an object, but conversely, the skull is recognized as a subject: for Vindice, "the skull still retains its former subjectivity."[64]

The eroticism of Gloriana's skull has long been discussed.[65] Graham Holderness suggests, for example, that in passing off the skull as a living woman, "the grotesque simulation of vitality again draws attention to the true lifelessness of the remains."[66] Vindice insists, though, that the remains are hardly lifeless: they obviously do not possess a pulse or even flesh, but they

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[63] Coddon, "Necrophilia and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," 85.

[64] Dudley, "Conferring with the Dead," 290.

[65] See, for instance, Stallybrass' "Reading the Body"; Mullaney's "Mourning and Misogyny"; and Gabriel A. Rieger, *Sex and Satiric Tragedy in Early Modern England: Penetrating Wit* (Farnham, Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2009), especially 66–75.

[66] Holderness, "I Covet Your Skull," 225.

have a role to play. Gloriana's skull is simultaneously property and person in a distinctly tragic manner: as a weapon, it is "the vehicle of her own revenge,"[67] but it is also a present absence that "shall feel" as much as the Duke himself. Indeed, Vindice's explicit remark that Gloriana's skull is not a "useless property" belies a quiet truth in the play's end. As Antonio questions "how the old Duke came murdered," Vindice declares that "'Twas we two murdered him," referring to himself and Hippolito (5.3.93, 98). "You two?" asks Antonio; "None else, i'faith, my lord. Nay, 'twas well managed" is the reply (5.3.98–99). Antonio orders the brothers' executions, assuming that if they were once willing to kill their ruler, they would do so again, and in this ending, Adrian Streete argues, the "resistance and violence" engendered by Vindice becomes "an iconoclastic surplus of meaning that fuels the discourse of revenge drama but which eventually becomes non-meaning. . . . When there is no longer a distinction between subject and object, death is perhaps the only state that makes ideological sense."[68] Vengeance, in short, is the inevitable end of an avenger—but in this, Gloriana's skull is ignored. Given Vindice's emphasis on the skull's role in the Duke's murder, his declaration that "'Twas we two murdered him. . . . None else, i'faith" is perhaps more complicated than it seems. Were Gloriana a living character, we would naturally see Vindice as covering up the truth, and rather obviously at that, to protect the woman he loves—we do not because we assume that she can only be seen as dead. Vindice and Hippolito both imply, however, that they see her skull as both dead and, in some manner, alive: the skull, feeling as much as the Duke, has a part to play. The body is indeed a prop in *The*

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[67] Mullaney, "Mourning and Misogyny," 160.

[68] Adrian Streete, *Protestantism and Drama in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 217.

Revenger's Tragedy, but the skull is also a body, one whose role in the tragedy is silently omitted in Vindice's confession.

The Revenger's Tragedy clearly plays with and exaggerates the tropes of revenge tragedy, set forth in *The Spanish Tragedy* and taken up in *Hamlet*; Middleton's play, David L. Frost suggests, "might well have been written by Hamlet," for it is the story of an avenger without moral qualms.[69] Vindice, though, takes the interrogation of anonymity and identity present in *Hamlet* and *The Patient Man* to a nearly satiric level, for he recognizes Gloriana's skull to be not only innominate and individual, but active in the narrative. Coddon avers that the play "does not disembody death by rendering it into a discourse as does that paradigm of proto-modern subjectivity, Hamlet; rather, the play theatricalizes death in the specific, material dead body."[70] Gloriana's skull, though, does embody death: it is death's vizard and a symbol to frighten fat folks, just as much as it is Gloriana. Both the means and the cause of the Duke's demise, Gloriana's skull is both innominate and individualized, perspectives that both play roles in *The Revenger's Tragedy*. Though it appropriates the connotations of anonymity and typical identity from the danse macabre, ars moriendi, and memento mori tokens, Gloriana's skull is also alive in a way that is completely different than these predecessors. This skull is, in fact, an explicit actant in the enacted tragedy: Vindice categorically announces that Gloriana's role as property and shareholder, anonymous skull and individual person, is his "tragic business" (3.5.99). Indeed, the skull's role is the tragic business of the entire play.

CONCLUSION

[69] David L. Frost, *The School of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 41.

[70] Coddon, "Necrophilia and *The Revenger's Tragedy*," 72.

The relationship between skulls and tragedy is so prevalent that one need only cast an eye over a short range of contemporary critical books on early modern drama before lighting on a skull on the front cover: Yorick's role in *Hamlet* has welded the two already-related topics together. This is hardly surprising, as Michael Neill argues that "the skull acts as a peculiar and sinisterly attractive mirror for the gazer, drawing endless narratives into itself only to cancel them."[71] Skulls can invite narratives—the typical identities ascribed to the skulls in Lucca's *A Dialogue of Dying Well* and in *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore* are obvious examples—but these narratives are hardly cancelled simply because they are drawn into a skull. Though anonymous (and thereby typical) skulls are often intended to remind their viewer of mortality, on the early modern stage the skull is also ascribed an identity whose narrative past reverberates in the present. Yorick's mortal life is over, but as a memory and as a skull alike, he still has a tragic role to play in Hamlet's actions.

This fusion of skull and person, only glimpsed in the Renaissance, is nearly ubiquitous today—nearly, in that the individual aspect of the skull has overwritten its innominate nature. Just as Mark Rylance could not conceive of Andre Tchaikowsky's skull as being both the pianist's and Yorick's, Kenneth Branagh's *Hamlet* explains away the gravedigger's identification of Yorick's skull by giving it buck teeth and then presenting a flashback that focuses on these teeth in the head of the living, laughing Yorick.[72] Likewise, though the script of *The Revenger's Tragedy* begins, amid a dumb show, with Vindice carrying Gloriana's skull onto the stage, Alex Cox's 2002 film opens with Christopher Eccleston as Vindice descending into the city's tombs, locating his beloved's resting place, and thence retrieving her skull

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[71] Neill, *Issues of Death*, 235.

[72] *Hamlet*, directed by Kenneth Branagh (1996; Burbank, CA: Warner Home Video, 2007), DVD.

(conveniently, for portability and gender identity alike, the only one with hair still attached).[73] Though initially and recurrently anonymous in their early modern scripts, both cinematic portrayals take pains to assure the viewer that neither Hamlet nor Vindice is mistaken in attributing the proper identity to the skull at hand—that these skulls are not actually anonymous. In this, Branagh and Cox implicitly side with Rylance: just as the stage actor could not ascribe an individual identity to a skull that already possessed one, so do the films insist that skulls have personal identities so well-defined that there is no possibility of anonymity.[74]

The danse macabre underscored the anonymity of death; ars moriendi texts concentrated on an individual's preparation for it, asking that a typical identity be ascribed to memento mori tokens in order to derive a lesson of mortality. On the stage, though, skulls are recognized to be anonymous and to belong to typical individuals—but they are something else as well, something distinctly tragic. For Shakespeare, Dekker, and Middleton, the most prominent skulls are hardly innominate objects: Hamlet, the Hippolitos, and Vindice all insist that there is an intrinsic, complicated relationship between identity and anonymity that is brought into focus by the skull, and that thereby materializes tragedy on the stage. By bringing together the iconography and

[73] *The Revenger's Tragedy*, directed by Alex Cox, starring Christopher Eccleston (2002; London: Fantoma, 2003), DVD.

[74] As I write this, the remains of Baby Hope have just been identified as those of four-year-old Anjelica Castillo. Found in a cooler next to a Manhattan highway in 1991, they were buried in St. Raymond's Cemetery under a headstone marked "Baby Hope"; Jerry Giorgio, the case's lead detective, explained that "We weren't going to call her Jane Doe." 'Jane Doe' is obviously an effort to ascribe a temporary identity to anonymous remains; the fact that even this name was not individual enough for the child is important, for it speaks to our own intense desire that remains be not only respected, but viewed as those of an identified individual. See Michael Wilson, "At the Gravestone of 'Baby Hope,' Investigators Who Never Let Go" *The New York Times*, October 8, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/09/nyregion/at-the-gravestone-of-baby-hope-investigators-who-never-let-go.html.

discourses of the danse macabre, ars moriendi, and memento mori only to appropriate and expand on them, the onstage skull acts as a locus of cultural tradition and ontology. In early modern England, a skull might be anonymous or typical, but in Renaissance theater, it is also an individual identity. The skull is, in short, a generic actant, a material maker of tragedy in theatrical production.

In the 1980s, several prominent scholars viewed early modern interiority with suspicion, claiming that "a conception of personal inwardness hardly existed at all in Renaissance England."[75] Though Hamlet's insistence to the contrary is typically brought up, we might also look to the role of the skull in the theater. The skull not only indicates tragedy—consider, if somewhat guiltily, the Shakespearean fantasy in *The Last Action Hero*, where Arnold Schwarzenegger, playing Hamlet, briefly contemplates a skull in his hand before whipping it through the air and knocking out a guard, the skull smashing in his face, the scene of tragedy becoming an action movie[76]—but helps to create the tragic genre. Theodore Spencer argues that early modern English tragedy was "far more concerned with death than any drama that had previously existed,"[77] a trend that Neill explains "reflected the strain of adjusting the psychic

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[75] Katharine Eisaman Maus contests this view and cites Francis Barker's *The Tremulous Private Body* (New York: Methuen, 1984); Catherine Belsey's *The Subject of Tragedy: Identity and Difference in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Methuen, 1985); Jean E. Howard's "The New Historicism of Renaissance Studies," *English Literary Renaissance* 16 (1986); and several other critics in an overview of the push against early modern interiority. See Maus, *Inwardness and the Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 2.

[76] *The Last Action Hero*, directed by John McTiernan, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger (1993; Burbank, CA: Columbia Tristar Home Video, 1997), DVD.

[77] Theodore Spencer, *Death and Elizabethan Tragedy* (1936; repr. New York: Pageant Books, 1960), 232.

economy of an increasingly individualistic society to the stubborn facts of mortality."[78] This tension between anonymity and identity is brought together in the skull and is, in fact, the stuff of tragic interiority, a subjectivity that "arises out of a character's non-identicality to his or her social position."[79] The skull's very appearance demonstrates that it is indeed identical to every other skull—that it is anonymous. On the stage, though, it acquires an identity; *Hamlet*, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy* insist that the skull is not merely an object, but the remains of an individual as well. This simultaneity is hardly a 'trick perspective' of agency, but a key component of enacted tragedy, for the onstage skull encapsulates the non-identicality of the individual even as it underscores the irrevocable anonymity of death.

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[78] Neill, *Issues of Death*, 30.

[79] Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., "Tragic Subjectivities," in *The Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy*, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 75.

Chapter Four

"Never Aim to Grieve, But Better Men":

The Philosopher's Stone, Corruption, and Theater in *The Alchemist*

If a prop does not appear on the stage, is it a prop? If something does not exist—indeed, has never existed—can it properly said to be a thing? to be? Arjun Appadurai points out that "contemporary Western common sense, building on various historical traditions in philosophy, law, and natural science, has a strong tendency to oppose 'words' and 'things,'" and yet immediately goes on to speak of things exclusively as material objects.[1] According to Heidegger, there are three categories of "things." Tangible objects are clearly things, he argues; the "*narrower* or limited meaning of 'thing' is that which can be touched, read, or seen, i.e., what is present-at-hand." When deciding something, though, we might say that "it depends 'above all things' on this or that consideration"; if "a betrayal is in the air we say, 'There are uncanny things going on'"; and "when we say 'things aren't right,' 'thing' is used in a much broader sense." In this broader definition, "thing" means "every affair or transaction, something that is in this or that condition, the things that happen in the world—occurrences, events." Things can be either tangible objects or sets of circumstances.

But what of a theoretical object, a concept, something like the number five, to use Heidegger's example? Such concepts, Heidegger argues, are things "in the *widest* possible sense," a sense that he suggests is an iteration of Kant's thing-in-itself. Whereas Kant's "thing-for-us" is a phenomenon, a tangible object that can be touched (akin to Heidegger's narrowest

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[1] Arjun Appadurai, "Introduction: Commodities and the Politics of Value," in *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. Arjun Appadurai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 4.

definition of 'thing'), Kant's thing-in-itself is "that which is *not* approachable through experience as are the rocks, plants, and animals." This third category of 'thing,' Heidegger expands, is simply "that which is not nothing. We can think *something* by the term and concept of 'God,' but we cannot experience God. . . . God is a thing insofar as He is something at all, an X. Similarly, [a] number is a thing, faith and faithfulness are things."[2] Even if a prop does not appear, then, naming it on the stage makes an audience think of *something*—and so the nonexistent object becomes a stage property.

Previous chapters have examined props that frequently appear on the early modern stage, and that, I have argued, help to constitute the genres of plays: crowns abound in tragedies and history plays, rings are scattered through comedies and tragedies, and even if *Hamlet* was the first play to use skulls, subsequent tragedies made up for the previous dearth. This chapter, though, takes up an object that plays a significant role in a single Renaissance comedy without ever appearing on the stage: the philosopher's stone of Ben Jonson's 1610 play *The Alchemist*. Even without being physically present, this stone permeates the story of the various cons

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[2] Martin Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, trans. W. B. Barton, Jr. and Vera Deutsch (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1967), 4–6. I wish to point out that just as the thing-for-us "is as a thing and also a thing-in-itself, which means that it is recognized absolutely within the absolute knowledge of God," Graham Harman argues that "*beings themselves* are caught up in a continual exchange between" Heidegger's concepts of the present-at-hand and ready-to-hand (i.e., the difference between the Thing and the object, the theoretical musing upon material elements and the unthinking use of an object)—and that it is the nature of the ready-to-hand, which Harman calls "tool-being" to "recede from every view." It is impossible, in other words, for even the Kantian thing-for-us to ever be known: the object always withholds a part of itself, a withdrawal that Harman argues occurs "even on the *inanimate* level. . . . withdrawal is not a specific feature of human temporality, but belongs to *any relation whatsoever*." See Heidegger, *What is a Thing?*, 5; and Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Chicago: Open Court, 2002), 4–5.

perpetuated by Face, Subtle, and Dol in the empty house of Face's master Lovewit; though the trio execute several schemes, the central and most common one is the eponymous con, wherein Face and Subtle promise to create the philosopher's stone for the knight Sir Epicure Mammon as well as for two Anabaptists, Tribulation Wholesome and his disciple Ananias, in exchange for raw materials and payment. Subtle never produces the mythical stone, of course—and yet, by Heidegger's logic, it is nonetheless a thing. This stone is, moreover, an actant in Jonson's play, something "which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events."[3]

Literary critics have linked Jonson's use of alchemy with a host of concepts, for "whatever its limitations as a true science, alchemy has justified itself over and over again as a metaphoric system."[4] Jonathan Haynes reads alchemy as "a neat metaphor for nascent capitalism";[5] Elizabeth Cook argues that Mammon's Marlovian language makes him "an alchemist of sorts";[6] and by now there is a "critical consensus that Lovewit's house functions as a metatheatrical metaphor" for the historical Blackfriars theater as well as the alchemical nature of theater itself.[7] As David Bevington explains, "playwriting is like alchemy: the dramatist conspires with an acting company to manufacture an exotic dream, for which the spectators must

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[3] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), viii.

[4] Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 136.

[5] Jonathan Haynes, "Representing the Underworld: *The Alchemist*," *Studies in Philology* 86, no. 1 (Winter 1989): 36.

[6] See Elizabeth Cook's introduction to Jonson's *The Alchemist*, ed. Elizabeth Cook, New Mermaids rev. ed. (London: Methuen Drama, 2010), xxv.

[7] Matthew Steggle, "The State of the Art," in *The Alchemist: A Critical Reader*, ed. Erin Julian and Helen Ostovich (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2013), 85.

pay good money only to discover at the end that the whole thing has disappeared."[8] Like the alchemical processes with which it is associated, the role of the philosopher's stone in Jonson's play is overdetermined: both substance and nonsubstance, absent yet present, it is both the product of and the process for alchemy; a metaphor for capitalism, language, and the theater; and the central attraction for three of *The Alchemist*'s intended gulls. The fact that this absent prop cannot be precisely defined or pinned down renders it an imaginative resource for Jonson and for the play's audience.

This chapter will proceed along the three central planes on which the stone works in *The Alchemist*: the cultural material, the enacted dramatic, and the metadramatic planes. I will first explore the cultural material history of alchemy, especially as it relates to the philosopher's stone, wherein it is imagined to be a mechanism capable of bringing about perfection. This history is exploited in the enacted drama of Jonson's play: the perfection that the stone was believed to be able to bring about is recognized by *The Alchemist*'s characters, but they proceed to dream of using it for corrupt purposes. To these planes, I will add a metatheatrical lens by exploring how Jonson's use of the stone is related to his perceptions of theater itself. *The*

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[8] David Bevington, "The Major Comedies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, ed. Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 84. Ian Donaldson links the play with its theater even more concretely. A plague of "unusual severity" had forced the playhouses to close for nearly four months in 1610, so that Jonson's audience "may well have felt some of the nervousness experienced by Lovewit," and "*The Alchemist* is likely to have been performed at Blackfriars, in the same district that the play is set," Donaldson emphasizes, and so "through these conjunctions of time and place, Jonson creates a suggestive parallel between the activities of the three rogues . . . and the activities of the King's Men themselves, operating in another house in Blackfriars (or is it perhaps the same house?): the theatre." See *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 245–46.

Alchemist is frequently viewed by critics as a mitigation of the playwright's thitherto thorny relationship with the stage, with alchemy as a metaphor for theater—but the absence of the philosopher's stone evokes a more dubious attitude, especially when contemporary theories of comedy are considered. Jonson employs the stone as an emblem of the dramatic script: though absent from performance, it is nonetheless at the heart of the play; though able to perfect, it is all-too-susceptible to corrupted usages. The philosopher's stone, in short, contributes to *The Alchemist*'s comedy, captures the early modern theory of comedy as a mechanism of corruption and perfection alike, and reveals that Jonson doubts the ability of enacted drama to better his audiences.

CALCINATION

When and where the study of alchemy began is unknown.[9] One theory suggests that it commenced "somewhere in the Middle East, perhaps in Mesopotamia, after which it spread to Egypt, Greece, and the Orient" as an offshoot of metalworking—"known to have been practiced as early as 3500 B.C."; another, that alchemy began in China as early as the fourth century B.C., "evidenced by the fact that an injunction prohibiting counterfeiting gold and threatening

[9] William R. Newman has argued that "the term 'alchemy' needs to be rethought," since Renaissance writers used it as "a synonym for 'chymistry,' a discipline that included iatrochemistry and a host of technologies" until the close of the seventeenth century. Newman acknowledges, though, that the word "was strongly associated with the transmutation of metals and other substances in the Middle Ages, both before and after it came to be associated with medicine," and for the sake of simplicity I will use "alchemy" throughout this piece, with the understanding that, like many sciences, its methods, subdisciplines, and even ambitions overlap with contemporary areas of study. See *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), xiii.

offenders with dire punishment was issued in 144 B.C."[10] Early modern England's conception of alchemy, though, seems to have been derived from Greece. Aristotle's *On Generation and Corruption* relates the four classical elements of the world—water, air, earth, and fire—to senses, reasoning that each element "was itself composed of two separate 'qualities.'" Water is cold and wet; air, hot and wet; earth, cold and dry; and fire, hot and dry. Alchemy was based on the theory that by "exchanging one or both of their qualities, alchemists could change the elements themselves into another element. Water (cold and wet) became air (hot and wet) when the quality 'cold' was exchanged for the quality 'hot.' . . . Aristotelian natural philosophy made elemental transmutation one of its key postulates."[11] This philosophy is obviously predicated on the notion that all four elements are made of essentially the same substance, that there is a "*prima materia* from which all visible, material objects are derived"[12]—and so, if "every existing thing is connected with every other existing thing by virtue of its creation from the same underlying 'stuff,'" that stuff, the *prima materia*, is "'pure potential,' *capable* of undergoing differentiation and diversification."[13] Aristotle proposed two complications, however: when earth became fire, and water became air, he noted the appearance of "smoky earth" and "watery

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[10] Stanton J. Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1996), 12.

[11] Bruce T. Moran, *Distilling Knowledge: Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 26.

[12] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 17.

[13] Joseph P. Farrell, *The Philosophers' Stone: Alchemy and the Secret Research for Exotic Matter* (Port Townsend, WA: Feral House, 2009), 37.

vapor"—smoke and steam, we would say today. These "intermediate substances," Aristotle posited, could become "the various metals and minerals of the world" when combined.[14]

When Alexandria fell in 642, "the Moslems came into possession of the corpus of Greek philosophical and scientific knowledge" and proceeded to further that knowledge.[15] Jabir ibn Hayyan—the name signed to many scientific treatises,[16] westernized as 'Geber'—an eighth- or ninth-century scholar, appears to have been the first to characterize Aristotle's 'smoky earth' and 'watery vapor' as sulfur and mercury.[17] The hot, dry sulfur and cold, wet mercury, Jabir argued, were the parents of all metals—though 'sulfur' and 'mercury' should be considered more metaphorical than literal, John Read argues, understood as "the property of combustibility or the spirit of fire" and "the mineral spirit of metals," respectively.[18] Due to these properties, Jabir posited that combining sulfur and mercury would ultimately lead to the philosopher's stone if the elements were purified through distillation. "Impure sulphur and mercury could produce only the baser metals, such as iron and tin; parent principles of higher purity would lead to silver and gold"[19]; and finally, "when each of the two principles was of superfine purity they yielded the Philosopher's Stone," a substance "so much purer than ordinary 'gold from the mines' that a

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[14] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 26.

[15] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 14.

[16] Linden points out that "Jabir is now rejected as the true author of all of the works that bear his name," and that many of the writings appear to have been the work of a tenth-century school while later works appear to have been written in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries under that name. See *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 15.

[17] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 26.

[18] John Read, *Through Alchemy to Chemistry: A Procession of Ideas & Personalities* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1957), 18.

[19] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 15–16.

small quantity of it could, by virtue of a species of leavening, transmute or 'tinge' an indefinite quantity of a base metal into ordinary gold."[20]

This theory of metallic transmutation was bolstered by the medieval and early Renaissance belief in animism, "the notion that not just animals and plants but also minerals and metals were essentially active and able to grow."[21] The reappearance in the fifteenth century of the works of Hermes Trismegistus, believed to have been an ancient Egyptian and a contemporary of Moses, had repercussions throughout Renaissance culture, but especially for alchemy, for "hermeticism was closely associated with the alchemical tradition" through the medieval period; indeed, it was speculated that Trismegistus' "religious and esoteric knowledge had been passed to Orpheus and then on to Pythagoras and Plato."[22] Hermes' work, legendarily found in his tomb either by Alexander the Great or Sarah, wife of Abraham, was considered "the most sacred book of alchemy, revealing cryptically the means of producing the philosopher's stone," and alchemists in Italy and England alike traced their animistic position to it.[23] The idea that everything contains a vital principle is of course also a Platonic one, and Aristotle's argument "that all things in nature sought after the perfection of their being" similarly

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[20] Read, *Through Alchemy to Chemistry*, 18.

[21] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 29.

[22] Like Jabir ibn Hayyan, this is not entirely correct. The works of Hermes Trismegistus were actually written in the "third or fourth century AD," which accounts for their "pronounced Platonic influences." Though this was discovered in 1614, it was an inconvenient truth for the philosophy's proponents, "and the *Hermetica* continued to be influential throughout the seventeenth century." See Margaret Healy, "Protean Bodies: Literature, Alchemy, Science and English Revolutions," in *Renaissance Transformations: The Making of English Writing (1500–1650)*, ed. Margaret Healy and Thomas Healy (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 164, 165.

[23] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 20, 23.

contributed to Renaissance alchemists' ideas: if, given enough time, metals buried within the earth naturally "all tend toward their respective greatest purity and perfection, namely gold or silver, dependent on their constituents," then alchemists merely sought to accelerate a natural process.[24]

Exactly how to speed that process was the problem, and so alchemical procedures are amazingly varied. While Jabir had argued that combining distillates from multiple materials would produce the philosopher's stone, alchemists in medieval Europe—notably Raymond Lull and John of Rupescissa, thirteenth- and fourteenth-century Franciscan friars, and Roger Bacon, a thirteenth-century English scientist—operated on the principle that the stone was "the end product of a series of distillations (usually of one substance only) gradually increasing in purity," progressing to the purest substance of all: the 'fifth essence,' "a universal medicine created by art and found nowhere in nature." Lull's alchemical work emphasized "the spiritual character of the true alchemist who is inspired and enlightened through divine revelation," but insisted that the alchemist must start with gold and silver, "viewed as the rudiments of perfection." In contrast, Rupescissa argued that "the actual material from which the fifth essence was to be derived did not matter as much as the procedure or process applied in preparing it," so that, as soon it was discovered, the right process would derive the fifth essence "from a variety of materials, including human blood, animals, herbs, fruits, and roots." If everything is fashioned from *prima materia*, after all, then the alchemist's material is irrelevant: the production of the stone depends upon the right process. For his part, Bacon proposed that finding the *prima materia* and "separating from it the four elements and refining and reuniting them again would . . . produce a

[24] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 29.

perfect thing capable of bestowing its perfection on everything else," whether gold or "an elixir of life, the mother of medicines."[25]

The thirteenth-century text *The Mirror of Alchemy*, long attributed to Bacon, explicitly brings together the two seemingly disparate benefits of the stone on its first page, where the author of the work defines alchemy as "a science teaching how to make and compound a certaine medicine, which is called *Elixir*, the which when it is cast vpon metals or imperfect bodies, doth fully perfect them in the verie proiection."[26] This combination of wealth and health dates back at least to "the biblical account of Moses' requiring the Israelites to *drink* the refined gold from the Golden Calf"; Chinese alchemy likewise lays claim to "alchemical gold being able to prolong life."[27] Though the thirteenth-century scholar (and teacher of Thomas Aquinas) Albertus Magnus "used the term medicine at times interchangeably with elixir" without ever indicating that "he was looking for a medicine in the sense of an agent to cure people of disease,"[28] alchemy was often associated with medicine by the time of Bacon. This link was further strengthened by Paracelsus and "the beginning of the era of iatrochemistry, with its concentration on medicines chemically prepared and derived from minerals,"[29] for "with Paracelsus alchemy had shifted

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[25] Ibid., 11–25.

[26] Roger Bacon, *The Mirror of Alchimy* (London, 1597), A3^{r}. On the authorship of *The Mirror of Alchemy*, see Stanton J. Linden's introduction to *The Mirror of Alchimy: Composed by the Thrice-Famous and Learned Fryer, Roger Bachon*, ed. Stanton J. Linden (New York: Garland, 1992).

[27] Farrell, *The Philosophers' Stone*, 76.

[28] Wendy J. Turner, "The Legal Regulation and Licensing of Alchemy in Late Medieval England," in *Law and Magic: A Collection of Essays*, ed. Christine A. Corcos (Durham, North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2010), 211.

[29] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 7.

from a search for gold to a quest for a better pharmacopoeia. Gold in its liquid form (*aurum potabile*) would be a remedy for all diseases and help to produce the elixir of long life."[30] Long life, but not immortality: though "following Bacon, the pseudo-Lull, and others, the stone was thought able to maintain human health and thus prolong life, it was *not* considered an 'elixir of immortality' as some popular treatments of alchemy claim."[31] Around the advent of the fifteenth century, parts of Rupescissa's work were incorporated with writings (wrongly) attributed to Lull and published, under Lull's name, as *Concerning the Secrets of Nature or the Fifth Essence*. Hugely popular and translated into several languages, this text was "now clearly directed toward producing metallic transmutations by virtue of creating a Philosophers' Stone rather than addressed to making medicines."[32]

Just as there is no agreement on how to produce the stone or even what the stone itself could produce, there is likewise no consensus regarding exactly what the philosopher's stone looks like—even outside of *The Alchemist*, its physical aspects are purely theoretical. John Edward Mercer cautions that the word 'stone' should "not be taken in its strict sense, but rather as equivalent to the more abstract term 'substratum'—the something which underlies and supports. It was applied to any substance—powder, liquid, solid—that was supposed to have the magisterial power of transmuting."[33] Some authors thought the stone to be "a heavy, shining powder, with a strong and pleasant odour"; when the powder was red, it could change things to

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[30] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 228.

[31] Lawrence M. Principe, *The Secrets of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 72.

[32] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 21.

[33] John Edward Mercer, *Alchemy: Its Science and Romance* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1921), 135.

gold, but when white, to silver.[34] There is an array of other descriptions: for Paracelsus, it is "a solid body of the colour of a ruby, transparent, flexible, and nevertheless breaking like glass"; Helvetius "gives it the colour of sulphur"; and Berigard de Pisa "is very precise, telling us it is the colour of a poppy and smelling like burnt sea-salt."[35] The play's characters, then, cover their bases in defining the stone as an amorphous body that changes with its user's needs. "'Tis a stone," explains Face, "And not a stone; a spirit, a soul, and a body; / Which if you do dissolve, it is dissolved; / If you coagulate, it is coagulated."[36] The very concepts of alchemy transmute through the centuries: the philosopher's stone is both the agent of the process that changes metal to gold and the culmination of a process; its production depends on the material, the process, or their combination; and, once created, it can speed the natural progression of any metal to gold and cure any disease. Pinning down the ontology, the production, the appearance, and the very purpose of the philosopher's stone was an impossible task even in Jonson's day—and these ambiguities are purposefully exploited by Face and Subtle, who promise a product that is charged with cultural cachet yet is tantalizingly always just out of reach.

Centuries later, it is easy to deride alchemy and to scoff at its processes, pretensions, and plans, no matter how many illustrious names were attached to it, but medieval and Renaissance England took it quite seriously. Henry VI "began licensing individuals to practice the transmutation of metals" in 1444 as a means of bolstering his "financially floundering kingdom,"

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[34] Read, *Through Alchemy to Chemistry*, 29.

[35] Mercer, *Alchemy: Its Science and Romance*, 135–36.

[36] Jonson's *The Alchemist* in *Ben Jonson's Plays and Masques*, 2nd ed., ed. Richard Harp, Norton Critical Editions (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), 2.5.40–43. All subsequent references to *The Alchemist* refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically.

a practice continued by Edward IV,[37] and the renowned John Dee was famously an advisor to Queen Elizabeth. In the sixteenth-century Holy Roman Empire, princes not only hired alchemists "to make medicines, artificial gemstones or pearls, to advise on mining projects or to produce tinctures or powders—often touted as the elusive philosophers' stone," but they did so with contracts "that spelled out in detail the obligations of both parties." These alchemists seem to have truly believed in their capabilities, for "even under torture they refused to admit that they *deliberately* swindled their patrons."[38] Keith Thomas explains that alchemy's insistence that "transmutation could not be accomplished until the adept had purged himself of all vices, particularly of covetousness," rendered alchemy a self-perpetuating science "able to survive innumerable and inevitable disappointments." The seventeenth century, though, ushered in a Cartesian mechanical philosophy that rejected "astrology, chiromancy, alchemy, physiognomy, astral magic and their associates,"[39] and so alchemy and similar practices seem to have been on their way out by the time of Jonson. "King James' opposition to occult tradition diminished the respectability that Renaissance magic had claimed" in Elizabeth's time, Ryan Curtis Friesen writes,[40] and though Thomas asserts that "Magical inquiry possessed some intellectual respectability" through the middle of the seventeenth century, he goes on to liken Jacobean university students' interest in magic as "the equivalent of drug-taking today as the fashionable

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[37] Turner, "The Legal Regulation," 209, 224–25.

[38] Tara E. Nummedal, "The Problem of Fraud in Early Modern Alchemy," in *Shell Games: Studies in Scams, Frauds, and Deceits (1300–1650)*, ed. Mark Crane, Richard Raiswell, and Margaret Reeves (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2004), 44, 53.

[39] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 642, 643.

[40] Ryan Curtis Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (Brighton: Sussex Academic Press, 2010), 79.

temptation for undergraduates."[41] Jonathan Hughes takes up Thomas' belief that the emergence of empiricism relegated magic to "an illicit attempt to harness supernatural powers that occurred outside the sphere of respectable intellectual enquiry," arguing that "one fundamental difference between the late Middle Ages and the Renaissance was the lack in the earlier period of any divide between science and magic"[42]—but this divide between science and magic in the early modern period is not quite as clear as Hughes indicates.

Like mathematics, William Caferro suggests, alchemy was considered a branch of "natural magic": the counterpart of demonic magic, natural magic "allowed access to the hidden powers of nature, the 'occult' in the literal Latin sense of the word, representing the secret meanings of things."[43] After all, Robert Boyle, the seventeenth-century figure hugely influential to modern chemistry, left among his "highly technical directions for making regulus of antimony, corrosive waters, and other products" a recipe that instructed its reader in the ways of transmuting species—namely, how "to make a Toad or Serpent" from the carcass of a duck or goose.[44] Even into the eighteenth century scholars were open to the possibilities of alchemy,[45]

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[41] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 226. Thomas' book, it should be remembered, appeared in 1971.

[42] Jonathan Hughes, *The Rise of Alchemy in Fourteenth-Century England: Plantagenet Kings and the Search for the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Continuum, 2012), 7, 9.

[43] William Caferro, *Contesting the Renaissance* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 201. Linden separates alchemy from natural magic, but notes that, "resting on a common foundation, it was inevitable that the two bodies of knowledge should have many points of contact and that, as a result, attitudes toward them tended to be similar." See *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 21.

[44] Newman, *Promethean Ambitions*, 164.

[45] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, 645–46.

and so despite the Cartesian revolution, early modern scientific theories did not supplant those of the medieval period so much as coexist alongside them for a time.[46]

Attitudes towards alchemy, then, were in flux at the time of *The Alchemist*. Criticism in the mid-twentieth century decried the alchemical language in Jonson's play as "hocus-pocus," obscure speeches that "slow down the action and are even, in a dramatic viewpoint, tedious."[47] Jonas A. Barish argues that Jonson uses "pseudoscientific mumbo jumbo to stand for quackery,"[48] and Brian Gibbons describes the philosopher's stone as "the symbol of the absurdity and sterility at the heart of greed: in itself it is cold, dull, shapeless, unfeeling, dead."[49] At best, such perspectives are colored by a post-Enlightenment feeling of superiority; the fact that *The Alchemist* revolves around fraud hardly indicates that Jonson believed alchemy to be a "supremely and transparently ridiculous" practice, or that he was critical of those believed in it.[50] On the contrary, though John Dee and other famous alchemists are satirized in the play, given the status of alchemy in the early seventeenth century it is possible that "Jonson, like Shakespeare and Donne, saw alchemy as both a legitimate pursuit . . . and as a vehicle for charlatans."[51] Jonson, after all, owned "a copy of *Liber sacer*, also known as the *Sworn Book of Honorius* (one

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[46] Katherine Eggert, "*The Alchemist* and Science," in *Early Modern English Drama: A Critical Companion*, ed. Garrett A. Sullivan, Jr., Patrick Cheney, and Andrew Hadfield (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 201.

[47] Louis Kronenberger, *The Thread of Laughter: Chapters on English Stage Comedy from Jonson to Maugham* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1952), 23, 24.

[48] Jonas A. Barish, *Ben Jonson and the Language of Prose Comedy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 287.

[49] Brian Gibbons, *Jacobean City Comedy: A Study of Satiric Plays by Jonson, Marston and Middleton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968), 170.

[50] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 119. See also Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction*, 88.

[51] Robert M. Schuler, "Jonson's Alchemists, Epicures, and Puritans," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England*, vol. 2, ed. J. Leeds Barroll (1985): 203n2.

of the key books for ritual magic in pre-Reformation England) that had previously been in Dee's possession."[52]

Consider how Face himself, in the heat of an argument, draws a distinction between Subtle's alchemical practice and cozenage:

FACE. When all your alchemy, and your algebra,
Your minerals, vegetals, and animals,
Your conjuring, cozening, and your dozen of trades,
Could not relieve your corpse with so much linen
Would make you tinder, but to see a fire.
I gave you countenance, credit for your coals,
Your stills, your glasses, your materials,
Built you a furnace, drew you customers,
Advanced all your black arts; lent you, besides,
A house to practice in——

SUBTLE. Your master's house!

FACE. Where you have studied the more thriving skill
Of bawdry since.

(1.1.38–49)

Friesen argues that "Jonson demonstrates as a matter of course that Subtle does not perform true alchemy, because true alchemy is impossible"[53]—and yet, before being taken in by Face, Subtle

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[52] Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 247. Donaldson does not clarify exactly when or for how long Jonson owned this *Liber sacer*, though in an earlier book, Donaldson writes that the playwright bought books "avidly, but lacked the means to maintain a stable collection" and was "often obliged through hardship to re-sell them subsequently." See *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 199.

seems to have practiced alchemy at least semi-professionally. Knowledge of alchemy (and algebra, minerals, and so on) may not have kept him warm, but Subtle had somehow acquired such knowledge before meeting Face. Moreover, Face reveals, he has given Subtle "a house to practice" in, and only afterwards, "since" then, has Subtle studied bawdry. Ian McAdam reminds us that "while we might expect a close and conscious identification between Jonson the literary alchemist and Subtle (who is after all the play's titular character)," Subtle works just outside the framework of Jonson's satire, noting that Mammon's "highest and most idealistic moment, comes in fact as a description out of the mouth of Subtle—as if, under the ironic grandiosity and intentional ridicule, resides a certain degree of sympathy."[54] Alchemy may attract cheats and frauds, *The Alchemist* acknowledges, but Subtle believes in it—or at least, formerly did—even if he does cheat others with its promise. The recognition, then, that alchemy is a field more prone to chicanery than others hardly obviates the possibility of either Subtle or Jonson believing in it, or in its feasibility.

Rather than writing off *The Alchemist*'s philosopher's stone as a ludicrous object of ridicule or a dull, dead symbol of sterility, therefore, I propose that the stone is used throughout the play as a figure of perfection shrouded in ambiguities—and a generative one at that. When Jonson's play premiered in 1610, centuries of alchemists had yet to agree on the composition, the manufacture, or even the purpose of the philosopher's stone; alchemy itself was considered scientific and magical, feasible and incredible, depending on whom one asked. The play's

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[53] Friesen, *Supernatural Fiction*, 175.

[54] Ian McAdam, "The Repudiation of the Marvelous: Jonson's *The Alchemist* and the Limits of Satire," *Quidditas* 21 (2009): 65.

venture tripartite exploits these uncertainties in its schemes, but it is the gulls themselves who demonstrate the corruption of human nature when offered perfection.

PUTREFACTION

The possibility of consummate perfection that is held forth by the philosopher's stone is exploited in Jonson's enacted drama. *The Alchemist* contains seven intended victims: Dapper, Drugger, Kastril, Dame Pliant, Epicure Mammon, and the Anabaptists Ananias and Tribulation Wholesome. Stanton J. Linden argues that each of them "is transmuted by his obsessions into a blind, dehumanized creature," and that alchemy, "of which Lovewit's house is the microcosm, is a world of illusion, madness, and self-deception."[55] The connection between alchemy and Lovewit's house is analogous to the one between the machinations of theater and the Blackfriars itself, but Linden's language is altogether too dark for the play's tone, especially given the fact that when Mammon discusses the philosopher's stone, he does so in "impressive blank verse lines, full of mythic resonances and exotic allusions, modeled upon the language spoken by Christopher Marlowe's magniloquent heroes."[56] Indeed, of the seven gulls, the lattermost three are taken in by the promise of the philosopher's stone—and it is not their belief in alchemy, but their intentions that prove to be humorous.

Before the entrance of Sir Epicure Mammon, Subtle expresses surprise that Mammon has not yet appeared on the day that "the *magisterium*, our great work, the stone" was promised to

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[55] Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 131.

[56] Katharine Eisaman Maus' introduction to *The Alchemist* in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), 862.

him (1.4.14). Already, Subtle pretends to muse, he can imagine the charity work Mammon will perform with the stone:

> Methinks I see him entering ordinaries,
> Dispensing for the pox, and plaguy houses,
> Reaching his dose, walking Moorfields for lepers,
> And offering citizens' wives pomander-bracelets,
> As his preservative, made of the elixir.
>
> (1.4.18–22)

Subtle is almost certainly being sardonic here, but the positive potentialities of the stone are nonetheless articulated and left to linger through the first interlude, for the first act of *The Alchemist* ends with Subtle envisioning the knight in search of hospitals "to make old bawds young, / And the highways for beggars, to make rich." Subtle envisions, in short, that Mammon will "turn the age to gold" (1.4.23–24, 29). When Mammon does make his stage debut at the start of the second act, he focuses on this gold, inviting his friend Surly to enter "the rich Peru" (2.1.2). "This is the day, wherein, to all my friends, / I will pronounce the happy word, 'Be rich,'" Mammon goes on—and the list of activities his friends will no longer have to accomplish speaks to their characters (2.1.6–7). "No more deal with the hollow die," "no more be at charge of keeping / The livery-punk for the young heir," he pronounces; "You shall start up young viceroys / And have your punks and punketees" (2.1.9–11, 22–23). The potentials of the stone to cure leprosy and spread wealth to the poor, possibilities just raised by Subtle, are brought into sharp contrast with Mammon's more corrupt intentions. Indeed, it is only when Surly expresses doubt in the stone that Mammon acknowledges that he might use it for a greater good: the stone is "the secret / Of nature naturized 'gainst all infections, / Cures all diseases coming of all

causes," the knight avers, and he will "fright the plague / Out of the kingdom in three months" (2.1.63–65, 69–70). He goes on:

> MAMMON. Sir, I'll do't. Meantime,
> I'll give away so much unto my man
> Shall serve the whole city, with preservative,
> Weekly; each house his dose, and at the rate—
> SURLY. As he that built the water-work, does with water?
> MAMMON. You are incredulous.
>
> (2.1.72–77)

This exchange encapsulates the uneasy tension between the stone's potential for good and its corrupt usage. Mammon explicitly concedes that the elixir would greatly benefit the city, and professes that he means to give it to each house—but only "at the rate," a phrase that can be read philanthropically or, Surly points out, uncharitably. In the former instance, "rate" might mean pace, as if Mammon were building up to his earlier conclusion that England could be rid of plague. Surly's reply, though—"as he that built the water-work?"—uses "rate" to mean price, comparing Mammon's distribution of the elixir to the late sixteenth-century implementation of waterworks that brought water from the Thames into London's homes[57] and implying that Mammon intends to sell his panacea. Mammon's answer to Surly's jibe, "You are incredulous," could support either reading, an ambiguity that underscores the disparity between the stone's altruistic and contaminated possibilities.

A similar disparity is evident in the case of the Anabaptists who also seek the philosopher's stone. When he makes his debut, the preacher Tribulation Wholesome reminds his

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[57] Harp's *Ben Jonson's Plays*, 223n1.

zealous disciple Ananias that, before speaking, he should weigh "What need we have to hasten on the work, / For the restoring of the silenced saints, / Which ne'er will be, but by the philosopher's stone" (3.1.37–39). Richard Harp suggests that this passage refers to the fact that "Amsterdam had a colony of English Puritans in exile who still maintained relations with the old country,"[58] and Cook that the Anabaptists were those who had "attempted to take control of several Dutch cities, including Amsterdam," and had then "fled to England to escape the consequent persecutions"[59]—but in either case, Tribulation wishes to advance his religion's cause and relieve his persecuted brethren. Subtle, though, quickly jabs to the heart of the Puritan's goals: "even the medicinal use" of the stone, Subtle assures Tribulation and Ananias, "shall make you a faction, / And party in the realm" (3.2.25–26). Subtle goes on to promise that the medicinal powers of the elixir, curing the gout, palsy, and dropsy of great men, restoring the youth of women, and healing leprous lords and syphilitic knights will all "increase your friends" (3.2.26–41)—but then he turns to the stone's other properties, suggesting that they might turn a lawyer's gilded silverware:

> SUBTLE. to massy gold. You cannot
> But raise you friends. Withal, to be of power
> To pay an army in the field, to buy
> The king of France out of his realms, or Spain
> Out of his Indies. What can you not do
> Against lords spiritual or temporal,
> That shall oppone you?

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[58] Ibid., 241n7.

[59] Cook's *The Alchemist*, 64n29–30.

TRIBULATION. Verily, 'tis true.

We may be temporal lords ourselves, I take it.

(3.2.45–52)

In the space of fifty lines, Tribulation moves from the restoration of his exiled brethren to acknowledging that he harbors earthly ambitions.[60] With the help of the stone, Subtle points out, the Puritans could make friends, buy out entire kingdoms and oppose their rulers—but it is Tribulation who makes the leap to being "temporal lords ourselves" and connects this to other Anabaptists' methods of becoming "soon, and profitably, famous" (3.2.101). Tribulation's hypocrisy here is hardly surprising, but neither is it overly conspicuous: whereas Epicure Mammon only briefly acknowledges the stone's altruistic potential before rhapsodizing over the earthly delights it will bring, Tribulation concentrates on the former before alighting on the latter for only a fleeting moment. This brief instance of personal hypocrisy might even be lost in performance—Subtle goes on to satirize the Anabaptists' religious practices at length—but the epicurean Mammon and ostensibly wholesome Tribulation are nonetheless established as dovetailing counterparts of one another, explicitly aware of the universal good that might be achieved with the philosopher's stone, yet insistent on exploiting it.

Eric Wilson argues that *The Alchemist*'s characters "are continually mistaking their objects, overvaluing things in their absence": that these objects are, in a word, fetishized, "the

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[60] These disparate goals might be reflected in the difference between exoteric and esoteric alchemy: while exoteric, or practical, alchemy aimed to transmute metals and produce a curative elixir, what historians have dubbed esoteric alchemy concentrates "on spiritual and philosophical values and ideals, especially as they impinge on the inner life of the individual adept." These alchemies shared many of the same qualities and languages in the Renaissance, but whereas the first focused on the end product, for the latter, "the purely chemical operations and reactions occurring with their vessels symbolized deeper spiritual meanings." See Linden, *Darke Hierogliphicks*, 8, 9.

process by which associations, desires, and interpersonal relations are materialized into some concrete, if displaced, form."[61] Wilson's argument centers upon Abel Drugger's sign, but it seems clear that the play's philosopher's stone is just as much a fetish, one that enables Epicure Mammon and the Puritans to exhibit their ostensible and true desires. The stone literalizes the displacement of which Wilson's definition speaks: the stone never appears. This fetish, however, is not overvalued in its absence: if anything, its value is underestimated by the play's characters, for the philosopher's stone has the potential to benefit not just one man, or a persecuted religious group. The stone conjures the possibility of curing lepers, ridding England of the plague, restoring a prelapsarian earth, even bringing about the end of days: Mammon speaks of "a fifth monarchy" that he intends to "erect / With the philosopher's stone" (4.5.26–27)—the age predicted in Daniel and Revelation as the time of Christ's second coming.[62]

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[61] Eric Wilson, "Abel Drugger's Sign and the Fetishes of Material Culture," in *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, ed. Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 119, 113.

[62] Harp, *Ben Jonson's Plays*, 284n1. While "the concept of a Fifth Monarchy was . . . widely known" throughout early modern western Europe—Fifth Monarchists were a sect that split from other millenarians—this passage from Jonson seems to be the only link between alchemy and Christ's return. Though Protestant "reformers understood the fall from grace as affecting not only humanity but nature itself," and early modern alchemists "believed that the philosophers' stone would redeem 'corrupted' matter and therefore possibly—hopefully—transform and restore the entire natural world to its pristine, prelapsarian state," I can find no explicit link between alchemy and the Second Coming. Paracelsus did prophecy that Elias the Artist, "the Messiah of Alchemy," would appear, leading to "the opening of the alchemical heaven and the establishment upon earth of a New Reign, or Fifth Monarchy, of Alchemy"—but, notwithstanding the obvious parallels, Christ is not explicitly mentioned. See Bernard S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (Totowa, NJ: Rowman and Littlefield, 1972), 22; Bruce Janacek, *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern*

The philosopher's stone is and is capable of bringing about perfection, and yet both Mammon and the Anabaptists only ostensibly aim for this perfection, revealing more carnal and corrupt desires when given the opportunity. Soon after Mammon's introduction, Subtle himself sets up this situation, professing that he has created the stone "unto public good, / To pious uses, and dear charity, / Now grown a prodigy with men" (2.3.16–18). While the cultural history of the philosopher's stone holds that the stone is perfection itself, and is capable of perfecting others, *The Alchemist* demonstrates that, even when fully cognizant of the stone's world-changing power, the epicurean and wholesome alike will use it to tainted ends. The dilemma, in other words, is performative: no matter how perfect the mechanism, its practical appliance corrupts, a notion that is not only theatrically enacted but metatheatrically demonstrated by Jonson.

MULTIPLICATION

Jonson's complicated stance towards the stage has been the subject of much criticism: he was hardly shy about expressing his ambivalent, at times disdainful thoughts regarding audiences. The prefatory epistle to the 1607 quarto of *Volpone* speaks of the contemporary theater as "nothing but ribaldry, profanation, blasphemy, all license of offense to God and man,"[63] and at an "even more disenchanted moment of his career Jonson would speak with deeper bitterness of 'the loathèd stage', as a place he wished to quit for ever ('Ode to Himself', 1629)."[64] Jonas A.

England (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2011), 3; and John Read, "Gold Making Galore," *The New Scientist* 4, no. 101 (23 October 1958): 1119.

[63] Jonson's *Volpone* in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology*, ed. David Bevington, Lars Engle, Katharine Eisaman Maus, and Eric Rasmussen (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2002), Epistle 37–38.

[64] Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 99–100.

Barish vividly describes the playwright's relationship with the audiences of early modern London:

> Jonson, despite a lifetime of writing for the stage, never arrived at a comfortable *modus vivendi* with his audiences. His feelings toward them ranged from gingerly [sic] to stormy, and by the time he had been at the job of pleasing them for a few years, he had formed some devastating conclusions. Playgoers, he believed, frequented the theater in order to parade their fine clothes and gape at those of their neighbors—to make spectacles of themselves, in fact, and so compete with the play. Or they came clamoring for more of the same empty, noisy amusements that had always diverted them in the past: plays filled with shrieks and battles, plays with ghosts and devils, emperors and clowns. Whatever strained their attention or swerved from stereotype they would "censure" in boorish ways, turning aside with rude remarks, rising noisily from their places to create a disturbance, or even addressing disruptive remarks to the players. To entertain such audiences was to have to cope with them, to devise stratagems to combat their apathy and circumvent their prejudices.[65]

In more recent years, this portrait of Jonson has considerably softened. Jonson's earlier distrust of plays, the critical story goes, was assuaged by the time of *The Alchemist*. Richard Helgerson suggests that "like Lovewit, who at the end of *The Alchemist* forgives Face his histrionic transgression, Jonson could now in gratitude express some tolerance for the art that had so well served him";[66] Donaldson argues that despite the playwright's occasional prejudice against the

[65] Jonas A. Barish, *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981), 133–34.

[66] Richard Helgerson, *Self-Crowned Laureates: Spenser, Jonson, Milton, and the Literary System* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 162.

theater, "it is impossible to ignore the zest and high spirits with which the illusory arts are planned and executed" in *The Alchemist*, that *The Alchemist* demonstrates Jonson to be "more ready now to accept the energies of the theatre about which he had expressed such stern misgivings" in *Volpone*;[67] and, while Jonson's animosity towards his audience has frequently been attributed to his dramatic failures—he "often felt betrayed by the audience, especially when they rejected *Sejanus* and *Cataline* [in the early seventeenth century], classical tragedies in accord with his humanist values, and later when [the 1629 play] *The New Inn* was mocked off the stage"[68]—Derek B. Alwes points out that despite Jonson's ambivalence towards his audiences, "his contempt was usually reserved for audiences that failed to appreciate his work, and *The Alchemist* was apparently a great success."[69]

This line of criticism, I wish to suggest, is a bit idealistic, for it misreads the play's paratexts. A reading of *The Alchemist*'s prologue and epilogue indicates that Jonson did not emend his theatrical prejudice in this play: *The Alchemist* is neither a thank you to the theater nor an acceptance of the early modern audience. To the contrary, the play explicitly announces that

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[67] Donaldson, *Jonson's Magic Houses*, 83; Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 249.

[68] Sara Van den Berg, "True Relation: The Life and Career of Ben Jonson," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson*, ed. Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 6, 9–10.

[69] Alwes goes on to acknowledge that "one of the elements that make it difficult to discern Jonson's own attitude toward his audience" in *The Alchemist* "is that Jonson depicts a wide variety of audience responses within the play itself, some (but not all) of which he is clearly mocking." The play's gulls, he continues, are an audience for the trio's various cons; both Lovewit and Surly are introduced as audience members before participating in the action; and Lovewit's neighbors "are another kind of audience whose understanding of the show is clearly suspect. See "Service as Mastery in *The Alchemist*," *The Ben Jonson Journal: Literary Contexts in the Age of Elizabeth, James and Charles* 17, no. 1 (2010): 41.

Jonson has in fact given up on educating the audience. The prologue to *The Alchemist* is relatively short, but quite telling:

Fortune, that favors fools, these two short hours
We wish away, both for your sakes and ours,
Judging spectators; and desire, in place,
To th'author justice, to ourselves but grace.
Our scene is London, 'cause we would make known
No country's mirth is better than our own:
No clime breeds better matter for your whore,
Bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more,
Whose manners, now called humors, feed the stage;
And which have still been subject for the rage
Or spleen of comic writers. Though this pen
Did never aim to grieve, but better men;
Howe'er the age he lives in doth endure
The vices that she breeds, above their cure.
But when the wholesome remedies are sweet,
And in their working gain and profit meet,
He hopes to find no spirit so much diseased,
But will with such fair correctives be pleased:
For here he doth not fear who can apply.
If there be any that will sit so nigh
Unto the stream, to look what it doth run,

They shall find things, they'd think or wish were done;

They are so natural follies, but so shown,

As even the doers may see, and yet not own.

(Prologue 1–24)

From the very start, Jonson may be seen as "dismissing fortune for the period of the play" in favor of the spectators' judgement.[70] An equally valid reading, however, emphasizes the playwright's antipathy towards the stage. Fortune may be the direct object of the prologue's first sentence—but it may also be an invocation, with Fortune a figure whom Jonson asks to efface "these two short hours." As the prologue progresses, Jonson's criticism of contemporary dramatists is evident (the manners of "bawd, squire, impostor, many persons more" all "feed the stage"), as is his own explicit project: not "to grieve, but better men." Indeed, the playwright actually seems to grow optimistic, even Socratic, in his belief that nobody is "so much diseased, / But will with such fair correctives be pleased": humanity's errors simply need to be pointed out, whereupon the mistaken party will take self-correcting measures.

The twist, I believe, comes in the last six lines. "For here he doth not fear who can apply" is confusing at best. The easier part of the line's gloss is identifying "he," which seems to refer to "th'author" of the play, though the pronoun is separated from its noun by fifteen lines. As for the remainder of the line: Cook glosses "apply" to mean "interpret veiled allusions," and Katharine Eisaman Maus more fully explains that Jonson "professes to deplore" those who "interpret literary works as political allegories with veiled references to current events."[71] A more cynical interpretation of the line, though, suggests that Jonson does not "fear who can apply" not because

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[70] Harp's *Ben Jonson's Plays*, 201n6.

[71] Cook's edition of *The Alchemist*, 7n19; Maus' edition of *The Alchemist*, 870n3.

there is no veiled allusion or political allegory, but simply because Jonson is certain that the audience will refuse to understand the play's lessons as applicable to their own lives. Every audience member, the prologue goes on, will recognize themes in the plot that "they'd think or wish were done"—"the stream" must refer to the play itself, and so those who sit "so nigh" that they can follow its current are the spectators who follow the plot's actions—but even when their mistakes are pointed out to them, "the doers may see, and yet not own." Harp annotates the prologue's final couplet: "even those who share in the follies mocked onstage will be able to see (recognize) and yet not own (admit to) them."[72] What Harp does not point out, however, is the incongruity of the prologue's final lines when compared to its stated goal. Jonson explicitly aims to supply "fair correctives," and consequently to "better men"—and yet he announces that the audience will be unable to recognize the follies depicted in themselves. Jonson seems to want to better his audience, but recognizes that this audience will not take his proffered advice, or that they are actually unable to do so, as if the fact that their follies are "*shown*" is the problem.

The play's epilogue similarly conveys a distrust of the audience. Urged to speak by Lovewit, Face explains that he has gotten free of his partners and his gulls:

yet I put myself
On you, that are my country, and this pelf,
Which I have got, if you do quit me, rests
To feast you often, and invite new guests.

(5.5.162–65)

Face directly addresses the audience, as many contemporary epilogues do, and invites them to come again: the pelf, James D. Mardock remarks, "is not Lovewit's winnings in the play's

[72] Harp's *Ben Jonson's Plays*, 201n8.

fiction, but the price of admission to the playhouse. One can easily imagine the player jangling the evening's receipts as he delivers these final lines, lines that serve as a reminder of our open invitation to return, gulls that we are, to pay to believe the theatrical lies on offer."[73] Donaldson is a bit more inclusive in his note that 'pelf' is "a word that means booty, but also rubbish, nicely conveying Jonson's own dual valuation of the commodity for which everyone in the play has ultimately been scrambling. Gold may be fine to possess, though it is also, in the last estimate, trash. The *pelf* of these final lines is at once the loot Face or Jeremy has acquired through his illicit activities in Lovewit's house, and the booty of the box office."[74] Donaldson's astute reading requires some revision: pelf, the *OED* suggests, not only means "stolen goods" and booty, but is also "chiefly *depreciative*. Money, riches (esp. viewed as a corrupting influence)."[75] The epilogue does not seem to devalue gold itself—the gold is not trash—so much as to place it into an alchemical metaphor of the theater business. Attending a show is rather straightforwardly capitalistic: in exchange for a penny, one receives entertainment. Face's epilogue, though, attempts to extend the theater's relationship with the audience even as he hints that the spectators are being gulled: though the contract between spectator and stage ends as soon as the show is over, Face promises that it is "*this pelf*" that "*rests / To feast you often, and invite new guests*." The audience's money, in short, will ostensibly continue to guarantee admission—and then some, for guests are welcome as well—but the theater would obviously not admit this audience for free at a future date. The receipts, rather, will be used to create more plays, the profits from which would be used to create more, and so on in an endless alchemical proliferation whose

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[73] James D. Mardock, *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 84.

[74] Donaldson, *Ben Jonson*, 249.

[75] *OED*, 3rd ed., "pelf, *n*." Emphasis the editors'.

similarity to Face and Subtle's scheme is evident. While the prologue suggests that Jonson mistrusts the abilities of his audience, the epilogue indicates that he has qualms about the very nature of the theatrical business model.

Where the prologue and epilogue spell out Jonson's doubts, the stone itself demonstrates the playwright's thoughts regarding the enacted genre of comedy. Mina Kerr argues that Jonson's "art and workmanship were thoroughly self-conscious, and he had fixed, positive theories about literature" which he explicated "continuously and vociferously for forty years and explained clearly in his inductions, prefaces, epilogues, and *Discoveries*." These theories add up, she concludes, to a man who "was frankly, consciously didactic, and his whole dramatic career was a battle against vice and folly. From beginning to end, he assumed the attitude of a censor and reformer, purposing always through the laughter of comedy to improve morals and correct taste."[76] This theory of comedy was a popular one. George Puttenham's *The Art of English Poesy* argues that comedies throughout history "tended altogether to the good amendment of man by discipline and example;[77] Levinus Lemnius writes that comedy is "the mirror & glasse of ma*n*s life, wherein every ma*n*, under the person of another, beholdeth & perceiueth his own maners";[78] and Sir Philip Sidney's *The Defence of Poesie* contends that fiction exists in order "to teach and delight."[79]

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[76] Mina Kerr, *Influence of Ben Jonson on English Comedy: 1598–1642* (New York: Phaeton Press, 1967), 2, 6.

[77] George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 121.

[78] Levinus Lemnius, *The Sanctvarie of Salvation, Helmet of Health, and Mirrovr of Modestie and Good Maners* (London, 1592), E1^{v}.

[79] Sir Philip Sidney, *The Complete Works of Philip Sidney*, ed. Albert Feuillerat, vol. 3, *The Defence of Poesie, Political Discourses, Correspondence, Translations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1923), 10.

Jonson's moralizing is hardly a secret: Murray Roston explicitly likens Jonson to Sidney,[80] and Andrew McRae asserts that in all of Jonson's work, he "maintained a commitment to the didactic value of his writing," pointing to the epistle of *Volpone* in which Jonson "declares sententiously that 'The principal end of *poesie*' is 'to inform men, in the best reason of living' (Epistle 81–2)."[81] This is not to say, though, that the playwright necessarily succeeds in his self-imposed obligation to educate as well as to delight, for *The Alchemist* indicates some despair in this mission: the play's prologue raises the idea of instruction only to lament that this is an impossible wish for those who "sit so nigh" that they can "look what it doth run" (Prologue 20–21). The problem, the prologue indicates, may not be in the audience itself, but in the very fact that the show is being performed.

The philosopher's stone is an apt metaphor for Jonson's ambivalence regarding the theater. Like comedy itself, the stone hypothetically tends towards perfection yet in practice may be more likely to corrupt than to better those that it touches. This metaphor may even be extended by mapping the stone's competing possibilities onto the distinction between the textual and the performative elements of the theater. The philosopher's stone is much like the script of a play: critical to the success of the project, but extraneous after the fact, stone and script produce gold and play, but need not be present for the exhibition of said products. In the light of the philosopher's stone, then, Jonson's attitude towards the theater of *The Alchemist* is not one of gratitude or acceptance. The playwright's script offers up perfection of the comedic variety—the plot points out the audience's own foibles and faults—but just as the play's characters recognize

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[80] Murray Roston, *The Comic Mode in English Literature: From the Middle Ages to Today* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 110.

[81] Andrew McRae, "Jonson in the Jacobean Period," in *Ben Jonson in Context*, ed. Julie Sanders (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 26.

the stone's ability to perfect the world but consciously turn it towards more corrupt ends, the audience refuses to be corrected, to even see itself reflected in the play. This is not wholly the audience's fault, Jonson tells us. The fault is in the theater itself, in its alchemical economy (the epilogue indicates) and in the very fact that theater relies on performance: "*Fortune, that favors fools, these two short hours* / *We wish away*" (Prologue 1–2). The philosopher's stone is the script and the comic genre alike, an instrument of perfection and corruption whose use in the theater inevitably delights at the expense of instruction. Indeed, Jonson indicates his preference at the very start of the 1612 Quarto's letter to the reader: "If thou beest more [than a reader], thou art an understander, and then I trust thee."[82]

PROJECTION

One cannot speak of perfection in *The Alchemist* without mentioning Samuel Taylor Coleridge's famous remark: "Upon my word, I think the Œdipus Tyrannus, the Alchemist, and Tom Jones the three most perfect plots ever planned."[83] Like *Volpone*, the play follows the Aristotelian unities of time and place; it is confined "within the limits of twenty-four hours and within the boundaries of one city or town."[84] Barish remarks that while another author may have taken the time to explain the reasoning behind Lovewit's return, "and where a playwright bent on suspense would have provoked our curiosity about it beforehand," Jonson makes Lovewit return without a word of warning "because he cares only for the series of brilliant confusions it will produce. . . .

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[82] Prefatory "To the Reader," l. 1 in Cook's *The Alchemist*. Despite being the standard edition, Harp surprisingly does not include this epistle.

[83] *Specimens of the Table Talk of the Late Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London, 1835), 2:339.

[84] Kerr, *Influence of Ben Jonson*, 15.

the true center of interest lies in the shifting configurations of character confronting character."[85] How curious, though, that Jonson's plot is considered perfect when the playwright doubted the very ability of theatrical performance to perfect its audience. The very word "plot" has close ties to performance (where the early modern "backstage-plat" helped to orchestrate the entrances and exits of actors in "a moment of to-and-fro with the entirety of the playbook, but only in performance"[86]) as well as to labor: Puttenham includes the 'plat' in a list of the playwright's necessary tools as if the poet were a craftsman, "the genteel, verbal counterpart to rude mechanical labor,"[87] a connection surely anathema to Jonson.[88] Indeed, given the playwright's distrust of audiences as well as theatrical performance—and given his renowned temper—it seems likely that Jonson himself may have taken issue with Coleridge's assessment.

Jonson's distrust of theatrical production was balanced by his comparative confidence in the written word. When *Sejanus* was "rowdily dismissed from the stage, Jonson's response was to publish a much revised and 'Romanized' version of the play in a quarto edition, shifting the piece from the hazardous realm of the playhouse to the relative safety of the library in an evident

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[85] Barish, *Ben Jonson*, 80. The effect of this on the audience is briefly argued by Joe Lee Davis, who traces Jonson's increasing reliance on such surprises to conclude that "the element of intrigue for its own sake gradually increases to the point that satire is weakened and some of the effects of philosophic farce supplant it." See *The Sons of Ben: Jonsonian Comedy in Caroline England* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1967), 89.

[86] See Tiffany Stern, *Documents of Performance in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 231. Stern has a thorough, illuminating chapter on such 'plats.'

[87] See Martin Brückner and Kristen Poole, "The Plot Thickens: Surveying Manuals, Drama, and the Materiality of Narrative Form in Early Modern England," *ELH* 69, no. 3 (Fall 2002): 624; as well as Kalas' *Frame, Glass, Verse*.

[88] Pressed in his youth by his stepfather into the bricklayers' trade—"one of the lowliest and least skilled of Elizabethan crafts"—Jonson was afterwards so sensitive about his origins that he "could not bring himself to name the trade to which he had been forcibly apprenticed." See Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 2.

attempt to secure it from further popular attack,"[89] and Jonson's 1616 folio "testifies to Jonson's impatience with the fragility of the stage," Barish explains: "the actor's voice—not to speak of the public's ear—constituted an unpredictable and untrustworthy element over which he had too little control; print offered an escape into a stabler medium. By lifting the play out of the turbulence of the public arena into the still silence of the page, it enabled it to transcend the imperfections and the vicissitudes of live performance." While most plays were published with the assurance that the printed version was identical to the performed—"as played by," "as acted by," and so forth—Jonson "completely overturns this custom" in his publishing practices: the text, rather, is presented "'as it was first composed by the author'—presumably superior to, and in any case different from the acted version, about which he leaves us in the dark, not even mentioning the name of the company."[90] Indeed, it was precisely Jonson's emphasis on "the ear over the eye, language over spectacle" that both led to and was almost certainly further entrenched by his famous quarrel with Inigo Jones.[91]

Jonson inherited a dramatic tradition in which comedy was theoretically meant to delight and instruct, and in which props contributed to the theatrical realization of genre. The philosopher's stone of *The Alchemist* perfectly encapsulates the playwright's attitudes towards his audiences and comedy on the stage. Well-versed in alchemical jargon and belief, the playwright exploits the stone's cultural material history in order to further the hypocrisy of Sir Epicure Mammon, Tribulation Wholesome, and Ananias. The history of the stone reflects a desire for and journey towards perfection, but the gulls of Jonson's play all realize the potential

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[89] Donaldson, *Jonson's Magic Houses*, 3.

[90] Barish, *Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 138–39, 137.

[91] Van den Berg, "True Relation," 6, 9–10.

good that could be achieved with the philosopher's stone only to reveal their corrupt, all-too human desires. Even if the stone were available, the plot demonstrates, man's hypocrisy would corrupt its usage.

Theater, then, is alchemical not only because it creates something magical out of base materials, but because it cannot help but result in a corrupted, corrupting product. For Jonson, words themselves and words alone are capable of perfecting their readers (so as long as they are understanders). When that perfection is brought to the stage and materialized, however, when the script becomes a play, the result is a production that intrinsically cannot perfect the audience. Ben Jonson's drama is a successful comedy, but the play from it is not, a point that the playwright registers through the philosopher's stone, an emblem of script and comedy, capable of perfection but prone to corruption. Despite the popular success of *The Alchemist*, for Jonson, the fact that it is staged renders it a comedy as Stephen Gosson defines it: a play that "whets us to wantonnes, it norisheth unperfections, and argueth a corruption in our maners."[92]

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[92] Stephen Gosson, *Playes Confuted in Fiue Actions, Prouing that they are not to be Suffred in a Christian Commonweale* (London, 1582), F5^{v}.

Coda

The history of genre criticism is marked by confusion over the precise relations of genre, mode, and form. Gérard Genette traces this confusion to Aristotle's discussion of tragedy, which Genette argues "is simultaneously modal and thematic," a concurrency that for centuries "was concealed by the ambiguity of the word *tragedy*, with its two senses, broad and narrow. Certainly Aristotle espoused both senses in succession without paying much attention to the difference between them."[1] Important Renaissance critics such as Rosalie Colie and Barbara Lewalski have themselves argued respectively that genres are best thought of either as framing mechanisms, each one a subculture "with their own habits, habitats, and structures of ideas as well as their own forms,"[2] or as the progenitors of modes that in turn "may interpenetrate works or parts of works in several genres."[3]

This disssertation primarily subscribes, however, to definitions of genre set forth by Tzvetan Todorov and Jacques Derrida. Todorov's *Genres in Discourse* asks: "Where do genres come from? Quite simply from other genres. A new genre is always the transformation of an earlier one, or of several: by inversion, by displacement, by combination. . . . There has never

[1] Gérard Genette, *The Architext: An Introduction*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 20–21. It is worth noting that Genette also takes genre critics to task for so often basing their work upon Plato's and Aristotle's supposed division of genre into the categories of drama, epic, and lyric. Nothing, Genette explains, "authorizes us to claim that *in Aristotle (or Plato)* the dithyramb illustrates the lyric 'genre'—quite the contrary." See *Architext*, 7, italics his.

[2] Rosalie L. Colie, *The Resources of Kind: Genre-Theory in the Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 17, 116.

[3] Barbara K. Lewalski, introduction to *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*, ed. Barbara K. Lewalski (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1986), 5–6.

been a literature without genres; it is a system in constant transformation."[4] Derrida takes this notion a step further in his argument that "there is no genreless text; there is always a genre and genres, yet such participation never amounts to belonging." The construction and definition of a genre, he goes on, "gathers together the corpus and, at the same time, in the same blinking of an eye, keeps it from closing, from identifying itself with itself. This axiom of non-closure or non-fulfillment enfolds within itself the condition for the possibility and the impossibility of taxonomy."[5] Codifying genre, in short, obviates it.

The generic theories of Todorov and Derrida are especially relevant to theater. A play, I have posited, is fundamentally different than a drama: the difference between performance and script is an obvious one. This idea's ramifications, though, include the fact that outside of performance, a play has no genre; a play exists only as it is being performed. The "system in constant transformation" that Todorov defines as genre, then, describes the enacted genre of plays as well, a system that is created and destroyed anew in every performance, a system that is and can never be replicated.

This constantly changing system, the dissertation argues, is partially composed of stage properties, objects that work as actants onstage. Too often, stage props are viewed in the light of their abbreviation: a prop might be a fundamental support, but the *OED* suggests that it is "*esp*. one not forming an integral part of the thing supported."[6] Whether integral or not, a prop is always separate, something that is emphatically not "the thing supported"—in this instance, a

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[4] Tzvetan Todorov, *Genres in Discourse*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 15.

[5] Jacques Derrida, "The Law of Genre," trans. Avital Ronell, *Glyph* 7 (1980): 212.

[6] *OED*, 3rd ed., s.v. "prop, *n*."

play. Assumptions such as this prize the drama, the play's narrative content, at the expense of the enacted genre's performative elements.

This scholarly inclination is reasonable. Most Renaissance playwrights emphasized dialogue over stage direction, and the script is after all the primary source of narrative and genre alike. Dramas allow us to study them at little cost, for however long we have and at our convenience; they permit "the liberties of reading," in the words of Harry Berger Jr., offering the option of "moving back and forth over the text, slowing it down, rearranging and comparing passages."[7] Plays, on the other hand, are innately ephemeral, and so careful study of them is a challenging proposition. Attending them requires both time and money, and the inherent logistical difficulty of teaching undergraduates using plays instead of dramas is staggering. It is no wonder, then, that literary critics tend to favor dramas.

From a performative perspective, however, theatrical genre is made up of more than script alone. The script may be the foundation of the play, but its genre is realized in performance, and in performance, the audience will not see the script: they instead experience a theatrical network composed of various actants. *Renaissance Play Things* has examined, in turn, the contribution of rings to the comedy and tragedy of *Romeo and Juliet*; the place of crowns in Shakespeare and Marlowe's theatrical iterations of kingship; the role of skulls in conceptions of identity and tragedy in *Hamlet*, *The Patient Man and the Honest Whore*, and *The Revenger's Tragedy*; and the comedic and metatheatrical ramifications of the philosopher's stone in *The Alchemist*. Props, this dissertation has argued, help to create enacted genres.

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[7] Harry Berger, Jr., *Making Trifles of Terrors: Redistributing Complicities in Shakespeare*, ed. Peter Erickson (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 51.

A stage prop is admittedly only one actant in a network of theatrical production, and so *Renaissance Play Things* is hardly a comprehensive examination of such networks. In its demonstration of how props both represent and actively contribute to theatrical genres, it rather aims to illustrate how the lessons and concepts of object-oriented criticism can be used in conjunction with New Historical methods. Such an approach recognizes the relationship between and importance of script and performance alike, and bridges an implicit critical divide between page and stage. Tempting as it may be to focus exclusively on drama, the performative elements of plays are vital aspects of the theater, something that even the rude mechanicals of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* recognize. The first rehearsal of *Pyramus and Thisbe* begins with Bottom's request to "say what the play treats on; then read the names of the actors," but it ends with Quince's admonition to learn the script—and "In the meantime I will draw a bill of properties such as our play wants."[8]

[8] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (New York: Norton, 1997), 1.2.7–8, 85–86.

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Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003.

Joshua S. Smith
Vita
jss383@psu.edu

EDUCATION

Ph.D., English, The Pennsylvania State University	December 2014
M.A., English, The Pennsylvania State University	May 2010
B.A., English, Columbia University	May 2007

PUBLICATIONS

"Reading Between the Acts: Satire and the Interludes in *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*." *Studies in Philology* 109.4 (Winter 2012)

SELECT CONFERENCE PAPERS

"Diverse Questions of a Dead Man's Skull: Anonymity and Identity in Tragedy," The Shakespeare Association of American Conference, St Louis, Missouri, April 2014.

"The Ring's the Thing: Temporality and Genre in *Romeo and Juliet*," The Shakespeare Association of America Conference, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 2013.

AWARDS AND HONORS

Department of English Travel Grant, Pennsylvania State University, 2012, 2013, 2014
Tracy Winfree McCourtney & Ted H. McCourtney Distinguished Graduate Fellowship in English, 2008
Columbia University Dean's List, 2004–2007
Inaugural H. F. "Gerry" Lenfest College Scholar, 2003–2007

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

The Pennsylvania State University
- Early Period Studies Group, *Vice President*, 2013–2014; *Webmaster*, 2011–2013; *Member* 2010–Present
- Graduate Writing Center, *Freelance Editor*, 2011–Present
- Graduate Student Mentor Program, *Mentor*, 2012–Present

Columbia University
- Alumni Representative Committee, *Member*, 2011–Present