

MATERIAL ENCOUNTERS OF THE ENGLISH RENAISSANCE

BY

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Vita

James Christopher Beaver was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on April 6, 1981. After graduating with high honors at Bishop Eustace Preparatory High School, in 1999, where he was an Edward J. Bloustein Outstanding Scholar, James attended the University of Pennsylvania, where he graduated *Summa Cum Laude* in 2003 with a Major in Philosophy and Minor in English. After graduation, James worked as a research coordinator at the University of Pennsylvania Alzheimer's Disease Center, while playing in local Philadelphia rock bands, The Sheep and Blueberry Magee. He received his M.A. from the University of Delaware in 2009, and, since the fall of 2009, has been a graduate student in the English Department at Brown University. He has been the recipient of the Henry Reed Prize in Literature at the University of Pennsylvania, and the Charlotte Beebe Wilbour Fellowship in Classical English at Brown University. He has recently published an article in the *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*.

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In *America*, Jean Baudrillard offers the rather stark image of the academic alone at his or her computer, “ceaselessly correcting, reworking, and complexifying, turning the exercise into a kind of interminable psychoanalysis, memorizing everything in an effort to escape the final outcome, to delay the day of reckoning of death, and that other—fatal—moment of reckoning that is writing.” Amidst this hyperbole is a description of writing to which I readily assent: that it is the “other [...] fatal moment of reckoning.” Writing, for me, most certainly amounts to a sort of fatal act or encounter, where the fluidity and elasticity of thought, and the flux of conscious experience, necessarily meet the fixity of the page, of words to be printed and uploaded into the archive.

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INTRODUCTION
A Place for Matter

“What’s the matter?” The question—and its variant, “What is the matter?”—is asked twenty times in William Shakespeare’s tragedy *Othello, the Moor of Venice*, perhaps never so memorably as in Desdemona’s query to her husband in their final bedroom encounter (5.2.50).¹ Othello replies, “That handkerchief which I so loved and gave thee / Thou gav’st to Cassio” (5.2.51-52) In doing so, he explicitly links “matter” as it refers to “the condition of or state of things regarding a person or thing,”² corresponding to the classical Latin *res*, in the sense of “matter, case, [or] situation,”³ with a physical thing—the handkerchief—and its circumstances, movements, and exchanges, in space and time. The handkerchief serves for Othello as “ocular proof” (3.3.377) of Desdemona’s infidelity, but as the audience and Iago know (and Othello learns all too late), this “napkin is too little” (3.3.304), its role as *evidentia* less a testament to physical realities than to Iago’s rhetorical, and performative, manipulation of the general. Its substantiality—as onstage phenomenon, in performance—is without question, and, in fact, is the very basic requirement for its function in Iago’s scheme. The plot of Shakespeare’s tragedy, however, concerns precisely how this thing becomes significant of “the matter,” and, inversely, how “the matter” becomes signified in the thing: in short, how the *materia* of rhetoric becomes intertwined and overlayed with the *materia* of *physis*. This dissertation attempts to inhabit the problematic articulated in Desdemona’s

¹ All references to *Othello* are taken from William Shakespeare, *Othello: Texts and Contexts*, ed. Kim Hall (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2002). Dennis Kezar makes the same observation in his excellent essay “Shakespeare’s Additions,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Autumn 2003): 31-62, 34.

² “matter, n.1. 5.a”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/115083?rskey=5dxP1t&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 20, 2015).

³ Ibid. The *OED* traces a series of meanings in which “matter” “correspond[s] to classical Latin *res*, which the word is often used to render,” and notes that “the sense ‘matter, case, situation’ is recorded for post-classical Latin *materia* from the 13th cent. in British sources.”

question and Othello's response, as it plays out at the close of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth century. In doing so, I develop a mode of reading matter that suspends, or forestalls, the tendency Dennis Kezar finds in materialist critical drives to "[ascribe] agency and causality to time-bound matter that cannot completely support such investment," or "seek[] to explain literary and cultural phenomena through the revelatory imputation of material novelty and historical disturbance." Rather than repeat Iago's (and Othello's) critical practice, with a methodological approach that "always risks (and always seeks) an overinvestment of meaningful agency in things and their social situation,"⁴ why not linger, instead, with the perplexity Desdemona-*as-critic* invites: how, exactly, could a handkerchief be "what's the matter"?

What would it mean to develop a critical mode which could inhabit that problematic, exercising its critical capacities precisely within the overlap between the *materia* of rhetoric and the *materia* of *physis* in the English Renaissance? As A.C. Howell suggests in his seminal essay "*Res et Verba: Words and Things*," such a critical mode would need to preserve the tension in which *res* existed in the period, between the abstract and the phenomenal: "the term *res*, meaning subject-matter, seems to become

⁴ Kezar, "Shakespeare's Addictions," 33. Written over a decade ago, Kezar's critique is a response to methodological approaches arising from the "turn to things" at the end of the century, but we do well to ask whether such critical impulses linger. In his recent study on currency in the English Renaissance, David Landreth observes the "ironic or perverse" relation of "material culture" and "thing theory" to his project, 44. In doing so, he offers a critique of Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass's privileging of the signifying power, or "animate autonomy achieved by things such as clothes" over the more mundane materialities of coins: "Currency, per Jones and Stallybrass, is the thing whose life is not a life of its own: disembodied with respect to 'social relations,' metallically impermeable to the meanings that textiles soak up as they lie on the surface of the body. Here currency is the same in early modernity as it is in present modernity, 'neutral' with respect to historical difference; its life in either moment is that of a familiarly untrammelled instrumentality, with no prospect of the animate autonomy achieved by such things as clothes. See David Landreth, *The Face of Mammon: The Matter of Money in English Renaissance Literature* (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 2012), 44; and Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000). For equally compelling critiques of material culture studies in its early formulations, see Eric Wilson, "Abel Drugger's Sign and the Fetishes of Material Culture," in *Historicism, Psychoanalysis, and Early Modern Culture*, CultureWork: A Book Series from the Center for Literacy and Cultural Studies at Harvard, ed. Carla Mazzio and Douglas Trevor (New York: Routledge, 2000): 110-135; and Alan Sinfield, "Poetaster, the Author, and the Perils of Cultural Production," in *Material London, c. 1600*, ed. Lena Cowen Orlin (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000): 75-90.

confused with *res* meaning things, and the tendency to assume that things should be expressible in words, or conversely, words should represent things, not metaphysical and abstract concepts, may be discerned.”⁵ “The tendency to assume that [...] words should represent things” ought not to overshadow the confusion Howell observes; that is, the fact that *res*, in the sixteenth century, could point to *both* non-corporeal “subject-matter” *and* phenomenal entities.⁶ In the tension of *res*, the key problematic centers on what we define a thing to be⁷ and what relation we claim words have to it.⁸

In order to address the two elements in this problematic, this dissertation develops a mode of reading the dramatic and poetic texts of Renaissance England that couples the empiricism of Bruno Latour and Actor Network Theory with critical attention to the routines and practices generative of *copia* in Renaissance humanism. Although strange bedfellows at first glance, Latour and sixteenth century humanism have more in common than one might imagine. Latour, himself, has repeatedly invited us “back to the sixteenth

⁵ A.C. Howell, “*Res et Verba*: Words and Things,” *ELH* 13, 2 (June 1946): 131-142, 131.

⁶ Juliet Fleming and Rayna Kalas provide recent, if slightly varying, articulations of this dynamic. For Fleming, the English Renaissance is an intellectual moment “which lacked a systematic bifurcation between real and thought objects, and consequently apprehended matter not as that which is deprived of meaning but as a principle of structure that underpins all meaning.” See Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 21. Similarly, for Kalas, “The modern separation of thought from things, and of ideality from materiality, does not map seamlessly onto the Renaissance; a less anachronistic separation would be that of the eternal from the worldly, the spiritual from the temporal.” See Rayna Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English English* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 3.

⁷ Howell’s use of the word seems unnecessarily vague and positivist, especially in the context of twentieth century phenomenology, as he appears to regard the thing as a self-identifiable entity.

⁸ Considering John Lily’s *Grammar*, Judith Anderson argues for two perceptions of language in the period, one which takes words as “thingly,” or substantial, in and of themselves, and, another (a precursor to the modern signifier/signified binary) which views words as referential to the phenomenal world: “What it involves is the reification of the word itself, the word as entity or ‘thing’; it is a displacement of the referent, a grab for power, as it were, by language. Such reification exaggerates the substantiality of words, whereas the substitution of word for thing stresses the function of words as (ideally transparent) referential markers and ultimately would endeavor to deny it. The latter view inclines to identify the thing as the word’s real substance, and the former its inverse, to identify the word itself as a kind of substance or thing: in the latter case, the word might be said to disappear into the referent; in the former, reality itself to be constituted or reconstituted in language.” See Judith Anderson, *Words that Matter: Linguistic Perception in Renaissance England* (Stanford: Stanford U Press, 1996), 14. Kalas offers another formulation of the “inverse” view to which Anderson refers, which is equally compelling: Language did not express meaning accord to a binary logic of the sign, which imagines the word to be a picture of the thing it signifies; rather it articulated an ordered network of matter.” Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse: The Technology of Poetic Invention in the English English*, 84.

century,” back to a time before we were (never really) modern, to the *early* or *premodern*. Latour’s most well-known account of the similarities between our time and the Renaissance remains *We Have Never Been Modern*, in which Latour, following the work of Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, contends that the division between Nature and Culture, subjects and objects, and humans and nonhumans, is the product of a “Constitution” of modernity, developed in the seventeenth century, that is no longer tenable. “Because of the slow demise of Nature,” he says in “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” “I now have the feeling, much like Stephen Toulmin, that we are actually closer to the sixteenth century than to the twentieth.”⁹ “Closer to the sixteenth century”—“Nature” (with a capital “N”), in Latour’s understanding, is no longer buttressed by the existence of extended corporeal bodies, *res extensa*: that material reality inherently “devoid of any meaning, except that of being the ultimate reality, made of fully silent entities that were yet able, through the mysterious intervention of Science devoid of any meaning, except that of being the ultimate reality.”¹⁰ For Latour, *res extensa* only evolved as a conceptual category in the seventeenth century, most notably through Cartesian philosophy, but also with the broader rise and institutionalization of scientific empiricism associated in England with the work of Francis Bacon in the early part of the century. “*What is the successor of nature?*” Latour asks. “Of course, no

⁹ Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” *New Literary History*, 2010, 41: 471–490, 480. Latour makes the comparison between the twenty-first and the sixteenth centuries most explicit in the essay when he argues, in a discussion of the network in which the “new red tuna” is constituted, how it “closely resembles the strange and complex emblems that were accumulated during the Renaissance in cabinets of curiosities,” 480–481. Latour’s most well-known account of the similarities between our time and the Renaissance remains *We Have Never Been Modern*, in which Latour, following the work of Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, contends that the division between Nature and Culture, subjects and objects, and humans and nonhumans, is the product of a “Constitution” of modernity, developed in the seventeenth century, that is no longer tenable. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993), 93; and Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985). For a specific attempt to substitute a network-based model of attachments for the categories of subject and object, see Bruno Latour, “Factures/Fractures: from the concept of network to the concept of attachment,” *Res* 36 (Autumn 1999): 20–31.

¹⁰ Bruno Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 471–490, 476.

human, no atom, no virus, no organism has ever resided ‘in’ nature understood as *res extensa*. They have all lived in the pluriverse, to use William James’s expression—where else could they have found their abode?”¹¹

Latour invites us to consider how we define “things” in a period before the inception of *res extensa*. The task is more difficult, I think, than we might imagine, for, especially in treatments of material culture over the past two decades, whenever “thing” or “object” is employed, as well as the frequent variants “thingly” or “thingness,” a subtle implication of an extended, physical phenomenon accompanies the terms.¹² In order to engage the pluriverse in/of which all things are comprised, Latour turns us from the tactile, sensible realm implied by *res extensa* to what he calls “matters of concern,” which, though indebted to a Heideggerian ontology, also, I contend, also is indebted to the rhetorical *res*, explicit in Desdemona’s “What’s the matter?”¹³ In Latour’s understanding, “matters of concern” accompany our more familiar post-empiricist

¹¹ Ibid., 477.

¹² A number of studies in materialism have challenged the equating of matter with physical extension, instead offering various models—Spinozan, Deleuzian, Lucretian, Object-Oriented Ontology—of the agential capacity inherent in matter. Especially influential recent accounts include Graham Harman, *Tool-Being: Heidegger and the Metaphysics of Objects* (Peru, IL: Open Court, 2002) and “On Vicarious Causation,” *Collapse 2* (2007): 187–221; Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in the Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009); Jonathan Gil Harris, *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009; Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). My own approach seeks to balance such interests in materiality with an attention to language, specifically, rhetoric, writing, and the inscriptive actions by which matter is archived. In this sense, I subscribe to Juliet Fleming’s critique of vitalist approaches: “New vitalists,” Fleming contends, “Give new life to an exhausted romanticism that has always found matter – say the matter of literature – to be instinct with life,” (132). In a reading of Jane Bennett’s *Vibrant Matter*, she argues, “thinkers less careful than Bennett seem to find it all too easy to reverse the usual grammars and assert that matter is ‘instinct’ with life, intention or agency. And pace Bennett, even a more judicious reversal of the usual application of the terms will not get us far in understanding the relation of life to matter. Furthermore, unless it is very carefully practiced, anthropomorphism will always run the risk of looking like narcissism,” 122. See Juliet Fleming, “Scraping by: Towards a Pre-historic Criticism,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3, 1: 119–133.

¹³ Bruno Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225–248. In her criticism of vitalist approaches, Juliet Fleming argues that “new vitalists [...] give new life to an exhausted romanticism that has always found matter – say the matter of literature – to be instinct with life” (132), and contends, in a reading of Bennett, “thinkers less careful than Bennett seem to find it all too easy to reverse the usual grammars and assert that matter is ‘instinct’ with life, intention or agency. And pace Bennett, even a more judicious reversal of the usual application of the terms will not get us far in understanding the relation of life to matter. Furthermore, unless it is very carefully practiced, anthropomorphism will always run the risk of looking like narcissism,” 122. See Juliet Fleming, “Scraping by: Towards a Pre-historic Criticism,” *postmedieval: a journal of medieval cultural studies* 3, 1: 119–133.

“matters of fact,” which, he argues, “are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*.”¹⁴ In other words, he wishes to develop a mode of critique that could account for, as much as possible, *states of affairs*.

To articulate this mode, he turns to Martin Heidegger’s well-known discussion of the thing.¹⁵ “[Because of Heidegger’s work] we are now all aware that in all the European languages, including Russian, there is a strong connection between the words for thing and a quasi-judiciary assembly. Icelanders boast of having the oldest Parliament, which they call *Althing*.”¹⁶ Latour finds most compelling the way in which “thing-as-gathering/assembly” challenges contemporary perspectives that view things as exclusively external, non-discursive materialities, the proper stuff (*res extensa*) of “what is out there, [...] out of any dispute, out of language”:

Now, is this not extraordinary that the banal term we use for designating what is out there, unquestionably, a thing, what lies out of any dispute, out of language, is also the oldest word we all have used to designate the oldest of the sites in which our ancestors did their dealing and tried to settle their disputes? A thing is, in one sense, an object out there and, in another sense, an *issue* very much *in* there, at any rate, a *gathering*.¹⁷

A thing is “an object out there” and “an *issue* very much *in* there,” the physical, tactile object of the phenomenal world, *and* a condition or state of affairs, with any number of

¹⁴ Ibid., 232. Emphasis in the original.

¹⁵ See Martin Heidegger, “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (New York; Evanston; San Francisco; London: Harper & Row, 1971): 163-187.

¹⁶ Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?,” 232-233.

¹⁷ Ibid., 233.

participants—actors, or actants—making up its existence.¹⁸ And so, with handkerchief: “out there,” most definitely, existing physically, particularly in the world, in space and time, but, also, a “gathering” of various participants. The critical task is to approach these things, these assemblies, through “a multifarious inquiry launched with the tools of anthropology, philosophy, metaphysics, history, sociology to detect how many participants are gathered in [it] to make it exist and maintain its existence”; in other words, to “offer the participants arenas in which to gather.”¹⁹ In this project, then, following Latour, I treat things as “gatherings” of rhetorical, social, and physical practices: the woods of *Titus Andronicus* as *silva rhetoricae* of classical rhetoric, but also an absolute sovereign space, and the woodenness of the stage itself. The phenomenal world, in this perspective, offers what I call “conditions of possibility” for the “gatherings” of things.

Latour provides a working definition of things invaluable to a methodology that hopes to preserve the tensions in *res*, between idea and physicality, which existed in the English Renaissance. If his approach allows us to “offer the participants arenas in which to gather,”²⁰ it also raises the significant question of what constitutes a participant; in other words, what are the contours that define Latour’s actors or actants? Graham

¹⁸ Latour follows Heidegger in his definition of “thing” only so far. In a sub-section of his essay “The Origin of the Work of Art” entitled “Thing and Work,” Heidegger asks, “What in truth is the thing, so far as it is a thing?” (20). The question provokes for Heidegger a problem of distinguishing the thingliness of the thing from the *res/ens* of matters concerning men. What allows him to move forward is distinguishing between “the widest domain, within which everything is a thing (thing = *res* = *ens* = an entity) including even the highest and last things, to the narrow precinct of mere things,” and the specific characteristics of “mere” things (21). Latour, working through a “flat ontology,” rejects this distinction, and returns us to the position afforded by the “wide domain within which everything is a thing (thing = *res* = *ens* = an entity). It is interesting, and even slightly problematic, that Latour derives his terminology of “thing” as “gathering” from Heidegger’s etymological work on the Old Germanic *thing* or *dinc*—which Heidegger explicitly differentiates from *res* or *ens*—and yet arrives at a definition closer to the sense of *res* as “what pertains to man, concerns him and his interests in any way or manner” This definition of *res* is from Heidegger’s essay “The Thing,” in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 176.

¹⁹ Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam?”, 246.

²⁰ Ibid.

Harman provides a succinct account: “[In Latour’s theoretical framework] everything in the world—natural, artificial, human, animal, fictional—is equally an ‘actor’ or ‘actant.’ All it takes to be an actant is to have some sort of effect on other actants; the reality principle is *impact*, with no further distinction or qualification.”²¹ In Latour’s “flat ontology,” anything that has “some sort of effect on other actants” qualifies as a participant.²² As Harman and others have noted, this “excessively relational conception of actors” can lead to metaphysical paradoxes.²³ In my study, however, such metaphysical concerns remain less pertinent than the archival concerns which Julian Yates observes are endemic of “a strategic difference between Latour’s positing of a parliament of things [...] and the projects of many of us housed in the humanities”: “Our object remains always the archive of a practice, the remnants of some thing, which, by our joining, we re/activate, alive to the ways the figure of the archive itself as actor-network enables certain modes of joining and disables others, makes certain worlds or prospects un/thinkable.”²⁴ Yates draws attention to the fact that, in addition to the “gathering” that is the “thing,” within the discipline of the humanities, there is also the “gathering” that is the archive. For Jacques Derrida, “There is no archive without a place of consignation,” where consignation, itself, “not only mean[s], in the ordinary sense of

²¹ Graham Harman, “Entanglement and Relation: A Response to Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder,” *New Literary History* 45, 1 (Winter 2014): 37-49, 37.

²² “Flat ontology” is described by the philosopher Manuel de Landa as follows: “[While] an ontology based on relations between general types and particular instances is hierarchical, each level representing a different ontological category (organism, species, genera), an approach in terms of interacting parts and emergent wholes leads to a flat ontology, one made exclusively of unique, singular individuals, differing in spatio-temporal scale but not in ontological status.” See Manuel de Landa, *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 58.

²³ Harman, “Entanglement and Relation: A Response to Bruno Latour and Ian Hodder,” *New Literary History*, 37. See also Graham Harman, *Prince of Networks: Bruno Latour and Metaphysics* (Melbourne: re.press, 2009). For a lively discussion of the critical application of Harman’s and Timothy Morton’s Object-Oriented Ontology in literary studies, and a response defending relationality by Jane Bennett: Harman, “The Well-Wrought Broken Hammer: Object-Oriented Literary Criticism,” *New Literary History* 43, 2 (Spring 2012): 183–203; Timothy Morton, “An Object-Oriented Defense of Poetry,” *New Literary History* 43, 2 (Spring 2012): 205–224; and Jane Bennett, “Systems and Things: A Response to Graham Harman and Timothy Morton,” *New Literary History* 43, 2 (Spring 2012): 225–233.

²⁴ Julian Yates, “Shakespeare’s Kitchen Archives,” in *Speculative Medievalisms: Discography*, ed. The Petropunk Collective, (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013), 179-200, 182-183.

the word, the act of assigning residence or of entrusting so as to put into reserve (to consign, to deposit), in a place and on a substrate, but here the act of consigning through gathering together signs.”²⁵ How does the “gathering together [of] signs” shape the contours of the actors and actants which we discern in the “gatherings” of “things”? In considering this question, we not only require a definition of “things” conducive with the tensions of *res* in the period, we also consider how our engagement with “the archive of practice [...] enables certain modes of joining and disables others, makes certain worlds or prospects un/thinkable.”²⁶

Because the Renaissance “lacked a systematic bifurcation between real and thought,” and “the modern separation of thought from things, ideality from materiality [did not exist],” as scholars we are left to model critical approaches which inhabit the collapse of modern distinctions. Nevertheless, as historical phenomenology and deconstructive critical practices have demonstrated, we attempt to preserve the indistinction in Renaissance epistemology even as we employ frames that focus upon, respectively, the sensory, physical, or phenomenal, and rhetorical, figurative, or tropological. In other words, our very theoretical commitments seem at odds with inhabiting the Renaissance episteme. In her work, Juliet Fleming is interested in moments when, for example, the physical dimension of a posy ring constrains and structures the poetic text which will be inscribed on it, or, as she says, “an inscription may take the form of the implement on which it appears.”²⁷ But we might equally turn away from *this material* and toward the increasing store of collections of posies to be

²⁵ Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, trans. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 11, 3.

²⁶ Julian Yates, “Shakespeare’s Kitchen Archives,” 182-183.

²⁷ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 13.

used for inscriptions that began appearing in book stalls at the end of the sixteenth century. In his study on the history of early British rings, Charles Oman observes that “the earliest collection [...] at the end of a manuscript book of poetry written soon after 1596.”²⁸ To take a specific example, the anonymous *Loues garlan[d] or, Posies for rings, hand-ke[r]chers, and cloues and such pretty tokens that louers sent their loues. Reade, skanne, the iudge* (1624) accounts for roughly sixty-four such inscriptions.²⁹ Does the materiality—or substantiality—of the ring hold sway over the posy, or does the stock of textual models determine its realization? Or, to adapt Desdemona’s question to a slightly different context: what is the matter? It must be of a kind that requires us to bridge the gap between the stock of posies and the material ring to be inscribed, or, more pointedly, that sustains the epistemological viability of both Desdemona’s question (regarding the condition or state of affairs) and Othello’s answer (emphasizing the particular, physical thing) simultaneously.

If Latour’s theoretical model brings us “back to the sixteenth century,”³⁰ back to a time before we were (never really) modern, to the *early* or *premodern*, it does so primarily through turning from “matters of fact”—decidedly post-Enlightenment, post-empiricist epistemological constructs, obeying the very subject/object, nature/culture, science/social divides Latour deconstructs—to “matters of concern.” Our archival encounters with these *states of affairs*, which comprise the “gathering” of things, must also consider the ways in which they are drawn from and shape by the rhetorical dimension of the Latin *res*. For the sixteenth century, *res*, pragmatically and

²⁸ Charles Oman, *British Rings 800-1914* (London: Batsford, 1974), 42.

²⁹ Anonymous. *Loues garlan[d] or, Posies for rings, hand-ke[r]chers, and cloues and such pretty tokens that louers sent their loues. Reade, skanne, the iudge* (1624). Text Creation Partnership digital edition. EEBO. Web. 9 February 2013.

³⁰ Latour, “An Attempt at a ‘Compositionist Manifesto,’” 480.

theoretically, registered most prominently in the *trivium*, particularly, dialectic and rhetoric.³¹ Thus, this dissertation contends that, if we are to truly follow Latour back to the epistemological and ontological framework of the period, we must reconcile his “matters of concern” with the *res* of *copia argumentorum*, *copia exemplorum*, *copia sententiarum* in rhetorical (and dialectical) practice; in other words, enable an “archive of practice” that accounts robustly for the rhetorical register of early modern things.³² In short, we need to ask: what role does the rhetorical—figures and tropes—play in defining the contours of the participants, or actors, which make up the “gatherings” in the archive?

“It is not words that shakes me thus. Pish! Noses, ears, and lips” (4.1.39-40), Othello’s certainty belies the rhetorical mediation of Iago’s “medicine” (4.1.43). We, the audience, know it *is very much* words that shakes the general—a whole lot of them, in fact. Iago is one of Shakespeare’s most loquacious characters, second only to Hamlet. His talent lies in aligning these words with the material movements of the handkerchief across the stage, so that the physical thing can enter into economy with the “matter” of

³¹ The relationship between dialectic and rhetoric in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries was especially fraught, and the subject of much debate among prominent theorists, including Lorenzo Valla, Rodolphus Agricola, Desiderius Erasmus, Philip Melancthon, and Petrus Ramus. As Peter Mack observes, “The development of humanism provoked a reconsideration of the object of dialectic and a reform of the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic. Some humanists accepted late scholastic logic as it stood. Others approved of Aristotelian dialectic, but wanted to purify its use of Latin,” 15. See Peter Mack, *Renaissance Argument: Valla and Agricola in the Traditions of Rhetoric and Dialectic* (Leiden; New York; Köln: E.J. Brill, 1993). Along with arguments over the imitation of Ciceronian style, one of the primary areas of contention was over the five parts of classical rhetoric—*inventio*, *dispositio*, *elocutio*, *pronuntiatio*, and *memoria*. Ramus, in one of the more dramatic moves of the period, “became famous for cutting the Gordian knot of [the] similarities” between dialectic and rhetoric. Although “both taught how to find (*invenire*) and order arguments, remember them, and communicate them,” Ramus placed *inventio*, *dispositio* and *memoria*—with dialectic, leaving only those parts related to the art of speaking well—*elocutio*, *pronuntiatio*—with rhetoric. See Timothy J. Reiss, *Knowledge, Discovery and Imagination in Early Modern Europe: The Rise of Aesthetic Rationalism*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture Series (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1997), 5. Reiss’s account revises (and challenges) Walter Ong’s extremely well-known study of Ramist influences in the period, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958; Rpt. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004). The focus of my project lies not with dialectic, or Ramus’s revisions to the trivium, but with rhetoric, and the conceptualization of the *materia* of rhetoric under the practical rhetorical training influenced by Desiderius Erasmus.

³² I draw these Latin equivalents from the invaluable work of Terence Cave, which I rely on throughout this chapter. See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopia Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 6.

adultery. The question is, to what extent do words structure or determine the “gathering” that is the handkerchief?

My project seeks to balance the Latourian focus on things as “gatherings” or “matters of concern” with a specific historical attention to the rhetorical register through a focus on *copia*, the processes, practices, and routines that, for Shakespeare the grammar student, as well as his contemporaries, lie behind the capabilities of a speaker like Iago, for example.³³ In taking up *copia*, I rely upon Desiderius Erasmus’s seminal rhetorical handbook *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia* as a central primary text for conceptualizing linguistic production in the period. First published in 1512, Erasmus’s *De Copia* went through at least eighty-five editions before his death in 1536, with “the total number of printings printed well above one hundred and fifty.”³⁴ Because of Erasmus’s close relationship with English educator John Colet, the handbook became an essential text in the fourth form of English grammar schools in the period.³⁵ The importance of this text toward understanding the rhetorical functioning of the English language cannot be overestimated. Deeply indebted to Quintilian’s *Institutio Oratio*, it promised the diligent student of classics “riches piled up, so that whenever it is desirable there may be available for us a supply of words.”³⁶ It was a promise on which the greatest literature of the English Renaissance delivered.

³³ On the relation of Renaissance writers to the humanist pedagogical tradition, see T.W. Baldwin, *William Shakspeare's small Latine & lesse Greeke...* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1944); Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (London: MacMillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970); and Marion Trousedale, *Shakespeare and the Rhetoricians* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

³⁴ These numbers are provided in Donald B. King and H. David Rix’s introduction in their recent English translation: Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. Donald B. King and H. David Rix (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2005), 2.

³⁵ Brian Vickers, *Classical Rhetoric in English Poetry* (London: MacMillan; New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1970), 48. With respect to the English, Vickers observes, “The period roughly between Sidney and George Herbert sees the flowering of rhetoric in English literature. More new textbooks of rhetoric were produced in that period than any other,” 44.

³⁶ Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, 19.

With subsequent readings of Agricola after the publication of the first edition, Erasmus became more conscious of the role of the “places,” “*loci*,” or “*sedes argumentorum*” in verbal production, revising editions to expand on the structural role they place in rhetorical invention. But, overall, *De Copia* is a testament of what Ann Moss deems “a self-justifying and self-validating display of linguistic exuberance,” a pedagogical guide which is also a celebration of variation and abundance.”³⁷ Readers like Moss and Terence Cave have argued for the dominating influence of verbal play over in considerations of subject matter, or *res* in Erasmus’s rhetorical pedagogy. As Moss states, “The *De Copia* goes on to demonstrate how matter may be collected and stored under commonplace and example. But the matter collected (*res*) is always words (*verba*) [...] Even when material is sought in the least verbal of intellectual disciplines, in mathematics and physics, [...] it is brought back in the form of textual excerpts.”³⁸ In Cave’s understanding, *verba* take in *De Copia* is such because, for Erasmus, “*res* do not emerge from the mind as spontaneous ‘ideas’; they are already there, embedded in language, forming the materials of a writing exercise.”³⁹ We are left with a “harvest of *res* [that] becomes a language capable of a limitless range of permutations and combinations.”⁴⁰

Despite these suggestions of *res* absorbed into linguistic pieces, Cave reminds us of the encompassing work *res*, in fact, truly does in the period: “If *res*, as the counterpart of *verbum*, moves towards the domain of “thought” (*sententia*), it also includes the whole domain of physical objects conceived of as materials for rhetorical elaboration: in other

³⁷ Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 112.

³⁸ Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, 112.

³⁹ Cave, *The Cornucopia Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance*, 19.

⁴⁰ Moss, *Printed Commonplace-Books and the Structuring of Renaissance Thought*, 112.

words, one of the functions of *copia rerum* is the unfolding of object-things within language.”⁴¹ For Cave, then, *res* and *verba* function together in an upward movement towards “the domain of ‘thought’ (*sententia*).” Importantly, *res*, by itself, does not signify “idea” for Erasmus. Rather, Erasmus complicates the classical mimetic model in which “words copy or represent the objects of thought,” by illustrating the ways in which *res* and *verba* function together in a register that encompasses *both* the domains of “thought” *and* “physical objects conceived of as materials for rhetorical elaboration.” Cave’s analysis offers a satisfying conceptualization of “matter” in *De Copia*, by refusing to reduce it to either mere physicality or untethered ideality. In doing so, he allows us to see the *materia* of rhetoric, as conceptualized by Erasmus, as a complementary critical model to Latour’s “matters of concern” in the period.

Inhabiting the “matter” of the Renaissance, through Latour and the routines productive of *copia*, this project offers a series of case studies for thinking about things, as they take form amidst the conditions of possibility afforded by the material (rhetorical, physical, and social) registers of different genres, including the tragedy, lyric, comedy, and allegory. My argument is that each genre offers different conditions of possibility for the “gathering” or “assembly” of participants that collectively make things. Collectively, the texts selected represent a condensed historical span at the close of the sixteenth century and opening of the seventeenth century. This span is especially important in articulating a relationship between sixteenth century humanism and the developments of seventeenth century English empiricism. Specifically, Francis Bacon published his first edition of *Essays* in 1597, but did not launch his critique of the humanist rhetorical

⁴¹ Cave, *The Cornucopia Text*, 28.

system until *The Advancement of Learning* in 1605. By 1620, his landmark *Novum Organum Scientiarum* would be published. The composition of the texts in my selection occurs before this pivotal English treatise. Their composition occurred most prominently within an English humanist education system influenced strongly by the work of Erasmus, and the many reprints of his *De Copia* (1512).

In Chapter 1, “Into the Woods: *Titus Andronicus* and Matters of Use,” I lay the groundwork for the project, relying on *Titus*’s salient critique of humanism, particularly its inversion of humanist principles of *virtus*, to understand the ways in which words, physicality and desires function together to construct subjective experiences. I study these performative dimensions in the play’s central locale: the forest. I attempt, through the tools of rhetorical theory, history, and sociology to “detect how many participants are gathered in [it] to make it exist and maintain its existence.” In tracking down these participants, I treat the woods as a “quasi-object,” what Julian Yates, following Latour, identifies as “a conjunction of matter, information, and social practice.”⁴² Quasi-objects are what they are through use, and in piecing together these linguistic, material and socio-political participants that make the woods what they are in the play, I arrive at the conclusion that underlying the constitution of this “gathering” is a principle of use-value, whereby a constellation of rhetoric, performance (physical action) and desire work in symbiosis with raw *materia* to produce the nature of that “gathering,” even as, paradoxically, that thing affords the very possibility of certain kinds of rhetorical exercises and expressions of desire. I argue that *Titus* stages the woods first rhetorically, as the *silva rhetoricae* from which Aaron draws his Ovidian plot, and yet the woods are

⁴² Julian Yates, *Error, Misuse, and Failure: Object Lessons of the English Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 71.

not merely rhetorical. Their function, politically, as a terrain of sovereign exceptionalism, allows the “newly incorporate” Goths, closely affiliated with the emperor, to make use of them for their own ends. Lastly, the woods also function materially, through the presence of the stage itself, which allows Shakespeare to emphasize the physical dimension of the violence that occurs both on and offstage. Ultimately, the chapter demonstrates how an affinity between humanist processes of invention and Aristotelian material causation allows characters to use the woods to their own ends: the violence of the tragedy is a direct result of these arrangements of *materia*, rhetoric, and desire.

In Chapter 2, “Donne’s Space Junk,” I ask what happens to materiality when Christian Incarnation theology is displaced in John Donne’s early love lyrics by the deity of love. Donne’s poetics compulsively question how letters, words, love tokens, and engravings signify (or fail to signify) identity and relations between lovers. Junk becomes the repeated point to which the poet returns, a special locus of form’s dissipation into brute, unsignifiable matter. To frame this discussion, I rely on William Empson’s remarkable essay, “Donne the Space Man,” in which he argues Donne believed in space travel, as well as life on other planets. In the metaphor of the “the separate planet,” Empson argues, Donne expressed a profane religion of love, in which any thing can become the site of an Incarnation lovers share, independent of any other earthly authority. Donne’s theological position allows us to treat the variety of things, and love tokens, which populate Donne’s lyrics, elegies and satire as (metaphorical) modes of travel to that “separate planet.” A bracelet of hair, a compass, a flea, a name engraved on a window: all serve as mediators, or third parties, for the Incarnation his lovers fulfill,

helping make “one little room, an every where.” Donne’s poems, viewed as trifles, resembled such objects, and so intensified his connections to the transitory qualities of materiality. Overall, the focus on Donne’s lyrics magnifies the relation between rhetorical and physical *materia* which I considered in *Titus Andronicus*: his love lyrics problematize the status of the signifying capacities in a variety of love tokens by worrying over the relationship between (rhetorical) figuration and (physical) mediation. The question of how the rhetorical and physical intersect becomes microscopic in focus, as Donne struggles over the very possibility of figuration in the world, i.e., whether the trope conveys the meaning of the lovers, or whether its inherent function as a mediating effect diverts and disrupts the intimacy and presence Donne’s speakers seek. Donne’s love lyrics are studies in the possibilities of figuration as a means of (dis)connect between two lovers, and figuration takes form in his radical conceits and hyperboles, but also posy rings and manuscript letters. In Donne’s love tokens, the tension is between the intimacy of desire and the arbitrariness of the physical world.

In Chapter 3, “Jonson’s “Exotic Inventories”: Performance and Parasite Life of *Volpone*,” I conduct an inquiry into the attachments between persons and things in the domestic sphere through a reading of the parasite Mosca’s “taking an inventory” in the final act of *Volpone*. Mosca’s performance interrupts the processes by which persons and things are brought together in the early modern home, inhabiting, instead, a process of translation by which the domestic subject and interior are constituted through the raw *materia* of things, bodies, and words on paper. Mosca’s performance is emblematic of Jonson’s comedy, which radically destabilizes our sense of persons and things as discrete units, instead highlighting the ways in which both function as parts in processes of

transaction. In “taking an inventory,” Mosca employs a style of domestic management, enacting mechanisms of rhetorical and performative control, which marshals a vast storehouse of *copia* to organize a superabundance of material referents in the domestic space, and, in doing so, secure (a sense of stability in) the transaction. Through a study of the physical, rhetorical, and social dimensions of lists and inventories in the play and period, I explore the ways in which creative acts of *poesis* overlap with the phenomenal dimensions of the stage. Mosca’s performance of an inventory in the final act of *Volpone* offers an alternative model to our assumptions of referentiality. Rather than a mimetic record, the inventory acts as an inherently performative tool. Along with the list, it is a production of *res* and *verba* that manages flows of desires and things in and out of the home. In Jonson’s play, the rhetorical motives of *copia* combine with the experiential mobility of inventory to define relationships within the domestic space.

In Chapter 4, “Britomart in Flames: Chastity, Eroticism, and Elemental Desire in *The Faerie Queene*,” I turn to Book III of Edmund Spenser’s *The Faerie Queen* and consider how the conditions of possibility afforded by the physical world are, with *copia rerum*, set in relation to the *sententia*, or idea of Chastity, toward which Spenser’s poetics are dedicated. My interest lies with incompatibilities between the “matter” of chastity and the world in which it unfolds, and I focus on one such incompatibility in the trope of fire for erotic desire. The trope is used throughout Book III, most notably to convey illicit forms of lust, but also to suggest an affirmative (and generative) desire of the kind we find in Britomart. The fires of these erotic encounters take on the cast of natural phenomena in Faeryland. The challenge for Spenser is to articulate how Britomart’s “no vsuall fire, no vsuall rage” (III.ii.37) is of a *different kind* than this “filthy lust inflame”

(III.iii.1). While Spenser's narrator insists on a difference, his consistent reliance upon the trope of fire to convey the effect desire has upon the body threatens to detour the idea of chastity into an elemental sexual functionality indistinguishable from those lesser forms of lust and passion. As a conclusion, this chapter demonstrates that the aesthetic effort to contain material and libidinal contingencies only reinforces the radical instabilities of the physical world and human desires.

Over a decade ago, Jonathan Gil Harris asked the deceptively simple question, "What is an object?"⁴³ The question remains pressing, yet it is often overlooked. The study of material culture, in fact, has often been guided by empirically inflected assumptions of the referentiality of language, in which scholars often suppose an unproblematic mimetic relation between words and things. It is crucial to take into account humanist rhetorical practices if we are to properly historicize the material realities of that experience, if we are to inhabit the "matter" in the multiple senses of the Renaissance, as it exists before the institutionalization of empiricism and categorization of *res extensa*. In *The Advancement of Learning*, it is not, after all, physical matter which Francis Bacon believes defines practices of knowledge in the previous century, but rather, an overwhelming dedication to *copia*, which has dominated concerns of genuine subject matter (in Desdemona's sense of "matter"): "men began to hunt more after words than matter; and more after the choiceness of phrase, and the round and clean composition of the sentence, and the sweet falling of the clauses, and the varying and illustration of their works with tropes and figures, than after the weight of matter, worth of subject,

⁴³ Harris, "Shakespeare's Hair: Staging the Object of Material Culture," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 52, 4 (Winter 2001): 479-491, 484.

soundness of argument, life of invention, or depth of subject.”⁴⁴ As Bacon’s own criticism demonstrates, “the weight of matter” in the English Renaissance was inflected with *copia*. And so it should be with our own material concerns: this dissertation, therefore, reintroduces rhetoric into things, modifying approaches to material culture by reinstating the fundamental role humanist models for language play in our material encounters in the archive.

⁴⁴ Francis Bacon, “The Advancement of Learning, Book One,” *Francis Bacon: The Major Works*, ed. Brian Vickers (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996): 120-299, 139.

CHAPTER 1
Into the Woods: *Titus Andronicus* and Matters of Use

In *Titus Andronicus*, the audience hears of the woods before ever encountering them onstage, through Aaron, the Moor, who speaks to the empress Tamora's sons, Chiron and Demetrius, to convince them of a plan in which "both shall speed" in the rape of Titus's daughter Lavinia (2.2.101-2): "The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull; / There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take your turns" (2.1.127-30). Critics have taken Aaron's role as instructor to the Goths, and especially Chiron and Demetrius's subsequent imitation of Ovid, as evidence of *Titus*'s salient critique of the humanist education system to which Shakespeare was exposed as a young boy.¹ Such attention has coincided with critical studies of Lavinia's violated body.² Emblazoned, as she is, indecorously, by her uncle Marcus, "lopped and hewed and made... bare of her two branches" (2.4.16-8), the rhetoric of the body returns us once more to the figures of a forest in which the roots of her violation lay. Despite its significance in the plotting of this decisive act of violence, *Titus*'s forest, in and of itself, has held less scholarly attention than its more prominent *silva* kin in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *As You*

¹ The relationship between *Titus* and its classical sources has been widely explored. See especially T.J.B. Spencer, "Shakespeare and the Elizabethan Romans," *ShS* 10 (1957): 27-38; Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1983); Heather James, *Shakespeare's Troy: Drama, Politics, and the Translation of Empire*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture 22 (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1997); and Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds, and Women*, Feminist Readings of Shakespeare (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). For discussions of *Titus* as critique of humanist rhetorical practices, see especially Albert Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 11-19; D.J. Palmer, "The Unspeakable in Pursuit of the Uneatable: Language and Action in *Titus Andronicus*," *Critical Quarterly*, 14, 4 (Winter 1972): 320-349; Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 100-17, and Vernon Guy Dickson, "'A pattern, precedent, and lively warrant': Emulation, Rhetoric, and Cruel Propriety in *Titus Andronicus*," *Renaissance Quarterly*, 62 (2009): 376-409. For a contrasting perspective which sees *Titus*'s relationship to humanism in a less critical light, see Danielle A. St. Hilaire, "Allusion and Sacrifice in *Titus Andronicus*," *SEL*, 49, 2 (Spring 2009): 311-331.

² See Mary Laughlin Fawcett, "Arms/Words/Tears: Language and the Body in *Titus Andronicus*," *ELH*, 50, 2 (Summer 1983): 261-277; Lisa Dickson, "'High' Art and 'Low' Blows: *Titus Andronicus* and the Critical Language of Pain," *ShakB* 26, 1 (Spring 2008): 1-22; Deborah Willis, "The Gnawing Culture": Revenge, Trauma Theory, and 'Titus Andronicus'," *SQ*, 53, 1 (Spring 2002), 21-52; Tzachi Zamir, "Wooden Subjects," *NLH* 39 (2008): 277-300; Caroline Lamb, "Physical Trauma and (Adapt)ability in *Titus Andronicus*," *Critical Survey*, 22, 1 (2010): 41-57.

*Like It.*³ Yet *Titus*'s woods are, in fact, a central site where language, desires, and the physical world constellate to produce dramatic effects which trouble the humanist ideal of theater as a device for a complete, abstract and perfect knowledge. In *Titus*'s woods, knowledge is highly subjective and mediated.⁴ Critics have long noted the agonistic qualities of Shakespeare's woods, Jeffrey Theis recently describing the Shakespearean forest as "a space of contestation and self-creation," where "different characters and people experience the same environment differently; hence, the same wood can embody vastly different worldviews and definitions."⁵ This assessment is especially applicable to *Titus*'s forest, which "keeps shifting its character and identity."⁶ Such shifts occur as "each projects his inner aspirations onto the external landscape."⁷

The aim of this chapter is to read these subjectivity effects in relation to *Titus*'s fraught relationship with sixteenth century humanism, specifically, to understand the ways in which "vastly different worldviews and definitions" and "inner aspirations" would have been conceived in the vocabularies of Elizabethan rhetorical practices. In Aaron's description of "unfrequented plots" (2.1.116) and the trope of the hunt, I argue, Shakespeare dramatizes humanist conceptions of *inventio*, those processes and routines

³ For studies of *Titus*'s woods, see Albert H. Tricomi, "The Mutilated Garden in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Studies* 9 (January 1976): 89-105; Anne Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1994), 359-64; and Tzachi Zamir, "Wooden Subjects," *NLH*, 39, 2 (Spring 2008): 277-300. Tricomi's presiding interest is in understanding the symbolic values of images of the forest. Barton's discussion relates *Titus*'s woods to Roman spectacles of the hunt at the circus, called *silvae*. This discussion arises in a survey of *silva* spaces in Shakespeare's dramatic works (see 352-379). Zamir extends Tricomi's point on the relation between the imagery of the forest and Lavinia's violent transformation into a consideration of the aestheticization of pain. For a different approach to the botanical imagery in the play, which leads away from the relation between the forest and the human, see Jean Feerick, "Botanical Shakespeares: The Racial Logic of Plant Life in *Titus Andronicus*," *South Central Review*, 26, 1 & 2 (Winter & Spring 2009): 82-102.

⁴ The shift from the humanist ideal of theaters as spaces which produce encyclopedic, comprehensive knowledge toward a developing sense of this subjective, mediated knowledge produced in the public playhouses is the central thesis of William N. West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11.

⁵ Jeffrey S. Theis, *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England: A Sylvan Pastoral* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2010), 35, 30-1.

⁶ Barton, *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean*, 359.

⁷ Zamir, "Wooden Subjects," 285.

by which the *verba* and *res* of discourse were retrieved from commonplace books intended to archive and make readily usable classical wisdom.⁸ In this context, *Titus*'s woods resonate in the classical sense of *silva*, as "those gatherings of writing, whether in prose or verse, that address a variety of topics or are written in different styles."⁹ And yet, *Titus*'s woods are not merely words. The construction and fulfillment of the Goths' plots, of course, requires not only imitations of the *materia* of classical discourse, but also *materia*, in the physical sense, in and through which actions can take place. In this sense, the woods are the physical *materia* in which lived material experience takes place. Thus, in his early tragedy, Shakespeare uses the woods to realize a tragic vision of the interdependence of rhetorical and physical *materia* and human desires, where knowledge is equated not with humanist *virtus* but, rather, the power to perform one's version of experience within the dimensions of the stage.¹⁰

I. On *Silva*, or The Woods of Invention

"I have found the path," Aaron tells Chiron and Demetrius, "My lords, a solemn hunting is in hand; / There will the lovely Roman ladies troop" (2.1.112-4). Before the audience hears of woods "ruthless, dreadful, deaf and dull" (2.1.127), Aaron has this moment of epiphany, which, in the pun on "path," invites listeners in divergent

⁸ In other words, criticism has not adequately historicized and investigated the very staging of the educational processes by which the student of humanist rhetoric was taught to retrieve rhetorical models, of *res* and *verba*, from a carefully collected and well-organized classical archive, physically embodied in the commonplace book. For discussions of the important place of the commonplace book in Elizabethan conceptions of knowledge, see Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), and Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996).

⁹ Sean Keilen, *Vulgar Eloquence: On the Renaissance Invention of English Literature* (New Haven: Yale, 2006), 135.

¹⁰ My reading here parallels Albert Tricomi's well known studies on the relationship between language and the stage in *Titus*, particularly his observations of how metaphor is "literalized" in the play, and how "scenes derived from Ovid's story are confidently aware of their transposed existence in the added dimension of drama." See Tricomi, "The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*," *Shakespeare Survey* 27 (1974): 11-19, 13 and 17.

directions: one, toward the physical ground, where, literally and physically, “a solemn hunting is in hand”; the other, the “path” of invention, toward the classical Ovidian model Chiron and Demetrius will imitate to succeed in their own “hunt” (II.1.25). In this latter sense, “solemn hunting” refers to Aaron’s own process of composition, which, as prescribed by the humanist pedagogy of Elizabethan England, begins with *inventio*, his rhetorical search for *materia* to persuade the boys in the prescribed course of action. Thomas Wilson, in a description characteristic of humanism in the period, defines *inventio* as “the findyng out of apte matter [...] a searchyng out of thynges true, or thynges likely, the whiche maie reasonably sette furth a matter, and make it appere probable.”¹¹

This “searchyng” required a comprehensive understanding of the subject-matter at hand. For Cicero of *De Oratore*, notably, this understanding is conceived in the tropes of surveying and hunt:

Again, in art, in observation and in practice alike, it is everything to be familiar with the ground over which you are to chase and track down your quarry. When you have mentally encompassed all that area, if only you are quite hardened to practical dealings, nothing will escape you, but every detail of an affair will come up with a rush and fall into your net.¹²

Humanist rhetorical and dialectical treatises derived from Aristotle’s *Topics* and Cicero’s *Topica* (an adaptation of the former), and, in more recent times, Agricola and Ramus, emphasized the prominent role of the “the places”—or *loci*—as the means by which the

¹¹ Thomas Wilson, *The arte of rhetorique for the vse of all suche as are studious of eloquence, sette forth in English*, by Thomas Wilson (London: Richardus Graftonus, 1553), 10; EEBO STC. (2d ed.) 25799.

¹² Cicero, *De Oratore II*, trans. E. W. Sutton and H. Rackham (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1942), 305.

orator could “be familiar with the ground” and “mentally encompass[] an area.” The aim of surveying vis-à-vis the places is accompanied by the act of retrieval from those very places, where speakers “chase and track down your quarry” in the archive; in other words, locating the *materia* “whiche maie reasonably sette furth a matter, and make it appere probable.”¹³ In these tropes of *inventio*, surveyal and retrieval correspond with the presentation of matter and the implicit aims of the speaker. Each constitutes the essential components of a network out of which arguments take form.

Following Cicero, Wilson, in his treatise on logic, also uses the trope of the hunt to illustrate the process of invention with respect to the places, reinforcing the links between surveyal and retrieval which inform argument: “the hontesman in huntynge the foxe, wil sone espie when he seeth a house, whether it be a foxe borough, or not. So he yt will take profite in this parte of logique, must be like a hunter, and learne by labour to knowe the boroughes. For these places be nothyng el but couertes or boroughes, wherein if any one searche diligentlie, he maie fynde game at pleasure.”¹⁴ As with Cicero, Wilson’s account of the hunt figures the orator as surveyor and hunter, one who “learne[s] by labour to knowe the boroughes” through the places. “The forest walks are wide and spacious; / And many unfrequented plots there are / Fitted by kind for rape and villainy” (2.1.115-7), Aaron observes. In the rhetorical sense of “solemn hunting,” the literal, physical hunt serves as the occasion for Aaron’s retrieval and use of “unfrequented plots.” While Cicero encourages the reader “be familiar with the ground over which you are to chase and track down your quarry,” and Wilson emphasizes a

¹³ Wilson, *The arte of rhetorique*, 10.

¹⁴ Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason Containing the Arte of Logic*, (London: Richard Grafton, 1551), 72; EEBO STC (2d edn.) 25809.

survey of the boroughes “to fynde game at pleasure,” Aaron surveys the “forest walks,” which promise similar returns in “hope to pluck a dainty doe to ground” (2.1.26).

Aaron emerges as the dark side (pun intended) of the humanist ethos: a knowledgeable reader who knows “Olympus’ top” (2.1.1) and the lay of the rhetorical landscape, the *silva rhetoricae* available to shape a matter of argument, who obeys the humanist precept to “fit[] by kind” (2.1.117) one’s rhetorical selections with the given subject, while inverting the humanist emphasis on virtue in favor of “an excellent piece of villany” (2.3.7). In doing so, Aaron follows Desiderius Erasmus’s advice on textual models in *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia* to the word: “whatever kind they are, they will be added to the collection [...] However low it be, however unusual, poetic, archaic, new, obsolete, harsh, barbarous, and exotic, nevertheless, let it be placed in its own company, as it were, and nest, so that if ever a need for it arise, it may be summoned then.”¹⁵ Aaron leads us to a woods “fitted by kind for rape and villany,” a woods constructed before the audience’s eyes, or ears, as a place to serve Demetrius and Chiron’s ends.

II. Words and Wood: The Raw and the Cut

To fully appreciate Aaron’s argument though, one must consider how the woods of which he speaks are something other (ontologically speaking) than a metaphor for humanist rhetorical practices. In other words, though thoroughly textual in the sense of *silva rhetoricae*, Aaron’s woods must also exist as something more than rhetoric in order for his argument to achieve its effect. In his seminal work on the influence of Ramist

¹⁵ Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. Donald King, 7th Edition (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2012), 20.

dialectics on early modern thought, Walter Ong describes the conceptual significance of the *silva* metaphor for humanist rhetoric as follows:

Like its Greek cognate ‘*ῥλῆ*’, the Latin *silva* (woods, brush, forest) has as a secondary meaning an abundance or congeries or quantity, as in Cicero, Suetonius, and Quintilian, or in Ramus, who writes of the *silva* of Christian teaching which he feels needs putting in order. The Greek term extends further to mean also felled trees or timber, and finally material in general as the stuff out of which something is made, a notion ordinarily conveyed in Latin by *materia*.¹⁶

Rhetorically, the woods signal abundance, something which Aaron confers in his reference to “wide and spacious” “walks” and the “many unfrequented plots” (2.1.115-6). More striking is the relationship between the Greek “*ῥλῆ*” and Latin “*materia*,” a link which associates the woods or forest as raw matter for composition. For Ong, importantly, such raw material is fundamentally transformative: “The Latin concept of *materia* is associated with the notion of mater or mother: *materia* is the mother-stuff out of which something is formed, given outline or molded.”¹⁷ This conception of *materia* as the liminal point of form, as that upon which form acts or “of which something is formed,” has an affinity with Aristotle’s understanding of *materia* as form *in potentia*, that from which things take shape.¹⁸ In the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle lists four causes of an object, the first of which is material causation: “in one sense, that as the result of whose

¹⁶ Walter Ong, *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue: From the Art of Discourse to the Art of Reason* (1958; Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 119.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Aristotle’s conceptions of form and matter posit form as actuality and matter as potentiality (*dynamis*). As Natasha Korda and Jonathan Gil Harris observe in their critique of materialist studies which equate “materiality” with “physicality”: “Aristotle thus understood materiality as a synonym not for physical presence, but for dynamic process; matter, in his analysis, is always worked upon.” See Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, eds., *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 17.

presence something comes into being—e.g. the bronze of a statue and the silver of a cup, and the classes which contain these.”¹⁹ In both the rhetorical and physical senses of *materia*, what is most significant is the requirement that work be done *upon* the *materia*, because it exists precisely to be used, whether to piece together discursive structures or to make bronze statues and silver cups.

For Wilson, as for other theorists of classical logic and rhetoric in the period, if one knows the material cause of something, one can set out a particular “maner of reasonyng” based on, for example, the presence or absence of that material. This “maner of reasonyng” can take shape, for example, by considering, as Wilson does, “The Shoomaker hath no Lether, how can he then make a Shooe? The Printer hath no paper, ergo he cannot set his men on worke.”²⁰ Wilson highlights the use-value, worked-upon-character, of this raw material further: “The substance called *materia*, is ready to bee framed of the woorkeman, as hym liketh, by the whiche substaunce, either thynges naturall, or els thynges artificiall are made.”²¹ In arguing from the category of material causation, an orator can affirm, for example, that “if a manne haue cloth, he maie haue a garment made if it like hym.”²² In this model of presentation, however, the *actual*, *physical* presence of worker (“manne”), material (“cloth”), and desire (“if it like hym”) become central components under consideration in the argument.

In his initial unfolding of Rome’s woods, Aaron not only speaks of the *silva*, then, in a rhetorical sense, but also relies upon the place of material causation; that is, in Wilson’s terms, he makes use of that “maner of reasonyng” which “doth affirme [or

¹⁹ Aristotle, *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (1941; New York: Modern Library Paperback Edition, 2001): 5.1013a.

²⁰ Wilson, *Rule of Reason*, 89.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 88.

²² *Ibid.*

deny]” an argument based on the presence or absence of a physical material. Rhetoric does write the woods, to an extent, but *only also* by working vis-a-vis the category of material causation, through the guarantee that physical *materia* can be used for the ends inscribed. Words do not quite work on the *materia* of the (physical) woods like the shoemaker or printer work upon their “lether” and “paper.” Rather, the arrangement, or use, of *silva rhetoricae* work with matter to construct a place available for certain actions or performances. The woods are “fitted by kind” (2.1.117) through a union of rhetoric and physical action; they are, thus, defined primarily by how they are used or appropriated for such speech or actions.

If this union of speech and physicality, this merging of script and performance, sounds resonant of the very genre in which these words and characters come to life, then it is perhaps worth noting the materiality of the wood(s) upon which the actors of Shakespeare’s play stand, as Vin Nardizzi does when he observes, “Shakespeare routinely conscripted the structural woodenness of the theatre to perform the role of tree, woods, forest, orchard, and park.”²³ Exploring the “elemental woodenness” of the early modern stage, Nardizzi reminds the reader: “When a character invokes such a woodland setting verbally, his or her words indicate that the actor also physically motions towards some thing.”²⁴ Nardizzi, in a reading of Peter Quince’s nomination of “this hawthorn brake” as “our tiring-house” in *A Midsummer’s Night’s Dream* (III.i.4), argues that Quince “transforms the wooden fixture back into what it may have actually been: an underwood of hawthorn.”²⁵ Nardizzi highlights the material affinities between the

²³ Vin Nardizzi, *Wooden Os: Shakespeare’s Theatres and England’s Trees* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 21.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid., 22.

woodenness of the tiring house and those woodlands familiar to Elizabethan audiences. The journey that Nardizzi delineates backwards through time,²⁶ from the tiring house to the underwood of hawthorn, might just as easily be reversed, in a performance that gestures toward the journey from the underwood to the stage, the process by which the material of the wood becomes the stage. Or, rather, we could simply think of Quince arguing from the place of material causation, reminding the audience of that raw material, the “hawthorn brake” which is transformed into “our tiring-house.” From the *loci* of material causation, in the Aristotelian sense, without this wood, we cannot have the stage. Aaron’s account of the woods serves, then, as an inversion of what, as Nardizzi observes, Michael D. Bristol calls a “*fiat sylvius*”—a command which “strip[s] away layers of paint and drapery” onstage to assert, with “a force stronger than analogy” the presence of a woodland setting for the audience.²⁷

If Aaron argues from the category of material causation, what object he is arguing would be made? Certainly, nothing so (materially) obvious as a statue, a cup, a “goune” or coat, or shoe. Wilson notes that from material argument one can suggest “either thynges naturall, or els thynges artificiall are made.”²⁸ He describes an “artificiall thyng” as “an Image [...] made by the handy worke of man, & is grauen out of stone, or molten in gold, or in brasse.”²⁹ “Image” resonates materially in Wilson’s example, as it is made

²⁶ His modelling of this journey is deeply indebted to Jonathan Gil Harris’s *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). Harris focuses on how things are inherently polytemporal, how “the objects of material culture are often saturated with the unmistakable if frequently faint imprints of many times”: An object, a circumstance, is thus polychronic, multitemporal, and reveals a time that is gathered together, and with multiple pleats,” 3. Nardizzi views the untimely woodenness of the stage through its past life in the forest, tracing a journey from theater to underwood.

²⁷ Michael D. Bristol, “Shamelessness in Arden: Early Modern Theatre and the Obsolence of Popular Theatricality,” in *Print, Manuscript, Performance: The Changing Relations of the Media in Early Modern England*, ed. Arthur F. Marotti and Michael D. Bristol (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2000): 279-306, 279. I owe Nardizzi for his reference to Bristol (qtd. in 22).

²⁸ Wilson, *Rule of Reason*, 88.

²⁹ Ibid.

of physical substances, but it also has a poetic character. In other words, “image” alerts us to the way in which this “artificiall thyng,” like the statue, cup, gowne or coat, and shoe, functions as an aesthetic object. This, I want to suggest, is precisely what Aaron, as Shakespeare’s stand-in dramatist, is making from his *materia*, specifically, from his classical *silva* and woodsy stage. He even refers to his script as a kind of artistic object, “an excellent piece of villany” (2.3.7).

As Lynn Enterline observes of “the supremely literary origin for the horrible events written on Lavinia’s body,”³⁰ the assault upon Lavinia is highly literary in its reliance upon the Ovidian tale of Tereus and Philomela, but its literariness is through Aaron transmitted to the physical space of the stage, thereby becoming perceptive and sensuous. “Aesthetic,” of course, derives from the “ancient Greek αἰσθητικός of or relating to sense perception, sensitive, perceptive.”³¹ Aaron’s “excellent piece of villany” (2.3.7), as an arrangement of rhetoric, actions, and the physical materiality of the stage itself, is realized in the phenomenal realm most potently through violence—the physical “strike” (2.1.118)—which Chiron and Demetrius visit upon Lavinia. Thus, the rape of Lavinia is a sensible realization of Aaron’s use of the raw material of words and things. An aesthetic object or act requires the use of the *materia* from which discourse is drawn as well as the *materia* on which human actions can occur. It is the moment where human intention enters into the physical realm. Human intention—emphasized in the hunt (in its metaphorical and literal registers), linguistic manipulation, and physical violence—becomes the field in which nature-as-woods is enfolded.

³⁰ Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

³¹ “aesthetic, n. and adj.,” OED Online, March 2014. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3237?redirectedFrom=aesthetic> (accessed April 07, 2014).

This circuitry of text, performance, physical space, and materiality is further emphasized upon the discovery of the rape by the Andronici, a discovery which is profoundly textual in its epistemological derivations. Lavinia, in Titus's garden, sorts through her nephew's books for the narrative which best describes her own story (4.1.1-50). The moment highlights the role of the aesthetic as both the entrance of the textual into the field of perception, and the imbrication of human intention into nature. Marcus observes: "See, brother, see; note how she quotes the leaves" (4.1.50) emphasizing, all at once, (physical) perception ("See, brother, see"), reading practices ("she quotes"), and, in the dual senses of "leaves," both the printed pages (material records of inscriptive practices) and arboreal phenomena. Titus follows Marcus, aligning for us, all at once, the act, place, hunt and poet who "pattern'd":

Lavinia, wert thou thus surprised, sweet girl,
 Ravish'd and wrong'd, as Philomela was,
 Forced in the ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods? See, see!
 Ay, such a place there is, where we did hunt--
 O, had we never, never hunted there!--
 Pattern'd by that the poet here describes,
 By nature made for murders and for rapes. (3.1.51-7)

Lavinia, remade once more as Philomela, is imagined by her father "forced" into the "ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods." "See, see!" Titus yells. He is reading the text before him, yet also "seeing" the physical space. Perception, at once textual and physical, links the place ("ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods") with the act ("where we did hunt"). Amidst this revelation, Titus, like Aaron, views the place as "fitted by kind / for rape and

villainy”: “By nature made for murders and for rapes.” And yet, though Titus believes the woods are “by nature made for murders and for rapes,” this realization comes *only because* they are “pattern’d by that the poet here describes.”

Marcus commits a similar error, when he concludes, “O, why should nature build so foul a den, / Unless the gods delight in tragedies?” (4.1.58-9). His question directs A.C. Hamilton toward a conceptualization of tragedy in which the forest is “the major dramatic symbol upon which the play turns,” “a vision of a destroyed and destroying Nature that only tragedy dare face.”³² Tempting as it is to follow Marcus in his attribution of the violence in the woods to hostile gods, as Hamilton does, his proclamation against nature, like Titus’s, occludes the manner in which he comes to know the woods: through the poet, the hunt, and *human* perception. While Marcus (and Hamilton) may deem the woods emblematic of some supernatural proclivity toward chaos, they are in the play instead depicted as a site which characters come to know through textual manipulations and human performance: the woods are inscribed—arranged and manipulated—by language and performances. They are precisely the point where human intention and *materia* meet in uneasy tension.

“The ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods,” Titus says (4.2.53), echoing Aaron’s opening assessment to Demetrius and Chiron (2.1.129-30). Instructing the boys, Aaron closes with a call to action: if the woods cannot hear, cannot care, cannot think, then speak and act as you will. Human opportunity and action are predicated upon what the thing is defined to be: not merely what it is as a question of “nature,” but what it is as a question of epistemology, how we *know* it to be. “See, see!” (4.1.53) is at once

³² A.C. Hamilton, “*Titus Andronicus*: The Form of Shakespearean Tragedy,” *SQ* 14 (1963): 201-13, 211-2.

observation and interpretation, and the point seems to be that, in coming to an understanding of the woods, these two modes of knowing are utterly indistinguishable.

Will West, in his discussion of the relationship between encyclopedic and theatrical knowledge in the period, highlights the visual form of knowledge emphasized by humanist ideals in early sixteenth century understandings of “theater”: “Based on the Greek root of *theaomai*, ‘look,’ the theatre was conceived of as principally an instrument of vision, a device for ‘beholding.’”³³ As interpreted through Renaissance humanism, this sense of theater became associated with “an ideal model of knowing as a species of seeing that is drawn from readings of ancient texts.”³⁴ In short, “theater” was considered before the rise of the public theater in the late sixteenth century, West argues, primarily under this ideal humanist paradigm, as a center for knowledge production—as, what the Wycliffite Bible manuscript of 1382 (in which the word “theatre” first appeared in English), deems a “comune biholdihying place.”³⁵

As theatrical practice became a prominent cultural form, the understanding of the immediacy of this objective knowledge supposed to exist in this “comune biholdihying place” gave way to what West calls “an early modern epistemology of performance”:

In their earlier, imaginary forms, theatre and encyclopedia shared a conception that centered on the undistorted display of objects of knowledge before passive spectators. In practice, their supposedly spectatorial knowledge changed over the sixteenth century to a knowledge that was conceived of as performative, as relying on and shaped in its

³³ West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, 46-7.

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ Qtd. in West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, 46.

presentation rather than simply offering a faithful representation of a truth housed elsewhere. The performative conception of knowledge likens the activity of the spectator to that of the actor in producing meaning from the world she or he both replicates and observes.³⁶

In opening up “a new realm of existence – human experience – to intelligibility,”³⁷ theatrical practice complicated earlier humanist presumptions that theaters would allow for “the undistorted display of objects of knowledge before passive spectators.” Rather than serving as “a ‘place of looking’ [that] seemed to offer the possibility of a knowledge based on a shared sensual experience, prior to any reflection of interpretation,”³⁸ theatrical practice—in its unfolding of human experience—complicated the very kind of knowledge that could be secured. “Theatre in execution was never merely a place of looking, but one of action, and this action, although marked as fictional, nonetheless participated in the world in ways both direct and oblique.”³⁹ In depicting action in its unfolding of human experience (Aristotle, after all, defines tragedy as a depiction of an action), the theater instructed a kind of knowledge that was not solely intelligible, disembodied and undistorted, but rather produced in and through the very distortions and fluxes of physical and rhetorical performance of action in space and time.

Turning to Titus’s “ruthless, vast, and gloomy woods” (3.1.53) with West’s critique in mind, what becomes most noticeable is his assumption of unmediated knowledge at the very moment when knowledge of the woods is being relayed to Titus, Marcus, and the audience in the highly mediated forms of both the Ovidian text and his

³⁶ Ibid., 11.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid., 49.

³⁹ Ibid., 56.

own subjective experience of that place through the royal hunt. The relation between place and interpretive knowledge repeats Aaron's pattern of understanding, when he aligned those "ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull" (2.1.129) woods with the actions of Demetrius and Chiron—"there speak, and strike" (2.1.130)—their words and violent actions. There is a solipsistic, circular quality to Aaron's understanding of the woods that here is reemphasized in Titus's knowledge production: they are "fitted by kind for rape and villainy" (2.1.115-7), so one can "there speak, and strike" (2.1.130). Aaron's rhetoric presumes a performance before it is performed, supposing that the woods are defined by the very action which they permit. Through the lens of West's "early modern epistemology of performance," we can see Titus's "See, see!" (4.1.54) participating in a similar epistemological framework. While his observation pretends to a complete, objective knowledge of place and act, this pretension disregards the interpretive work he is doing and the mediation through which his knowledge comes.

Most interestingly, Titus traces his visual metaphor of knowledge not directly to the place, but to the *action* of the hunt, for he immediately follows "See, see!" with the confirmation, "Ay, such a place there is, where we did hunt" (4.1.54). As with Aaron's woods, "hunt" can resonate here in the trope of humanist archival practices: after all, the "place" is textual in Titus's moment of "discovery," as Lavinia "hunts" through Ovid to find it. Yet, it may be equally important to take seriously the hunt as action, since, like Aaron, Titus entwines place and action indistinguishably. His interpretation of the Ovidian woods is conditioned by the action of hunting, and, in this way, his woods are equally performative (epistemologically speaking), and inflected with a politicized, ideological understanding of what the hunt means in Rome's forests.

III. “The hunt is up”: Woods as Politics

Titus’s first encounter with the forest occurs in the opening of II.i, when the audience also first perceives (visually) the woods Aaron has promised. As he trots onstage, Titus observes, quite satisfied, “The hunt is up, the morn is bright and grey, / The fields are fragrant and the woods are green” (2.1.1-2). Not yet “ruthless, vast and gloomy” (4.1.53), the woods are, quite benignly, “green.” Titus, ever the literalist, misses the duplicity Aaron discerns in the place; his woods are all surface color. But this is not simply a burgeoning empirical positivism: the woods are arranged, even in this simplistic observation on color, through the prospect of the hunt. “The hunt is up,” Titus comments, and he proceeds to observe, or, more accurately, arrange and interpret, the setting that most complements this proposition: “the morn is bright and grey, / The fields are fragrant and the woods are green” (2.1.1-2). In his words, nature is made for the hunt, and these woods are the accompaniment of the hunting ideal. This arrangement, however, can be read as a symptom of his blind allegiance to the state, demonstrated earlier in his slaying of his son Mutius (1.1); for the hunt to which Titus refers is a royal hunt, and the forest, most likely, a royal game preserve. Elizabethans hearing this would have associated the hunt with an aristocratic, royal, pastime.

For Robert Pogue Harrison, the hunt symbolically “ritualizes and reaffirms the king’s ancient nature as civilizer and conqueror of the land.”⁴⁰ In other words, it rehearses the law-instantiating power which is at the origin of the sovereign’s rule, the civilizing *force* at the foundation of the order of the land. This sovereign power materializes also in

⁴⁰ Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 74.

the demarcation of land—the forest game preserve—for this activity. The etymology of “forest” reveals its political valences in relation to the hunt:

The word *foresta* appears for the first time in the laws of the Longobards and the capitularies of Charlemagne, referring not to woodlands in general but only to the royal game preserves. The word has an uncertain provenance. The most likely origin is the Latin *foris*, meaning “outside.” The obscure Latin verb *forestare* meant “to keep out, to place off limits, to exclude.”⁴¹

Harrison goes on to explain the relation between land and sovereign implicit in the “off limits” of *forestare*: “A ‘forest,’ then, was originally a juridical term referring to land that had been placed off limits by a royal decree.[...] It lay outside the public domain, reserved for the king’s pleasure and recreation.”⁴² Thus, the “outside” in “forest” echoes that power the king holds over the land, exercised in the arbitrariness of a decree to designate any land in his domain “off limits.”

The problem, of course, is that the emperor is asleep (“wake the emperor and his lovely bride” [2.2.2]). Titus has yet to understand that the wilderness, through the Goths, has already crept into Rome. While eventually he acknowledges, in defeat, “Rome is a wilderness of tigers” (3.1.54), Titus’s utter devotion to the ideal sovereign as both civilizer and conqueror, within whom civilized realm and wilderness both reside, fails to account for the fact that Saturninus is no ideal ruler. Tamora’s command upon their engagement—“be ruled by me” (1.1.442)—lingers as a reminder throughout the play of a

⁴¹ Ibid., 69.

⁴² Ibid.

sovereign, and state, utterly compromised and divided by that newly “incorporate” (1.1.462) contingent of Goths which seeks to perpetually undermine its integrity.

The epistemological implications of this un-Moor-ing of sovereign power mean that Titus’s vision of the woods and ideological assumptions of the state are utterly naïve. Titus sees the woods through the royal hunt, as the background for that ritual affirmation of sovereign power. Aaron knows better. I have discussed his “forest walks” (2.1.115) as part of an allegorical structure signifying humanist rhetorical processes of invention and also as physical *materia* whose presence guarantees the claims of his argument, a combination that yields that performative knowledge West highlights.⁴³ Like Titus’s observation, this knowledge is politically charged, as evident when Aaron explicitly sets the woods in relation to the court:

The emperor’s court is like the house of Fame,

The palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears:

The woods are ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull;

There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take your turns. (2.1.127-130)

In Aaron’s hands, the court becomes a working version of Chaucer’s glass temple, made operational by “tongues,” “eyes,” and “ears,” producing (and receiving) words, sights and sounds. The court retains its centrality, but, noticeably, there is no sovereign at the center; rather, the court is imagined solely as a space of policed (and hence, politically authorized and controlled) speech and perception; as a place, in short, of controlled experience. The woods, antithetically, are removed from law and all other concerns over human affairs (“ruthless, dreadful”). They are numb to speech (“deaf”) and reason

⁴³ West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, 11.

(“dull”). They are off the political, and even the human, map. Polarized from the language and image production machine of the state, the woods are a recognition, or construction, of its limited sphere, and they are a construction that is explicitly tied with alternative, unpoliced speech and physical performances (“speak and strike”). There is stuff out there, Aaron knows—rhetorical and physical *materia*—that permit speech and actions which the court does not and cannot control.

This epistemology inhabits the very mechanisms of knowing that West associates with the public theaters:

The public theatre’s reflexive self-authorization, relying neither on some external reference nor on an externally produced authority, was perhaps its most important contribution to epistemology – that knowledge could be the creation of human action and interaction, that it was in effect performed.⁴⁴

Titus’s knowledge relies on his relation to the sovereign and, hence, his sense of the stability of the state, as it extends to Rome’s wilderness. Aaron, like West’s public theaters, works through an epistemology of “reflexive self-authorization, relying neither on some external reference nor on an externally produced authority.”⁴⁵ The court is simply a noisy hub of words, eyes, and ears—not an authority of control over speech throughout the entire state. Walk outside the emperor’s gardens, and one walks away from those state-monitored, state-sanctioned discursive networks (and humanist principles of civilizing effects of education), toward paths of silence and darkness, places

⁴⁴ Ibid., 56.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

whose knowledge can be the “creation of human action and interaction”⁴⁶ of various kinds. Away from the authorized routes and channels of discursive production, Aaron can construct the woods as a part of a performance of his own desires.

Like the wooden stage on which it is performed, *Titus*’s sovereign woods—as both construct and place of experience—are made public. West suggests, “When vision or experience becomes public, even though it remains figurative, it becomes necessary to authorize some guide for its management. Such a guide also serves as a marker or a guarantee of the accuracy of the original knowledge.”⁴⁷ In the vacuum of power that opens in Rome, *Titus* presents an epistemological crisis in its woods that is catalyzed by a series of “guides” who generate, or perform, the world for their own ends. While Aaron is the first and most prominent, Tamora is equally important, pressing an “epistemology of performance” to precisely the moment when the play’s dramatic crisis, Lavinia’s rape, is realized. I will now consider how her version of the woods operates through a similar interdependence of rhetoric, desires, and physical material as Aaron and Titus.

IV. Tamora’s “detested vale”

Tamora’s woods begin with a false start. Just after Aaron buries the gold that will “coin” his stratagem (2.3.5), she arrives, and with her, an entirely new constellation of words, actions and desires—the forest made anew in her image. Her question, “My lovely Aaron, wherefore look'st thou sad, / When every thing doth make a gleeful boast” (2.3.10-11)? interrupts the driving narrative of Aaron’s plot, converting forest to pastoral haven, *locus amoenus*. As Aaron similarly treated the forest before her, she is using the

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 116.

woods to make an argument—a deliberative oration—in this case, for sex: “The birds chant melody on every bush, / The snake lies rolléd in the cheerful sun, / The green leaves quiver with the cooling wind / And make a chequer'd shadow on the ground” (2.3.12-15). The Elizabethan audience would know quite well they were witnessing a performance that need not have referential bases, and, especially attentive or knowledgeable attendants, would have recognized the generic features of the woods unfolding before them: the woods onstage are now wrapped up—being used—within a network of pastoral love poetry rhetoric, erotic physical performance and desire that, in a logical and rhetorical sense, all contributes to an argument for sex.

The character of this desire is perhaps most palpable in the prosopopoeia Tamora employs to give life to the leaves in the wind (*anemographia* is the rhetorical term for a description of the wind). In considering this, first, we might try to place these green leaves in context of the Biblical allusion of the snake: if this pastoral haven is hyperbolized into a quasi-Eden which has yet to Fall, then, perversely, Tamora and Aaron play the part of Adam and Eve. From this perspective, we can associate the leaves Tamora points to as those “natural” objects which cover the genitalia of this allegorized couple. “Quiver,” as in, “to shake, tremble, or vibrate with a slight rapid motion,” lends an affective, even eroticized, quality to these objects. The *Oxford English Dictionary* cites two examples that relate the characteristic to feminine affect: Caxton’s *Eneydos* xxvii.103 (1490), “Dido..quyuered & shoke”; and Middleton’s *Chast Mayd of Cheap-side* (1630), “A braue Court Spirit makes our Virgines quiuer” (I.5).⁴⁸ These connections are suggestive of one way in which the description of the woods—within the generic

⁴⁸ “quiver, v.1,” OED Online, March 2014, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156819?rskey=IITheB&result=4&isAdvanced=false> (accessed April 07, 2014).

conventions of pastoral love poetry—is directed not outwardly, toward reference, but, rather, inwardly, to the desires of the speaker: the “leaves” which cover her parts “quiver” in erotic anticipation that signals its own textual mediation (“leaves” also indicating surfaces from which to write and read).

Because Aaron has other ideas, this pastoral place is quickly displaced by an infernal *topos* constructed upon the arrival of Bassianus and Lavinia, then Chiron and Demetrius. This “place” is prompted by Demetrius’s, “How now, dear sovereign, and our gracious mother! / Why doth your highness look so pale and wan?” (2.3.89-90). By invoking “sovereign,” Demetrius affirms Tamora’s royal and performative power in the scene. In the absence of the emperor, she is his substitute. Her response, like her previous version of the woods, is a lengthy argument that relies on the rhetorical devices of *topographia*, *prosopopoeia*, *enargia* and *hyberbole*:

These two have 'ticed me hither to this place:

A barren detested vale, you see it is;
The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean,
O'ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe:
Here never shines the sun; here nothing breeds,
Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven:
And when they show'd me this abhorréd pit,
They told me, here, at dead time of the night,
A thousand fiends, a thousand hissing snakes
Ten thousand swelling toads, and as many urchins
Would make such fearful and confuséd cries

As any mortal body hearing it

Should straight fall mad, or else die suddenly. (2.3.91-104)

The conspicuous absences of the melodious birds, the coiled snake in the cheerful sun, the green quivering leaves, are substituted by overwhelmingly dour imagery which builds to construct an allegorical place, its parts serving most overtly as metaphors for the evil of the place rather than physical, living creatures. As her hyperbolic formulations lead us away from the physical space-time of the stage—toward a fantastic and allegorical construction that can only be rhetorical—Tamora is intent on using the *materia* of the here and now, the space and time, of the stage: her description attempts to juxtapose the radically metaphorical, allegorical, hyperbolic elements of her speech with language that relies on the physicality of the woods and the characters. She opens, “These two have ‘ticed me hither to this place: / A barren detested vale, you see it is” (emphasis mine), lines which insist on the space which the stage provides, instructing through visual appeal. This language is followed by a *topographia* that, at first, also relies heavily on visual imagery: “The trees, though summer, yet forlorn and lean, / O’ercome with moss and baleful mistletoe.” Sight, then, which can be validated onstage, is connected with the “forlorn and lean,” and “moss and baleful mistletoe.” Again, the Elizabethan audience would not expect a material referent (i.e., tree prop) to verify accuracy, but rather they would have recognized the entire speech as performance. And yet, they could have been entranced by the effects this “epistemology of performance” has in the dramatic space, by how her rhetorical performance can shape the course of events which occur here. Things are more complicated, though, than merely assessing how the visual imagery serves the dramatic space. In describing the trees, Tamora subtly mentions the season: “The trees,

though summer, yet forlorn and lean” (emphasis mine). This rhetorical move, *chronographia*, is what Puttenham calls “Counterfeit Time.”⁴⁹

Tamora soon shifts temporality again, this time returning to a prior event: “And when they show'd me this abhorréd pit, / They told me, here, at dead time of the night [...]” Tamora introduces a season, then returns to an event in the past, whose reality seems confirmed by the physical presence of the trapdoor onstage—that “abhorréd pit.” And still, she presents yet another temporality—“the dead time of the night.” By the close of her speech, Tamora’s recounting of this “hellish tale” is disorienting, multiplied in counterfeits, false semblants and false temporalities, at once allegorical and physical in its demands upon sense perceptions in the dramatic space. All of this, hard labor really, boils down to Tamora’s simple demand: “revenge it” (2.3.114).

Why the need for argument at all? The murder and rape are pre-scripted. Why the need for the rhetorical flourishes, disorientating temporalities and allegorical imagery, the noisy creatures and ventriloquized persons? One answer, of course, is the simple pleasure her copious discourse affords for the audience, the variety in which, once again, the woods are partitioned. But there is also a cycle of (re)production involved here, where rhetoric and performance use raw material and raw material yields itself to be formed by rhetoric and performance. What is produced? An aesthetic object; the impression of human intention upon nonhuman nature; or, more sinisterly, “an excellent piece of villany” (2.3.7). In this cycle, some form-thing must always be produced from the impress of form upon *materia*. “Here nothing breeds, / Unless the nightly owl or fatal raven” (2.3.96-7), Tamora says, in an atemporal statement of natural history. The “fatal

⁴⁹ George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 325.

raven” remains a striking image not merely because, as Pliny says in his *Natural History*, it was the “worst token of ill luck,” but rather because, in this terrain of sterility, the only reproduction that can occur is, paradoxically, through the “nightly owl” and this “fatal” bird.⁵⁰ Pliny describes the peculiarities of the raven’s reproductive habits as follows: “the common sort are of opinion, that [ravens] conceive and engender at the bill, or lay their egges by it.”⁵¹ The consumption of its eggs, Pliny notes, affected women’s reproductive cycles as well: “if women great with child chaunce to eat a Ravens egge, they shall be delivered of their children at the mouth.”⁵² In the midst of a rhetorical performance utterly superfluous to a genuine argument, Tamora unfolds a *topographia* of sterility amidst which that “fatal” bird breeds through its mouth. “Here nothing breeds,” she says, but where is “here”? Is it the space of the woods onstage, the allegorical landscape, or something in between, that vexed domain where offspring from the mouth enter and affect the physical realm? Where the “transport” of metaphor is materially inscribed, realized, in the physical realm? Or, conversely, is it the space where words, like the offspring of the raven’s mouth, are already things, existing in lived experience? A “fatal” offspring, whose contact in experience must be violent, because it requires materia for raw use? The woods, a raven’s den: the “gathering” of rhetorical, political and material practices for the production of knowledge and experience of tragedy.

V. Addendum: “Sorrows to the Stones”

⁵⁰ Pliny, The Elder, *The Historie of the World, Commonly called, The Naturall Historie of C. Plinius Secundus*, trans. Philemon Holland (London: Adam and Phillip, 1634), 168; EEBO STC. (2nd ed.) 20030.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

The world Tamora gives birth to—the woods she performs (rhetorically, physically), through the guidance of Aaron’s script—enforces itself epistemologically through nothing but the performance itself.⁵³ Outside of this network of discursive production and violence is silence. Not the silence of “deaf, and dull” (2.1.129) woods, which, in the play, are always-already available for use, but rather the silence of those who suffer, in the lived dramatic experience, the material realization or enforcement of the performance—those who are sacrificed to the “fatal” offsprings of rhetoric, performance and desire: Alarbus, Lavinia, Martius and Quintus. If the tragedy of *Titus* has a driving force, it is that this network of rhetoric, performance and desire always impresses itself on some *thing*, whether human or nonhuman, woods or girl. Moreover, the network requires for its existence that these things—and characters—be treated as nothing but means for its own ends, solely things of use-value. Rape and murder become the visitation of this aesthetic constellation upon that material—the violent imprint.

Perhaps because of the sheer quantity and graphic nature of the violence in the play, I have devoted this essay to the constellation of rhetorical, material and political factors that lead most directly to these decisive acts of violence. This approach has, regrettably, left those victims of violent imprints within the silence in which the play confines them. Surely, though, amidst the violence which is first visited upon the Andronici and, then, returned upon the Goths and the state, there are moments of pause, moments when the audience is afforded glimpses of other modes, or constellations, of

⁵³ In “Shakespeare’s Kitchen Archives,” Julian Yates reminds us that Tamora “‘swallow[s] her own increase’ (5.2.191), dies with her sons in her mouth,” a process he suggests “Titus symbolizes as a reverse pregnancy.” See Julian Yates, “Shakespeare’s Kitchen Archives,” in *Speculative Medievalisms: Discography*, ed. The Petropunk Collective (Brooklyn: Punctum Books, 2013), 179-200, 197.

rhetoric, performance, desire, and politics, formed, perhaps, out of traumatic experiences of those who suffer—those at the receiving ends of the violent imprint, those who are made to exist like raw material for other's use. What would these modes of speech and action, from the polar end of violence, look like? How would they treat their *materia*?

I close now with one possibility: Titus's treatment of the stones before his sons' execution (3.1.37-48). At the edge of the state, unheard by the tribunes he has served as he pleads for his sons' lives, Titus turns toward these stones, saying, "My tears are now prevailing orators," (3.1.26), in a conflation of the affective residue of trauma and the public rhetoricians. This is no strategic speech, but words borne of trauma, from the voice of one at the receiving end of state-sanctioned violence. In place of his silent sons, and his silent daughter (whom he has yet to see), Titus's words come from a deep drive to give voice to the victimized, even if it cannot be heard amidst "the palace full of tongues, of eyes, and ears" (2.1.128) now conjoined, quite dangerously, with words "ruthless, dreadful, deaf, and dull" (2.1.129). Here is a speech, a performance, guided by no hope that its constellation of rhetoric, action and desire will impress itself upon the stage-play world: "yet plead I must" (3.1.35). So, in an apostrophe, he turns away from the tribunes toward the stones. "Therefore I tell my sorrows to the stones / Who, though they cannot answer my distress, / Yet in some sort they are better than the tribunes, / For that they will not intercept my tale" (3.1.37-40). In a most vulgar sense, these stones might be said to signify the testicles of the castrated patriarch—the father, general—who loses his s(t)on(e)s as he is simultaneously severed from the state. If Tamora's mouth-breeding raven conjured the image of rhetorical productivity in a terrain where "nothing breeds" (2.3.96), Titus's detached stones emphasize the lack of productivity in his words and

performance—representing, in part, one endpoint both of his line and the impress of human intention upon the world in an “epistemology of performance” that goes nowhere.

And yet, in this highly Ovidian play, the bereft patriarch before the stones may allude to another kind of lineage, specifically that stony lineage of Deucalion and Pyrrha. Left as “the last exemplars” (17) after the flood in Ovid’s creation tale, Deucalion and Pyrrha beg of Themis “by what means / the ruin of our race can be redeemed” (17), to which the goddess responds, “throw behind you, as you go, the bones of the great mother” (18).⁵⁴ “Struck dumb,” and taking the words literally, Pyrrha thinks the command an impiety, but Deucalion recognizes, “By the great mother, the earth is meant; and bones, I think mean stones, / which lie inside earth’s body” (18). Deucalion’s interpretation relies upon a metaphorical understanding of “mother” and “bones,” which transports across the human divide toward a recognition of a shared (material, physiological) heritage between earth and humans. In other words, the Pyrrha-Deucalion narrative does not unfold as an anthropomorphism of the stones—where human terms of “mother” and “bones” are imported onto the earth—but rather relies upon this critical hermeneutic moment of Deucalion realizing the earthiness (and stoniness) of his humanity. Only an expansion of human definition allows for the regeneration of the human: once tossed, the stones morph into “human forms” (18).

The difference is subtle, but important, between Deucalion’s understanding of the stones and the treatment of the woods I have examined throughout *Titus*. If, for Tamora, for example, the woods function as the material mediators for her rhetorical and performative aims, they are a woods that are brought into the human fold—that network

⁵⁴ I use the translation from *The Metamorphoses of Ovid*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt, 1993).

of rhetoric, performance and desire—for use, whereas the premise of Deucalion’s recognition is not a “bringing in” of the earth toward such a network, but rather an expansion—or deterritorialization—of the conception of what the human is. “They will not intercept my tale,” Titus says of the stones, placing them outside of that circuit “of tongues, of eyes, and ears” of the palace (2.1.128) so readily manipulated by the Goths. Importantly, “they will not intercept” does not suggest the stones will listen, or hear, but rather only that they do not participate in the rhetorical productivity in which the woods enter and are interpellated under various performative ideologic-epistemologies. The stones do not “speak” in ways the woods do of erotic desire or infernal pastoral nightmares, for instance, and nor are they programmed as the woods are in a complementing “green” for the royal hunt. Titus rather values them precisely because of their distance from such performances, and, as such, he demonstrates a similar willingness as Deucalion to reconsider the dimensions of the human polity, to embrace a politics that is less rhetorically and performatively charged by human desires, and, in sum, a bit more stony.

One could argue, he *is* using these stones here, just as the woods have been used. They are serving as sounding boards for his sorrow, and, also, for the political comparison to the tribunes. In fact, the entirety of the speech can be read as a method of varying which Erasmus, in *De Copia*, defines as *aequipollentia* (equivalence), which draws relationships of opposites, of absolute contraries, such as “love, hate; angry, favoring; beautiful, ugly” or those which “differ privately, as: blind and seeing, dead and living, deaf and hearing, mute and talking.”⁵⁵ Just as Aaron’s forest and Tamora’s woods

⁵⁵ Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, 34.

are divided, partitioned, to best serve their arguments, so are Titus's stones: "A stone is soft as wax,--tribunes more hard than stones; / A stone is silent, and offendeth not, / And tribunes with their tongues doom men to death" (3.1.45-47). In this comparison, the stones serve as the *materia* for Titus's devaluing of the juridical mechanisms by which the state functions, and, thus, they become yet another casualty to human intention or desire. Furthermore, Titus (or Shakespeare) fails to obey Erasmus's rule when implementing *aequipollentia*, that "these characteristics are not predicated except of those things the nature of which is capable of the opposite. For a stone is neither said to be dead nor blind."⁵⁶ In Titus's rhetoric, the stones are valued for a silence of which they are not "capable of the opposite." Yet, to read Titus more sympathetically, and in keeping with the strangeness of Deucalion's reading of Themis's commandment, his realization of the shared heritage "bones" implies, what if Titus is entertaining a nature in stones that *would* allow for a speech, only a kind of speech that is inherently inhuman, one which is the contrary of that dangerous rhetoric deployed throughout the tragedy? In other words, does he violate Erasmus's rules—"For a stone is neither said to be dead nor blind,"⁵⁷ or expand the possibilities of what stones are, what they can do?

The strangeness of this latter suggestion perhaps makes more sense when we consider his assessment "a stone is soft as wax" (3.1.45). Far from a literal or material sense, "wax" resonates metaphorically in relation to the "hard[ness]" of the tribunes who "doom men to death with their tongues." In this relation, "wax" aligns with silence, and the "natural" hardness of stones aligns not merely with rhetoric, but the constellation of rhetoric ("tongues") and performance that produces the state execution. This

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

metaphorical “wax” is understood, then, best in a context of rhetoric and performance. In this context, Erasmus’s citation of Quintilian’s famous piece of wax, to illuminate one of his pedagogical methodologies in *De Copia*, is most relevant: “we should often of set purpose select certain expressions and make as many variations of them as possible in the way Quintilian advises, ‘just as several different figures are commonly formed from the same piece of wax.’”⁵⁸ In these rhetorical understandings, wax (and silence, for that matter) exist at the counterpoint of figuration and inscription, are aligned with that from which speech and figures are formed. Again, Aristotle’s notion of *materia* as *in potentia* comes to mind, and Titus appears to be valuing precisely the thing-in-itself *materia* of stone prior to its manipulation, formation or molding by and through human activity. His rhetoric, thus, values *materia* not always-already for use (as woods) but rather for their pre-linguistic, pre-performative, pre-inscriptive existence: thing as silent, thing as that which may be, but has not yet been, impressed upon. While Titus might very well *use* this stone, it is a performance of stone that generates an archive of silence and the unused. If this is true, what can we say of the anthropomorphic (or prosopopoeic) figurations of stones that “seem to weep with me” (3.1.42) and “were they but attiréd in grave weeds, / Rome could afford no tribune like to these” (3.1.43-4)? How do these performances of stone extend the archive of silence, of the unused or unusable? How do they rehearse Deucalion’s gesture of the human polity toward the stony? With respect to the “weeping” stones Titus envisions, it is important to note that he says they only “seem to weep,” not that they do, thus acknowledging his own subjective sense of their actions, rather than entirely incorporating them into his affective designs.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 17.

In even hinting at their “seem[ing] to weep,” though, Titus is tapping into a religio-political discourse that figures the weeping stones as affective markers of a justice (often divine) for which the silence of the state or human community has failed to advocate. An example of this discourse is perhaps most famous in Luke 19:40: “I tell you, if those should holde their peace, the stones woulde crye,” but its Biblical origins go back to the Old Testament; in Habbakuk, for example, we hear, “The very stones in the walls cry out against you, and the beams in the ceilings echo the complaint” (2:11). The tradition is too extensive to address in this brief space, but I do believe that Titus’s juxtaposition of silence and unused *materia* with these images of tears represents an effort to perform, or enter, into a discursive tradition where the failure of the state—and humans—is recovered through these nonhuman witnesses. The effort is to understand an affective correspondence between grief and trauma received—and gone unheard—with these things outside the state. Even in 1591, about the time *Titus* was being staged, Robert Southwell, in *Marie Magdalens funeral teares*, gives voice to a Mary after the death of Christ, who asks in desperation, “O who will giue water to my head, & a fountaine of teares vnto my eyes that I may weepe day and night, and neuer cease weeping?” only to find solace in the stones of the tomb: “Sorrow with me at the least thou O Tombe, and thawe into teares you hardest stones. The time is now come, that you are licensed to cry, and bound to recompence the silence of your Lordes Disciples, of whome hée himselfe said to the Pharisies, that if they held their peace, the verie stones should crie for them.”⁵⁹ In weeping, stones come to match the grief of those who have no voice in the human community to express their sorrows.

⁵⁹ Robert Southwell, *Marie Magdalens funeral teares* (London: I[ohn] W[olfe] for G[abriel] C[awood], 1591), 21-22;

The sorrows of stones were part of an act of witnessing, validating the grief of the victims as well as their claims to justice. In Joshua, for example, we hear the prophet: “‘See!’ he said to all the people. ‘This stone will be a witness against us. It has heard all the words the LORD has said to us. It will be a witness against you if you are untrue to your God.’” As with Southwell’s Magdalen, the stones are envisioned as part of a divine plan whose authority no human polity can supersede. In the brutal political divides of post-Reformation England, stones were recruited as witnesses to demonstrate the divine authority supporting specific religious factions. On the execution of Catholic martyr John Felton at Newgate in 1570, Thomas Knell, a Protestant, writes “A piththy [sic] note to Papists all and some that ioy in Feltons martirdome,” assuring that “The pauing stones wil witnes bear his Treason to requit,” and, furthermore, “That shall the Stones of Newgate tel, if Papists would denye.”⁶⁰ In Titus’s appeal to the stones, there is not a little of this performance at work, the extra-human appeal to a truer polity redemptive of divine justice. These are Titus’s witnesses, after all, to the failures of the tribunes. Rome, as Maddalena Pennacchia reminds us, was “the ‘city of stones’, the place where the precious marble of statues, the porous travertine of palaces and public buildings, and even the round pebbles set in mortar that paved the roads gave the place its globally praised and recognizable aspect.”⁶¹ Is Titus’s apostrophe, then, part of an appeal to capture the very material structure of the edifices that make the state, to envision, as he

EEBO STC. (2nd ed.) 22950.

⁶⁰ Thomas Knell, *A piththy [sic] note to Papists all and some that ioy in Feltons martirdome, Desiring them to read this and to iudge not in spite at simple trust to grudge. Set foorth by one that knew his life, and was with him at the houre of his death, which was the viii. of August. Anno. 1570. at the west end of Paules Church ouer against the Bishops gate, where he set vp the Bul* (London: John Alde, 1570), B.ii, B.iii; EEBO STC. (2nd ed.) 15034.

⁶¹ Maddalena Pennacchia, “The Stones of Rome. Early Earth Sciences in Julius Caesar and Coriolanus,” in *Questioning Bodies in Shakespeare in Shakespeare’s Rome*, ed. Maria Del Sapio Garbero, Nancy Isenberg, and Maddalena Pennacchia (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010): 309-326, 311-12.

borders upon madness, a stony council that would redeem the wrongs done against his family? Might his stones be as politically charged as the Protestant Knell's?

Perhaps he desires them to be, to speak against the state which puts his sons to death, and his rhetorical performance, in juxtaposing stones with tribunes, does make them politically useful to a degree. But we should recall the lack of overall productivity in this speech, its ultimate useless, powerless effect on the conditions of the state or his sons (or the narrative). He stands less in the position of a Knell who advances a sharply Protestant agenda, and more in the position of Magdalen, who genuinely suffers a grief that the community of Apostles fails to acknowledge or express. It is grief, the expression of Titus's own sorrow, that drives his encounter with the stones, as well as his use of them. Like Magdalen, Titus, whose castrated condition and outpouring of emotion align him with the feminine, turns to the stones not because they embody the architecture of a vigorous Roman state, but because, in their silence and impressionability, they touch upon the vulnerability of those who suffer violence and, what is the ultimate expression of that vulnerability, the human silence of death. "Were they but attired in grave weeds, / Rome could afford no tribunes like these." We may be tempted to say Titus is using the stones, anthropomorphizing, dressing them up, for his own aims, but the "grave weeds" upon the stones dresses them only as tombs, and, imagined as tribunes, Titus is here envisioning a polity of tombs: "Rome could afford no tribunes like these." Thus, once again, Titus is using the *materia* only to come closer, as Deucalion did, to what the human polity would be if it existed in the archive of silence and unusability that stones make possible—if it touched upon and entered into community with nonhuman nature. His Rome, in this moment, is a polity of tombs, containing the ruins of silenced humans.

In delineating this archive and polity, Titus is playing a kind of sculptor. “The sculptor’s art in Elizabethan England,” Bruce Smith notes, “was almost exclusively the tomb-maker’s art.”⁶² If Titus plays sculptor here, though, it is not to construct a monument akin to the Andronici tomb, which celebrates, preserves, and secures his lineage. It is to imagine a polity that registers only the absence of the human, the silence beyond rhetoric, the unused *materia* beyond performance—a “city of stones” as city of tombs, in which what determines the polity is not the lineage housed inside those tombs, but the stones themselves, which convert the defining features of Titus’s imaginings as ruins. If the woods are the raw *materia* of a society in vigorous activity and feverish desires, that upon and through which rhetoric and performance enact the violent inscriptions upon others, the silence of the stones is the archive of those ruined and entombed by this vigorous activity, as well as a promise of the nonhuman terrain into which all of this activity will one day succumb.

⁶² Bruce R. Smith, “Sermons in Stone: Shakespeare and Renaissance Sculpture,” *Shakespeare Studies* 17 (1985): 1-24, 2.

CHAPTER 2

Donne's Space Junk

In “Donne the Space Man,” William Empson argues that John Donne believed in life on other planets and space travel. Written in 1957, at the cusp of our own space age, Empson’s essay has largely been overlooked in Donne scholarship, too often conflated with Charles Coffin’s *John Donne and the New Philosophy* as an example of mid-century “Donne and the New Science” criticism. Yet to gloss “Donne the Space Man” as such is to miss Empson’s nuanced reading of Donne’s appropriation of Incarnation theology in his poetic practices, and its implications for the erotic attachments to things in Donne’s work. For Empson, Donne is defined by a desire, “idea,” or “theology” of the “separate planet,” which he acquires amidst the scientific, specifically astronomical, developments of the late sixteenth century.¹ Donne believed in life on other planets, and this belief was heretical because it amounted to “denying the uniqueness of Jesus.”² Did Christ—on Earth—save all of the universe’s inhabitants, or were there multiple Christs, on each planet, to save each form of life? (This problematic, Empson observes, was echoed in the European encounter with inhabitants of the New World.) The heresy is as bewildering as it is compelling: there is only one true savior in Christianity, and alien life on “separate planets” denies the Church—whether Protestant or Catholic—this central premise. Once the idea of the “separate planet” dislodges the notion of a singular, unique Christ, Donne is free to imagine a universe in which the Incarnation, itself, multiplies: “The young Donne,” Empson says, “believed that every planet could have its Incarnation, and believed this with delight, because it automatically liberated an independent conscience

¹ William Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” *The Kenyon Review* 19, 3 (Summer 1957): 337-399, 345.

² *Ibid.*, 338.

from any earthly religious authority.”³ If earth is not the center of the universe, but simply one of many planets, then we must consider the possibility that, with each separate planet, the divine *Logos* could materialize, be embodied, and thus offer a dramatic reinterpretation of John’s “*et Verbum caro factum est*”: in this case, “The Word [may become] flesh, and [make] his dwelling among ~~us~~ [them]” (John 1:14).

From this perspective, Empson sketches an understanding of Donne’s poetic practice as it is shaped within a radical theological position—a position most evident in Donne’s early love lyrics and elegies, in which it manifested as a genuinely profane religion of love or *eros*. In these poems, Empson argues, Donne stages “space-landings,” moments where both lover and beloved arrive, together, at their own “separate planet,” as the founding Incarnation on which the world is (re)ordered. Empson finds an early development of this idea in the elegy “To His Mistress Going to Bed,” in which Donne’s speaker instructs his beloved, “Off with that girdle, like Heav’n’s zone glist’ring, / But a far fairer world encompassing” (5-6).⁴ Here, Donne begins to open a vista to the “separate planet,” the beloved’s body taking form as a world in which his speaker can merge. Empson is sensitive of reading too much into the moment: “Certainly, he need only mean ‘Your body is more beautiful than this world, which is encompassed by stars as your body by that belt’; but the later lines drive home that she is a New World, and here astronomy is in view, so I expect she was starting to become a planet in his own mind.”⁵ The entire reading hinges on the metaphorical weight we place on “a fair fairer world”: if the simile, “like Heav’n’s zone glis’tring,” suggests a movement toward the

³ Ibid., 341.

⁴ All references to Donne’s poems are taken from *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins, Longman Annotated English Poets Series (Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2008).

⁵ Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” 363.

celestial, the disavowal of this comparison with the qualification, “*But* a far fairer world,” figures the beloved as something different altogether, possessing heavenly qualities—something of the cosmos—*but* also exceeding them, as a world unto herself. The etymologies of “metaphor” and “hyperbole,” which establish the senses of movement, or transport, embedded in each term, lend support to Empson’s argument that Donne is figuring a poetic transport: “metaphor” derives from the “ancient Greek μεταφορά” meaning “bear, carry,” and was interchangeable in the Renaissance with the Latin *translatio*;⁶ “hyperbole” derives from the “Greek ὑπερβολή,” meaning “excess, exaggeration,” but is also related to *hyperballein*, “to throw over or beyond,” from *hyper-*, “beyond,” + *bole*, “a throwing, a casting, the stroke of a missile, bolt, beam.”⁷ In comparing his beloved’s body to “Heav’n’s zone glist’ring,” and then exceeding that comparison with a “far fairer world,” Donne inhabits the very “throwing beyond” implicit in *hyperballein*, his conceit a figurative “missile” into the cosmos.

If we are to understand the radical nature of Donne’s theology of *eros*, though, it is essential that this “missile” lands; that is, that “a far fairer world” signifies not merely in a vague, generalizable way as “the universe” or even, in the more specific register of cartographic discovery, as the “New World,” but, rather, that it correlates with the *actual*, *physical* existence of other planets in the universe. Donne would have been aware of extra-planetary existence through his familiarity with the scientific developments of his time, particularly the work of Nicolaus Copernicus and Giordano Bruno. It is this correlation that guarantees his radical application of Incarnation theology in the trope: the

⁶ “metaphor, n.”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/117328?redirectedFrom=metaphor> (accessed May 06, 2015).

⁷ “hyperbole, n.”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/90286?rskey=BMMaE6&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed May 06, 2015).

material existence of an entity—a planet or world—outside of the (earthly) Christian spiritual order allows him to imagine his (embodied) lovers as inhabitants. If Copernicus dislocates the centrality of earth in the universe, he also makes possible alternative orderings of the divine *Logos* and materiality, of Word and flesh, as they might potentially exist in other planets. Donne simply asks, why can't I place my lovers there? Because separate planets exist materially—because they are “out there”—Donne can imagine a meeting of embodied lovers as the locus of a spiritual center, and the ontological foundation, of the cosmos, in a union of “human love [that is] the reality of which the love for God is the shadow.”⁸

In “The Sun Rising,” Donne’s lovers, in bed, are famously transformed into monarchical powers, “She’s all states, and all princes I, / Nothing else is” (21-22), before, then, becoming the center of the universe, as Donne’s speaker instructs the sun, “Shine here to us, and thou art everywhere: / This thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere” (29-30). As Robin Robbins glosses the penultimate line, Donne is “implying the Ptolemaic system, with the sun centred on the Earth,”⁹ but he only does so while asserting the complete independence of the lovers, expressed by the way in which the physical, intimate sexual encounter becomes the foundation of an Incarnation that realigns the cosmological order.¹⁰ Again, for Empson, Donne is not simply employing the trope of comparing love to religion, but is executing a rather drastic intellectual and spiritual inversion, the crux of which is that “all the imaginative structures which men have built

⁸ Ibid., 349-350.

⁹ Robbins, *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, 249.

¹⁰ Empson observes that, throughout his love lyrics, Donne plays a rather tricky intellectual game with Ptolemy and Copernicus: In fact, according to Empson, Donne is playing a rather tricky intellectual game: “Instead of simply backing Copernicus, [he] gets a kind of lockgrip on his reader by arguing from both Ptolemy and Copernicus at once. According to Ptolemy, the planets are more or less in heaven, and matter there is much better-class than matter here. Copernicus merely showed that it was convenient for calculation to treat the earth as one of the planets [...], but the obvious deduction was that life on other planets is simply like it is here.” Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” 361.

to control themselves are only derived from simple intimate basic relations, and the apparently fantastic compliment is no more than brutal fact.”¹¹ The “separate planet”—as both a trope and an intellectual construct—permits a poetic world in which love, as Donne says in “The Good Morrow,” “makes a little room an everywhere” (11), or, to put it slightly differently, in which every “little room” can have its Incarnation.¹²

For my purposes in this chapter, by placing Donne’s materiality in relation to a heretical vision of the Incarnation, Empson offers the opportunity to think seriously about what junk means in Donne’s poetics. I refer to “junk” not only in our familiar sense of “discarded or waste material that can be put to some use,” which arose in the nineteenth century,¹³ but also in the mid-twentieth-century, rocket era, sense of “space junk,” as in “debris, usually man-made, floating in space, especially in earth[’s] orbit.”¹⁴ To take an example from popular culture, we can think of Luke Skywalker’s comment on the *Millennium Falcon* in the film *Star Wars*: “What a piece of junk,” he says, referring to the ship’s repeated failures to launch the heroes into hyperdrive, to whatever destination they must arrive at next.¹⁵ “Junk,” in this sense, refers to a ship that is not capable of controlling its own trajectory, that ends up “floating in space,” subject to the whims of whatever gravitational orbits it comes across. Felicitously, my equation of “junk” with “ship” is not as anachronistic as “space junk” implies, for, in the sixteenth century, “junk” also was “a name for the common type of native sailing vessel in the Chinese

¹¹ Ibid., 347.

¹² In equating the Incarnation theology of the “separate planet” with the microcosm-macrocosm relationship in this line from “The Good Morrow,” I follow Empson. See “Donne the Space Man,” 361.

¹³ “junk, n.2”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/102090?rskey=oCmsF3&result=2> (accessed May 05, 2015).

¹⁴ “space, n.1”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/185414?redirectedFrom=space+junk> (accessed May 05, 2015).

¹⁵ *Star Wars, Episode IV: A New Hope*, DVD, directed by George Lucas (1977; Beverly Hills: Twentieth Century Fox, 2004).

seas.”¹⁶ It was a term well familiar to the English, as reflected in Samuel Purchas’s description of India in a passage from *Purchas, his Pilgrimage; or, Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages* in 1613: “The viceroy having two ships sent him for supply, two Iunkes, eight or ten boates.”¹⁷ Whether in the twentieth century “space junk” or the sixteenth century “junk,” the term highlights the significance of trajectories, the effectiveness with which a vessel arrives at its destination or, conversely, its failure to do so, the detours or misdirections it may incur in the course of travel. It is precisely this tension in “junk” which concerns me in “Donne the Space Man.”

Considering Empson’s critical writings on Shakespeare’s “Sonnets,” Lars Engle argues that Empson is engaged in a critical mode of what he calls “speculative authorial biography,” which is reflected most in his “interest in the author as an imagined self, located in both an individual and a collective history.”¹⁸ As Engle observes, this interest in the author as an “imagined self” corresponded to the fact that “Empson in his own time polemicized against formalist anti-intentionalism.”¹⁹ Indeed, one can observe throughout Empson’s analysis of the “separate planet” in Donne’s *oeuvre* a critical framework that allows him to effortlessly imagine the appeal which the idea would hold at various points in Donne’s intellectual development. Although I value Empson’s pursuit of the various formulations this idea takes in Donne’s lifetime, he could do more to explore the

¹⁶ “junk, n.3”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/102091?rskey=Ome30d&result=3> (accessed May 05, 2015). The etymology from the selection is useful toward understanding how the term arrives in the English language: “A word of Oriental origin, now adapted in most European languages: Portuguese *junco* (in 16th cent. *jungo*, Barbosa), Spanish *junco*, Italian *giunco* (16th cent. *giunca*, Pigafetta), French *joncque*, Dutch *jonk*. Apparently < Javanese *djong* (occurring in compounds of 13th cent. or earlier), ‘ship, large vessel,’ Malay *adjong*. The earlier English forms are from other European languages.”

¹⁷ Ibid. The example is one of several, the earliest dating to 1555, which the OED lists.

¹⁸ Lars Engle, “William Empson and the Sonnets,” *Blackwell Companion to the Sonnets*, ed. Michael Schoenfeldt (Oxford: Blackwell, 2006): 163-182, 169, 166.

¹⁹ Ibid., 166.

relationship between the idea of the “separate planet” and the conceits Donne employs to transport his lovers there. In other words, Empson’s critical investment in “speculative authorial biography” becomes, for me, most problematic in his treatment of Donne’s figural language, which he reads exclusively as expressive of the *idea* of the “separate planet,” insofar as it unfolds in Donne’s intellectual trajectory. Perhaps because the idea of Donne and space travel is so outlandish, Empson spends most of his efforts demonstrating how figures like “a far fairest world” in “To His Mistress” and the bed in “The Sun Rising” are referential substitutes for the profane theology based on the empirical existence of other planets—but he forgets that the tropes of Donne’s lyrics and elegies are constitutive of the travel itself. As we saw in the etymologies of metaphor and hyperbole, these figures are implicitly concerned with movement and transport:

Empson’s mistake, it seems to me, is to conflate these vessels of transport with their destination, to assume an almost mimetic relation between “a far fairer world,” for instance, and the idea of the separate planet. In truth, space-landings are dodgy business. They were no different in the sixteenth century. Even if Donne subscribed to a theology in which “all the imaginative structures which men have built to control themselves are only derived from simple intimate basic relations,”²⁰ the capacity of a figure or trope—whether we call it a fantastic conceit, metaphor or hyperbole—to convey this idea is extremely fraught and tenuous. The very fact that Empson has to expend so much energy wading through critical interpretation that has obscured the “separate planet” is evidence of this tenuousness: “a far fairer *world*” may lead Donne to (or signify) the “separate planet,” but it may also lead him to the New World, which is not the same, or it may, for

²⁰ Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” 347.

some readers, indicate an empty figure that leads to nowhere in particular. In this way, before we can reach the cosmological transcendence of the “separate planet,” like any diligent space travels, we must pass through the various satellites whose orbits are nearer to our terrestrial habitats. Ultimately, the distinction that Empson fails to address is described aptly by Erich Auerbach, in a quote on the transition from classical rhetoric to medieval Christianity from his famous essay “Figura”: “The distinction between figures of word and figures of substance that we find in Quintilian is resumed in the distinction between *figura verborum* and *figurae rerum*, word and prophetic events or phenomenal prophecies.”²¹ In Empson’s analysis, the “separate planet” for Donne is decidedly in the category of *figurae rerum*, insofar as it is comprised through both phenomenal astronomical discovery and their inflection in theological thought. In this perspective, *figura verborum* is what must ultimately transport the reader to the idea. So, why not follow these modes of transport, study their trajectories, to see how (and if) they make it to their destinations?

To consider this frame of analysis, we must ask, what word-things transport the lived experiences and desires of his lovers—the “simple intimate basic relation”—to that moment of Incarnation we see in “The Sun Rising,” for example? It is a question of what tropes allow the physical, intimate erotic experience of Donne’s lovers to achieve the presence—the interconnection of *Logos* and *materia*—of an Incarnation. As such, it requires our sustained engagement with what materiality means in Donne’s verse. An important first step in this engagement is to recognize that early moderns would have considered the tropes themselves as material, or sensuous, to a degree, as opposed to

²¹ Erich Auerbach, “Figura,” in *Scenes from the Drama of European Literature*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984): 11-78, 45.

empty, immaterial text through which material reality is expressed. Indeed, Juliet Fleming has argued convincingly for increased awareness of the material dimension to *verba* in the period, noting “the sensitivity of early modern culture to the phenomenality of visual and aural perception in the domain of the signifier.”²² Fleming finds examples of such “phenomenality of visual and aural perception in the domain of the signifier” in wall graffiti, tattoos, and pottery, but also in a rhetorical treatise like George Puttenham’s *The Arte of English Poesie*, which was especially attentive to the sensible qualities of figuration.²³

Along with Fleming, Rayna Kalas reminds us of the material dimension to language during the period: “In the Renaissance, the poetic conceit distinguished itself as a thing in motion, against the pretense of eternal stasis or fixity of idea that is staged by an iconic or pictorial image. The novelty of the poetic conceit as a thing in motion and in time belonged not to wit or ingenuity of a given writer but to the technical craft of poesy.”²⁴ From this perspective, if Donne’s larger intellectual aim was the “separate planet,” with all its theological import, his pragmatic, technical craft was dedicated to understanding the “conceit as a thing in motion and in time.” Donne focuses intensely on which “thing in motion” will convey the lived experiences and desires of love on pen and paper, and which will not.

²² Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 132. Fleming’s remarks on the immaterial, abstract text are also helpful in understanding the difference in attitudes toward textuality between our time and the Renaissance: “a ‘text’ is a piece of writing that has been established as such for reasons that are themselves material, historical and ideological. The notion of a ‘text’ represents the assumption that a certain form of consciousness has been able to dictate the terms of its own material constraints, and consequently remains, in some crucial sense, unbound,” 12.

²³ As Fleming observes, “for Puttenham and his contemporaries, the poetic line was a visual as well as an aural unit, which is to say that all poems were, at least potentially, ‘ocular representations.’” Ibid., 18. In Chapter 12 “Of Proportion Poetical,” entitled “Of proportion in figure,” Puttenham treats “figure, so called for that it yields an ocular representation, your meters being by good symmetry reduced into certain geometrical figures,” and includes visual images of the figures and their accompanying textual forms. See George Puttenham, *The Art of English Poesy*, ed. Frank Whigham and Wayne A. Rebhorn (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007), 179-200.

²⁴ Ibid., 3.

This focus on the possibilities of the conceit as a “thing in motion” corresponds, in Donne’s poetics, to the representation of physical *things* in motion; that is, Donne’s attention on where a conceit may or may not take the lovers is repeatedly correlated with considerations of those physical things associated with the various critical approaches currently classed under material culture studies. At the center of Donne’s many poetic gestures toward Incarnation (and their failures) are meditations on things: a bed in “The Sun Rising,” “a bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (6) in “The Relic,” a portrait miniature of “The Damp,” posy rings in “To a Jet Ring Sent to Me” and “The Token,” an engraved window in “A Valediction: Of My Name in the Window”; and “stiff twin compasses” (26) in “A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning.” Strikingly, the “things” through which Donne stages tensions of the intimate erotic encounter with his lovers extend beyond the objects of material culture, and into fields of embodiment and print culture studies. In lyrics like “The Message” and “A Valediction: Of Weeping,” body parts—the eyes and their tears, but also the heart—take form as the physical vessels which will carry desire and experience across space and time; in “A Valediction: Of the Book,” the materials which carry the written word—whether manuscript letters or poems circulated in coterie culture, or pages in print—are also treated as modes of transport. In such examples, Donne reflects on the very media in which his elaborate conceits—and their thingly counterparts, such as posy rings, bracelets of hair, and window scratchings—are transported in the phenomenal world. Traveling with Donne, then, can be a dizzying experience, his engagement with materialities rich and varied, as he

considers the ways in which love tokens, bodies, and the materials of writing are imbricated in the process of figuration.²⁵

If the material existence of the “separate planet” allowed “every planet [to] have its Incarnation,”²⁶ it created both erotic possibilities *and* tensions for Donne’s lovers; to imagine the possibility that any physical, intimate erotic encounter can reorder the cosmos is both liberating and terrifying, as it puts tremendous pressure on *which* modes of intimacy, *which* physical encounters, can attain the presence exemplary of an Incarnation. It also raises the question of what other materialities exert control on those possibilities. Donne’s use of things such as bracelets, posy rings, beds, body parts, and manuscripts to serve as metaphors, or hyperboles, for the “separate planet” complicates the emphases, or weight, we can place on those tropes. For the very sensible qualities implicit in the representations of these things have the effect of pulling us away from the “separate planet,” into other orbits and detours, that could easily lead a spaceship to become space junk.

To illustrate this point, let’s consider Arthur Marotti’s observation that “it makes sense historically [...] to view much lyric poetry from the early Tudor through the Stuart periods as coterie literature, especially poems composed in courtly and satellite-courtly

²⁵ With the heightened interest in material culture studies and Bruno Latour’s Actor-Network Theory in the last decade, as well as the more recent Object-Oriented Ontology criticism, I believe we are at a distinct advantage in considering the relation between poetic conceits, and imagery, and the things, or objects, they represent. Whereas, for example, “The Relic’s” depiction of “a bracelet of bright hair about the bone” (6) is valued by T.S. Eliot primarily because of the startling imagery, “the sudden contrast of associations of ‘bright hair’ and of ‘bone,’” scholars today acknowledge the imagery while interrogating the thing, exploring its place in lived material experience, or the nature of materiality itself. Ramie Targoff, for example, considers how “the power of this image can be traced both to the poetic achievement, and to the startling metaphysical claim that the image makes for the lovers’ reunion on Judgment Day when each soul will come searching for the missing parts of its body.” See T.S. Eliot, review of *Metaphysical Lyrics and Poems of the Seventeenth Century: Donne to Butler*, ed. Herbert J. C. Grierson (Oxford: Clarendon Press. London; Milford) in the *Times Literary Supplement*, October 1921; Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 5. While the image is for Targoff an example of both “Donne’s expression of his belief in the mutual necessity of body and soul, and his obsessive imagining of their parting,” I would also want to consider how bracelets of hair circulated in the period as love tokens, and what sort of meaning lovers attached to them.

²⁶ Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” 341.

environments.”²⁷ Marotti’s critical materialism, which positions Donne’s verse within the Elizabethan socioeconomic realities which affected him, offers a direct challenge to the more idealistic, transcendental qualities of Empson’s *figurae rerum* of the “separate planet.” Although both share an interest in how conditions in the phenomenal world informed Donne’s poetics, they stress *different* material realities. For Empson, the material existence of other planets becomes the sensible kernel from which Donne’s radical theology arises, and is the ultimate source which justifies our readings of the multiple Incarnation moments in his texts. For Marotti, the material social life experienced by a “gentlemen-amateur,” excluded from courtly aspirations, is of central importance to Donne’s verse.²⁸

Beds, bracelets, and posy rings are, potentially, useful tropes to point upward to the heavens by transporting Donne’s lovers to the “separate planet,” but they are also words with decidedly earthly existences, words which unfold into a sensible, tactile domain of lived experience, far from that planet. As such, they participate in a social existence that, for a critic like Marotti, come to define Donne and his poetic approach. The question is: which material existence—the “separate planet” or lived social experiences—does a trope, as a thing in motion, chart a trajectory toward? The crux is between spaceship and space junk.

To illustrate this point, I would like to conclude this introduction section with a consideration of the bed in “The Sun Rising,” that poem we observed was exemplary of Donne’s Incarnation upon the “separate planet.” For Empson, the triumph of the intimate sexual encounter in that bed leads to a reversal of social and cosmological orders, such

²⁷ Arthur Marotti, *John Donne, Coterie Poet* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), xiv.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

that “All here in one bed lay” (20), “She’s all states, and all princes I” (21), and, lastly, “This bed thy centre is, these walls, thy sphere” (30). For Marotti, in contrast, “The displaced anger of this comically antiauthoritarian lyric expressed a real frustration. In its hyperbolic wit, the insistent repetition of the word “all” (9, 20, 21, 24) is related to the feeling of being “nothing” that Donne mentioned in other poems. The reversal of voice implied in the active imperative mode in this piece [‘She is all states [...] Princes doe but play us’] is an imaginative compensation for passive helplessness.”²⁹ In other words, “Donne responded to narcissistic injury [caused by his social exile with his marriage to Anne More] by fantasizing omnipotence: he fictionally converted a social impotence into an assertion of personal power and, as elsewhere in his poetry, sexual potency indicates socioeconomic powerlessness.”³⁰ To summarize these respective positions, we might say that sex reconstitutes the world for Empson, while, for Marotti, the conditions of the world underly the hyperbolic claims of that sex. Each position seems equally reasonable for anyone who who has experienced satisfying sex (where we could care less about the order of the world), or, conversely, listened to someone brag of his sexual potency, in such extreme terms, that we can only assume: he’s compensating.

“This bed thy centre is” (30)—certainly, as an elaborate conceit, it performs the inversion that Donne’s profane theology would require. But “bed,” of course, exists in other material registers, which potentially conflict with the travel Donne’s lovers attempt to undergo. As Sasha Roberts observes, “the bed was among the most significant of personal and household possessions in the period; one of the most valuable forms of so-

²⁹ Ibid., 156.

³⁰ Ibid.

called “moveable” property in the home.”³¹ Just as Donne employs the bed to gesture toward the celestial, we are confronted with its material existence in sixteenth century England, an existence that, given Donne’s economic and social standing (or lack thereof), indicated that he was not in the position to own a more valuable bed, especially those “lavish ‘state’ beds” which Roberts observes “belonged to the elite (richly ornamented ‘four-poster’ or, more properly, ‘tester’ beds with a canopy.)”³² If we follow Marotti, and suggest that Donne acquiesces to a “fantasizing omnipotence” in which “he fictionally converted a social impotence into an assertion of personal power,” then the “state” bed he imagines, on which “She’s all states, and all princes I” (21) exists in utter disparity to the material realities of his *actual* bed. In this way, the spaceship bed—we may be reminded of the traveling four-poster bed in 1971’s *Bedknobs and Broomsticks*—is detoured, drifted into another orbit, and ultimately weighed down by material conditions which inscribe Donne’s lovers. In contrast, “The Word made Flesh” on the “separate planet” requires a physical intimacy which allows Donne’s lovers to (re)inscribe the world. We need not say Donne fails, however, but might only acknowledge the tension between his “state” bed in which “All here in one bed lay” (20), and the actual state bed from which he is absent. The bed, then, rests on the border between privacy, intimacy, and the state, in an ambiguity of figuration that opens into both material socioeconomic realities (and the things implicated in them) and “simple intimate basic (erotic) relations.”³³

Ultimately, a reconciliation between Empson’s and Marotti’s positions offers the most satisfying understanding of the relationship between figuration and materiality in

³¹ Sasha Roberts, “‘Let me the curtains draw’: the dramatic and symbolic properties of the bed in Shakespearean tragedy,” in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. Natasha Korda and Jonathan Gil Harris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002): 153-174, 154.

³² *Ibid.*, 154.

³³ Empson, “Donne the Space Man,” 347.

Donne's poetics. If the "separate planet" looms as an enticing possibility of liberation in the distance, the poems themselves are concerned with what will (and what will not) convey the lived experiences and desires of love in words. Gestures of unmediated presence and intimacy, in which his lovers arrive at their "separate planet," are balanced by Donne's continual awareness that any mode of travel in the sensible realm always involves a degree of material mediation, which subjects the representation of desire and lived experience to arbitrary systems of exchange and relations inherent in a material (socioeconomic) world utterly indifferent to any singular desire or intimate experience. Donne's elaborate conceits are the means to achieve the presence implied in "space-landings," but they, by nature, mediate desire to achieve that presence. Is desire mediated ever one's own? Does it preclude intimacy, or perhaps redefine the parameters in which intimacy exists? Once desire is mediated, to a certain extent, it is not entirely one's own. And so, Donne's vessels of travel are never entirely one's own, but they are all we have.

I. "Have Body, Will Travel": Travel by Letter

To enter into these questions of the body and space travel, which frame my focus in desire and materiality in Donne, let's begin in a most basic sense, with the travel of the physical body across the water. After all, for a body to travel in space and time during the early modern period, in a most literal and physical sense, was to board a ship. In the noise of the sea, Donne sends a letter to his friend Christopher Brooke, the man who "gave away the bride at Donne's clandestine marriage in 1602."³⁴ Of his disastrous trip to the Azores with Essex, aboard a ship on which he serves as gentleman-volunteer, most

³⁴ John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. A.J. Smith (New York: Penguin, 1971, Rpt. 1996), 516.

likely in hopes of advancing his prospects both socially and financially, Donne writes to Brooke:

Thou which art I, ('tis nothing to be so)
Thou which art still thyself, by these shalt know
Part of our passage; and, a hand, or eye
By Hilliard drawn, is worth an history,
By worse painted made; and (without pride)
When by thy judgment they are dignified,
My lines are such: 'tis the pre-eminence
Of friendship only to impute excellent. (1-8)

Donne opens the letter with an intimacy characteristic of humanist letter practices, a convention conveyed with perhaps more flair in the famous opening of another letter to a friend, Sir Henry Wotton: "Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls; / For thus friends absent speak" (1-2).³⁵ For Richard Wollman, such intimacy is a symptom not merely of the coterie culture in which Donne circulates or the humanist convention introduced by Erasmus, but also of an oral culture preserved in the medium of manuscript. As Wollman argues, "Manuscript [...] preserves to a greater extent the oral expression of the writer by inviting a closeness with the reader [...] That intimacy 'preserved' for Donne some authorial control over his writing and assured that his specifically appointed readers would not allow his words to perish on the page."³⁶ As Donne inhabits the humanist commonplace and writes with a direct sense that the letter will be speaking for or as him,

³⁵ For more on the humanist convention, see Lisa Jardine's *Erasmus, Man of Letters* and Kathy Eden's *Between Friends All is Equal or The Renaissance Rediscovery of Intimacy* (2012), as well as its specific relation to Donne in Ramie Targoff's *John Donne: Body and Soul*.

³⁶ Richard B. Wollman, "The 'Press and the Fire': Print and Manuscript Culture in Donne's Circle," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 33, 1 (Winter 1993): 85-97, 89.

the “oral expression” preserved in manuscript allows for “meaning [to] exist[] in the exchange, and contrary to modern print assumptions, not solely on the page.”³⁷ This presumption of “closeness” in the orality that Wollman suggests, exists in manuscript is arrived at in this “exchange” among equals, but, curiously, Donne invites a “third party” to the moment: the Elizabethan miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard.

With “Hilliard,” we enter into estimations of aesthetic value. As I noted in the previous chapter, “aesthetic” derives from the “ancient Greek αἰσθητικός of or relating to sense perception, sensitive, perceptive.”³⁸ Donne asks that Brooke validate his writing as “a skill comparable to that of the renowned Elizabethan miniaturist Nicholas Hilliard, who had probably painted Donne’s portrait a few years before”³⁹: “a hand, or eye / By Hilliard drawn, is worth an history, / By worse painted made; and (without pride) / When by thy judgment they are dignified” (3-6). The formal equation of the opening line, “Thou which art I, (’tis nothing to be so)” is redirected into a visual economy of bodily parts, the “hand, or eye,” which follows the language of the Petrarchan blazon, and, for all of its allusion to the physical parts required for Donne to write these very lines, is rendered as the *end* product of an artistic labor which compelling corresponds to the language of the Petrarchan blazon. Furthermore, as Parr observes, “The claim rests on shared ideals of artistic refinement that were grounded, in part, on knowledge of the classical and Italian models for much of Donne’s early poetry, and would have made his circle particularly alert to his reworking of the ancient literary trope of a storm at sea, to

³⁷ Ibid., 91.

³⁸ “aesthetic, n. and adj.,” OED Online, March 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/3237?redirectedFrom=aesthetic> (accessed April 07, 2014).

³⁹ Anthony Parr, “John Donne, Travel Writer,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, 1 (March 2007): 61-85, 61.

be found most notably in Virgil and Ovid.”⁴⁰ Thus, there is a contrast between the closeness suggested by the opening line, “Thou which art I,” and the comparison to the portraits of the Elizabethan miniaturist (one being of Donne himself), as well as those classical and Italian models which inform the “storm at sea” trope with which Donne structures his narrative. Donne’s account—and perhaps Donne himself—arrives to Brooke, somewhere between intimate friend and highly mediated copy. How should we hear, or read, him: in the gestures of acoustic intimacy potentially inherent in manuscript culture, or through the graphic conventions of humanist letters, the tropological reproductions of classical textual models and the visual culture of the miniature?

As I began to detail in my introduction, I want to suggest that the tension between intimacy and mediation in Donne’s letter from the sea is a tension in the writing itself, especially Donne’s verse, which lingers over how lived experience is recirculated into the materiality of manuscript copy. Donne’s letter that “speaks” to Wotton is an inscription, which as such registers not simply that which inscribes (the hand of Donne), but a range of inscriptive processes and cultural practices (portrait miniatures, humanist classical models and tropes) in, through, and by which those who inscribe are themselves inscribed.

Following Jacques Derrida, Jonathan Goldberg has examined in extensive detail the relationship between “the hand writing and handwriting” in the Renaissance , arguing that both “oral and written are derivative [...] from the handedness of the human.” Paraphrasing Derrida, Goldberg observes:

⁴⁰ Ibid., 61.

The writing being is also being written, whether at the instinctual level or while writing at the computer. In the relationships between writing in the general and in the specific senses—in relationships which are not merely at the order of conceptuality, but which are also social and historical—the field of a differential inscription of human being comes into view.⁴¹

In suggesting that “a hand, or eye / By Hilliard drawn, is worth an history” (3-4), Donne alludes to the “differential inscription of human being” to which Goldberg refers, to his own “handedness [as human],” an embodied writer on board a ship, who restructures experience onto paper through the coordinated labor of hand and eye, quill, and ink. He is, as he inscribes, thus, himself inscribed within certain coordinates “social and historical,” as “gentleman-volunteer” aboard Essex’s ship. Donne recognizes his own place on that ship, within those “social and historical” coordinates.

In many instances, Donne appears to have hated being on board ships. The early erotic elegy “Love’s War” offers perhaps his most blunt assessment:

To mew me in a ship, is to enthrall
Me in a prison that were like to fall;
Or in a cloister, save that there men dwell
In a calm heaven, here in a swaggering hell.
Long voyages are long consumptions,
And ships are carts for executions.

⁴¹ Jonathan Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 24.

Yea they are Deaths: is't not all one to fly
Into another world, as 'tis to die? (21-28)

As Stephen Burt observes of the passage, “Ships are not just prisons, but prisons that collapse, like the bare, ruined monasteries, and are full, moreover, of diseases, ‘long consumptions,’ which heat and confinement render more contagious.”⁴² “Consumption” not only conveys the realities of disease aboard ships in the period, but also a sense of a body at once imprisoned and open. As Burt puts it, within a ship, “heat and confinement render [diseases like consumption] more contagious,”⁴³ but they are contagious precisely because the body cannot remain isolated or removed from its material surroundings. In Galenic humoralism, consumption refers to “abnormality or loss of humours, resulting in wasting (extreme weight loss) of the body.”⁴⁴ Nancy Selleck argues that Donne, studied in medicine, would have been well attuned to the metaphorical possibilities of the humoral body, even if he rejected Galenic humoralism out of hand. As Selleck observes of this body, “Highly permeable and thus subject to—even composed of—its environment, the humoral body suggests a material embeddedness of self and surround.”⁴⁵ Working through the “principle of fluidity” in humoralism,⁴⁶ “consumption” metaphorically resonates well the “highly permeable and thus

⁴² Stephen Burt, “Donne the Sea Man,” *The John Donne Journal* 16 (1997): 137-183, 160. In the devout religious mode of “Batter my heart,” Donne will invert the imagery of imprisonment to yield freedom (“imprison me, for I / Except you enthrall me, never shall be free [12-13]).

⁴³ Ibid., 160.

⁴⁴ “consumption, n. 2.a.” OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39997?redirectedFrom=consumption> (accessed May 06, 2015). Donne, of course, writes during the major medical-discursive shift from Galenic humoralism to Paracelsan models of disease, a shift which has been studied in relation to discursive structures in Jonathan Gil Harris’s excellent *Foreign Bodies*. It is beyond the scope of this paper to determine, along the epistemic shift, according to which model of self Donne operates, but given Donne’s often contradictory positions, we might expect that he made use in his poetry at times of both humoral and Paracelsan metaphors to convey a sense of self. For a discussion of the humoral body, see Gail Kern Paster’s *The Body Embarrassed*.

⁴⁵ Nancy Selleck, “Donne’s Body,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 41, 1 (Winter 2001): 149-174, 149-150.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 168.

subject[ed]" body. Moreover, this loss of humours is accompanied by the sense of "consumption" as intake, "the act of consuming (food or drink) (13th cent. or earlier in a medical context [and classical])."⁴⁷ Consumption, then suggests the body's open economy with its surroundings, resonating the "taking in" and "loss" that occurs in the environmental shifts to which all travelers are subjected.

Yet, because this economy in "Love's War" occurs within the "prison" or "cloister" of ships (in the latter reference Henry VIII's takeover of the monasteries may resonate), those "carts for execution," the openness of the body is inextricably linked to its confinement within coordinates "social and historical." In Donne's letter to Wotton ("Sir, more than kisses, letters mingle souls"), the threat of openness is expanded, as Donne extends the ship at sea trope to the social realm. Donne asserts, "Life is a voyage, and in our life's ways / Countries, courts, towns are rocks, or remoras; / They break or stop all ships, yet our state's such / That though then pitch they staine worse, wee must touch" (7-10). Selleck notes: "While Donne struggles here to represent selfhood in terms that assert a measure of autonomy, he also continually admits that contact with, and contamination by, the world are necessary."⁴⁸ In this world of perpetual social contamination, ships both physically contain and become the metaphorical equivalents of the social subject. They are always represented as hazardous, subjected to social dangers without ("rocks") as well as dangers from within, in the body's open economy, its consumptive potential to leak or waste in response to such exposure.

⁴⁷ consumption, n. 2.a." OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/39997?redirectedFrom=consumption> (accessed May 06, 2015).

⁴⁸ Selleck, "Donne's Body," 159.

The dangers of exposure on the ship mirror those in the letter. In his play on the humanist commonplace, Donne attempts to convey the intimacy of friendship. For Laurie Shannon, “The sense of friendship as a social form set in opposition to everyday life and real politics emerges sharply [in the poem]. Friendship will provide a complex alternative to the poem’s famous lines excoriating the depravities of ordinary sociability and its tainting effects.”⁴⁹ Shannon argues that this is connected to a “sovereign amitie,” which is “absolutely separate from the ordinary terms of political and courtly life.” Interestingly, Shannon describes the friendship that permits such “separation” as “an act of self-erasure that [...] disposes of a self but to that self’s advantage. Unbordered, without seams: this kind of subject is empowered under such conditions.”⁵⁰ In other words, Donne’s “struggle[] here to represent selfhood in terms that assert a measure of autonomy”⁵¹ is related to a “self-erasure” that “sovereign amitie” achieves through the letter.

As a mode of transport, the letter facilitates a relation of undifferentiated selves, providing conditions of unmediated presence. Targoff argues that Donne “regarded the ideal letter [...] as a form of animated matter,” such that letters were “not only vehicles for conveying his soul [but] also vehicles for conveying his body.”⁵² In this sense, “matter” in Donne’s letters does not only refer to the letters’ content. It also refers to their possession of his material body. Donne wants his letters both to perform the ‘mutual communicating’ between souls that he described to Wotton, and to carry traces of his

⁴⁹ Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts*. (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2002), 44-5.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 45.

⁵¹ Selleck, “Donne’s Body,” 159.

⁵² Ramie Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 39.

physical being.”⁵³ But, again, as Targoff reminds us, Donne “depended upon his friend’s familiarity with the conceit [the classical trope which accorded the soul resides in the breath] in order to do something unprecedented to it: he replaces the embodied kiss with the disembodied letter as the site for mixing souls.”⁵⁴ Targoff finds insight here “something unprecedented” in Donne’s approach, which is realized when “he replaces the embodied kiss with the disembodied letter,” but her model adheres too closely to a strict soul/body binary. While I am not suggesting there is no value in studying Donne’s metaphysical portrayals of the relation between body and soul, the binary in this case elides the materiality that is always inherent in the “disembodied letter.” The *thing* will travel, and Donne is looking for a mode of transport. The “self-erasure” which Shannon suggests “sovereigne amitie” achieves through the letter, inherent in the humanist commonplace of epistolary intimacy and friendship, would readily allow Donne to conceive of the letter as that which could “carry traces of his physical being.”⁵⁵ Moreover, the classical conceit which accorded that the soul resides in the breath would have contributed to the sense that the letter carried Donne’s unmediated presence to Wotton. The price of unmediated presence, though, is the strictest adherence to the humanist convention of friendship and intimacy that the epistolary medium offered, as well as a common cultural legibility of the classical conceit which equated soul and breath. Thus, once again, Donne arrives to us—or, more specifically, to Wotton—in that perplexing mode of pure presence and extensive (tropological) mediation. The intimacy of an unbounded exchange of kisses and souls, of “traces of his physical being” and the

⁵³ Ibid., 40.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 25.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 44.

soul which animates it, within the letter is only made possible because of its place within broader social discursive patterns, material practices and reading strategies. Donne's desires and experiences are contained within these patterns, practices, and reading strategies of the letter as much as they—and him—are (purely) conveyed by it. Let us not forget: Donne was not often writing letters for a casual exchange with friends; much of his life, he was consumed with writing for social advancement, patronage, or money from friends, friends like Henry Wotton.

II. Portrait Miniatures and Epistemologies On / Off the Page

Perhaps the basic problem with framing an analysis of Donne's work within the binary of body and soul is how often his poetics trouble distinctions between the organic human body—whether in the Galenic or Paracelsan model—and those nonhuman things—material media like letters and portrait miniatures, but also linguistic media, like conceits—through which he stages exchanges with lovers and friends. As Josh Calhoun has observed, the distinction would have been troubled, in particular, during the period because material media, specifically, paper and parchment, was produced from nonhuman organic substance, such as flax and dried animal skins, or vellum.⁵⁶ In Elegy 5, "His Picture," Donne's account divides the body into sections—hand "with rude oars torn, or sun-beams tanned" (5-6) and "powder's blue stains scattered on my skin" (10)—that highlight the writing instrument (hand) and page (skin), such that the human body

⁵⁶ See Josh Calhoun, "The Word Made Flax: Cheap Bibles, Textual Corruption, and the Poetics of Paper," *PMLA* 126, 2 (March 2011): 327-44. In a work that has significant impact on studies of materiality beyond the English Renaissance, Jane Bennet challenges the "life-matter binary" she claims is "the dominant organizational principle of adult experience" (20), replacing it with a conception of "vital materiality," "thing-power," or "the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle," 6. See Jane Bennet, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010).

resembles more the “tanned” vellum of book cover and “blue stains” of ink upon page than whatever we might identify as an “actual” human body. In an even more striking example, “The Damp,” Donne stages an encounter with his beloved’s picture in his heart. Such an example renders any easy distinction between body and aesthetic, non-organic, nonhuman materialities utterly vexed. “When I am dead, and doctors know not why,” Donne’s speaker of “The Damp” opens, continuing as follows:

And my friends’ curiosity
Will have me cut up to survey each part,
When they shall find your picture in my heart,
You think a sudden damp of love
Will through all their senses move,
And work on them as me, and so prefer
Your murder, to the name of massacre. (1-8)

In the second and third stanzas of the poem, we learn that this imagined scene of autopsy and discovery is prompted by the beloved’s “conquest” over the speaker. The corporeal invasion by “doctors” and curious “friends” here is accompanied by precise dissection (i.e., division) of the body—“have me cut up”—and measurement, “survey each part,” which lead to the encounter with the beloved’s “picture in my heart.” We should hesitate to call this “picture” a foreign presence vis-à-vis the Paracelsan model, given Donne’s place in the epistemic shift between Galenic and Paracelsan understandings of disease and the body (indeed, as I have suggested above, he often may work through humoral metaphors). Yet there is a second sense, outside of medical terminology, in which we

could consider this object “foreign,” and this sense, I suggest, is taken up in the second stanza of the poem.

After the discovery of autopsy leads to contamination vis-à-vis the “sudden damp of love,” which converts the single murder to “massacre,” the speaker does an about-face, summarizing these events simply as “poor victories” (9). He then challenges the lover, “if you dare be brave,”

And pleasure in your conquest have,
First kill th’ enormous giant, your Disdain
And let th’ enchantress Honour, next be slain,
And like a Goth and Vandal rise,
Deface records, and histories
Of your own arts and triumphs over men,
And without such advantage kill me then. (9-16)

“Your picture” is thus reframed, first in the model of courtly love, with reference to “Disdain” and “Honour,” with suggestions of Petrarch’s unattainable object of desire, and then, even more specifically and materially, as a textual, historical artifact: specifically, a discursive product of classicism’s legacy. The beloved, to achieve a worthy conquest, must remove her self from the classical heritage, become “Goth and Vandal,” by destroying the poetic lineage and archive of history — “deface records, and histories” — that have produced the “picture” inside the lover’s heart and led to his demise. The “picture” is, then, *really* a picture, in that it is the poetic image of an image, which itself is the product of modes of discourse and social practices which Donne, at his most Spenserian, allegorizes as the “giant” “Disdain,” and “enchantress Honour.”

Whereas, in his letter to Brooke, Donne invites the comparison between his narrative and that “by Hilliard drawn” (4), here the speaker demonstrates a deep distrust of the portrait miniature. The speaker invites both beloved and himself to discard those discourses in which their identities are inscribed (“For I could must up as well as you / My giants, and my witches too, / Which are vast Constancy, and Secretness” [17-19]), for an encounter in which both are stripped bare: “Kill me as a woman, let me die / As a mere man,” he requests (21-22). As the speaker imagines his body subjected to the mechanized actions of division and measurement—as he himself is processed by the coordination of the scalpel-hand-machine and subjected to the repetition of “cut” and “survey”—he leads us to the “picture,” as well as “records, and histories.”

“The Damp” is what we, the reader, are left to inherit: the noxious fumes of/for/from a body whose senses have succumbed to the repeatable, inorganic form of discursive models and reproductions, tropological and printed. The speaker of “The Damp” is tired of the discursive imitations of knowledge and love—call it Petrarchan fatigue—in the social systems in which he and the beloved circulate. He wants to encounter her “naked” (24), stripped of these discursive strategies.

Or, does he? As his letter to Brooke indicates, Donne’s speakers are not always so suspicious of the portrait miniature. While the speaker of “The Damp” claims to desire the “naked” encounter with his beloved, no matter how damaging it may be, other speakers readily take up things that mediate relations between lover and beloved as material points of direct access to the intimate desires of their relationships. In Elegy 5, “His Picture,” the speaker focuses precisely on the meaningful resonances the exchange of “picture[s]” will provide the lovers as they separate:

Here take my picture, though I bid farewell;
Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell
'Tis like me now, but I dead, 'twill be more
When we are shadows both, than 'twas before. (1-4)

Both “The Damp” and “His Picture” are illustrations of what Elaine Scarry has observed as “Donne’s habit of interiorizing objects [or man-made artifacts].”⁵⁷ Striking is how vastly different the speaker’s attitudes are toward the artifacts in the two poems. The “picture” of the lover in the corpse’s chest of “The Damp” arrives through a highly mechanized access to the body and heart, vis-à-vis “cut” and “survey.” The pictures of Elegy 5, in contrast, register an immediacy of presence which the body cannot: “Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells,” he writes, metonymically linking heart with his spiritual substance, as opposed to doctor’s scalpel and anatomical display. The picture that he gives the lover, “’Tis like me now, but I dead, ’twill be more,” bears such likeness that death invests it with greater presence: as the line ends, with the picture figured as “more,” Donne alludes to Anne More, his wife. Thus, the image enacts the intimacy of shared union between the two. What has changed? Why *this* picture?

In “His Picture,” rather than the staging the portrait miniature as part of a line of “records, and histories,” it is the body that becomes a history of its own travels (and travails): “When weather-beaten I come back; my hand, / Perhaps with rude oars torn, or sun-beams tanned” (5-6). The corpse here reads as a record of both the weather patterns and mechanical labor to which it has been exposed. As with Brooke, in focusing on the

⁵⁷ Elaine Scarry, “Donne: ‘But yet the body is his booke,’” in *Literature and the Body: Essays on Populations and Persons*, ed. Elaine Scarry (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 88.

inscription upon the body, Donne's speaker draws attention to the hand: in this case, a "hand" as it is subjected to "rude oars" or "sun-beams tanned." The "hand" torn by the wooden "oars" reminds us not only of the physical hand that presses quill to paper, producing this very line, but also that hand's place on a ship, in a system of labor in which both hand and body are instruments to move the vessel along the seas.

These "tanned," dead hands recall also the tanned skin of vellum, that which covers and protects the ink not of hand-written loose-sheet letters but of a bound codex volume. It is the book's cover, as Susan Stewart observes, which also produces the sense of "closure of the book," making it available to an "outside."⁵⁸ This is precisely what occurs to Donne's speaker's corpse, whose death signifies the "closure" of his life's narrative, while also rendering him an object for "outside" viewers, and suitors of his beloved, to scorn. Donne further invites the metaphor of body as book when he adds details of "powder's blue stains scattered on my skin" (10). The speaker's body is thus the inception, or inscription, point where the "records, and histories" that the lover of "The Damp" demands be "deface[d]" are made.

Even here, however, as the picture is neatly set aside as a form of "genuine" representation in the care of (Anne) "[M]ore," Goldberg's "field of a differential inscription of human being comes into view."⁵⁹ (24). Knowledge arrives through highly mediated, technological discursive lines that are at once textual ("records") and historical ("histories"), and are produced in manuscript and print forms. Donne's speaker wonders,

⁵⁸ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), 38, 37.

⁵⁹ Goldberg, *Writing Matter: From the Hands of the English Renaissance*, 24.

what if my body became the record, the site, for the inscriptions of history? What if I became book?

Donne intimates in his demand for the “naked” encounter of “The Damp” and his giving over of the “picture” to “[M]ore” in Elegy 5 that the encounter with the female other need not always be a point of epistemological skepticism, but, rather, can serve as the source of an unmediated, intimate understanding. In “His Picture,” for instance, though the poem focuses upon the noise and ink of the physical bodies and machines writing and being written upon in history, there is nevertheless the confident request of the opening line, “Here take my picture” (1), followed by the assertions, “Thine, in my heart, where my soul dwells, shall dwell / ’Tis like me now, but I dead, ’twill be more” (2-3). Here is a thorough knowledge of picture, heart, soul and desire, a moment of intimacy in which all is as it should be, reminding us of the easy confidence in the opening to Brooke: “Thou art I” (1). Ted-Larry Pebworth argues that the coterie culture in produced “essentially ephemeral,” “occasional” verse guided primarily by an “ethos of performance”: “What we recognize as a peculiarly Donnean sensibility arises not from a consistent vision, but from an ethos of performance, one that tailors perspective to particular occasion.”⁶⁰ Indeed, an “ethos of performance” is evoked especially in “Here take my picture,” a request which both scripts bodily action of the beloved and alludes to movement in the speaker as well, all in the act of the gift exchange. The question seems to be how much of the “ephemeral” is retained in the trace of the text, how much does Donne’s speaker gesture away from discursive knowledge toward these fleeting physical encounters and verbal gestures? Such a gesture refers us to what Juliet Fleming identifies

⁶⁰ Ted-Larry Pebworth, “John Donne, Coterie Poetry, and the Text as Performance.” *Studies in English Literature* 19, 1 (1989): 61-75, 65.

as “the sensitivity of early modern culture to the phenomenality of visual and aural perception in the domain of the signifier.”⁶¹ Donne relies on the relation of picture and letter to the sensible realm, their exposure to “the phenomenality of visual and aural perception,” in crafting them as conceits. Their materiality, thus, becomes essential to how they function as modes of transport (i.e., how they convey, or produce, knowledge). In this realm of knowledge, the picture given to More and the letter given to Brooke, retain valuable traces of the intimacy speaker and reader share, as they become the condensed expressions, the fantastic conceits, of a relation (and desires) that can never be adequately figured upon the page in a discursive format. It is this form of knowledge, and these things in which it is embedded, that speak against the “sun-tanned,” ink-stained shipman of Elegy 5.

III. Material Exchanges: “False Fashions,” Posies, and Love Tokens

As I have traced the “differential inscription of human being” (Goldberg 24) that Donne’s speakers express, I have located two kinds of epistemological investments in his texts, one in the discursive knowledge of history and records, the other, in something more ephemeral, perhaps performative even, that finds at least some trace in objects and things in the sensible realm to convey the lived experiences and desires of his speakers and those to whom they write. “His Picture” offers one such example, an object which absorbs as metaphorical conceit the constellation of desires between lover and beloved. In their extensive reliance upon conceits, such as the “picture,” within textual and material contexts, Donne’s speakers at times invest “trifles” with all the properties of the

⁶¹ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 132.

knowledge and desires lovers share, and, in this very investment, expose themselves to the inscriptive processes of history that are so threatening to the integrity of the body and subject, and, hence, translatable desire. The “trifles” of *conceitti* become material vessels of transport to Empson’s “separate planet,” but Donne’s speakers are forever studying the nature of their ships, worrying over what other systems of meaning their “trifles” may participate. In the exchanges Donne stages between lovers, bodies and things become indistinguishable. “The Message,” for example, reflects upon the ways “Forced fashions / And false passions” “made by thee” have made the speaker’s eyes “fit for no good sight” (4-8): “Send home my long strayed eyes / Which (oh) too long have dwelt on thee” (1-2). These eyes no longer belong to the speaker as sensory objects, but rather to a discursive structure of “fashions” and “false passions” dictated by the beloved. The speaker will repeat the request for return with his “harmless heart” (9). In the abrasive disavowals that characterize this poem, Donne sees the very parts of himself trafficking in discursive and performative worlds which do not belong to him.

Pictures, eyes, hearts, and hands can serve as records of inscription foreign, arbitrary, and inhuman to the speaker’s desires, even as Donne’s speakers disavow such things. In the prosopopeia of “To a Jet Ring Sent to Me,” Donne’s speaker addresses the object directly, reproaching it for its failure to “figure our loves” (7), only to have it respond: “I am cheap, and naught but fashion, fling me away” (8). Marotti contends that “To a Jet Ring Sent to Me” is a response to Sir John Davies’s ninth sonnet of the “Ten Sonnets, to Philomel” (1596). Davies’s sonnet, “Upon sending her a gold ring with this Posie. *Pure and Endlesse*,” begins, “If you would know the love which I you beare, / Compare it to the Ring which your faire hand / Shall make more precious” (1-3). Where

Davies celebrates a posy of “Pure and Endlesse,” which figures “the love which I you beare” (quite literally) upon the hand, Donne begins in inky blackness, writing of a heart and brittle love, which the ring cannot but fail to figure: “Thou art not so black, as my heart, / Nor half so brittle, as her heart, thou art” (1-2).

The ring fails as record of broken love for *both* its lack of permanence and ephemerality: “What wouldst thou say? shall both our properties by thee be spoke, / Nothing more endless, nothing sooner broke?” (3-4). The “Jet Ring” is supposed to speak for “both our properties,” and yet Donne’s speaker betrays a desire for something either “more endless” or “sooner broke”: a record for all time of their “properties”—black and brittle hearts—or something immediately disposable. The problem for Donne’s speaker is that this “Jet Ring Sent”—from her?—will signify “naught but fashion,” and yet persist. It is entirely inadequate to transport “properties” from the lovers to the page, for the record, but it will continue to circulate and to signify, for the lovers or for anyone else who comes across it. The speaker’s solution is to remove it from circulation. After the ring demands, “fling me away,” the speaker reclaims it in the third stanza, as its protector: “Yet stay with me since thou art come, / Circle this finger’s top, which didst her thumb. / Be justly proud, and gladly safe, that thou dost dwell with me, / She that, oh, broke her faith, would soon break thee” (9-12). The closing gesture of the poem is to reclaim that which has been represented as nothing other than a failed signifier, a marker of “her [broken] faith.”

Along with removing the ring from circulation, Donne’s speaker adds that curious phrase, “circle this finger’s top, which didst her thumb.” The hand, once more, comes into view, if only partially, and we are left with the ambiguity of which—finger or ring—

“didst [top] her thumb.” Does the speaker refer to the intimate embrace of hands, the physical taking of hands as metonymy for sex? Or does he suppose that, because his beloved once wore the “jet ring,” it contains a mnemonic trace of her, a material memory of the kind discussed by Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass in their study of early modern clothing?⁶²

In reclaiming the object that has been a symbol of the arbitrariness inherent in material mediation, Donne’s speaker risks isolating himself with his object, inhabiting the absence of meaning that it has come to represent (his motto, “Don’t abandon ship, no matter how bad that ship may be”). The intimacy of hand play—and the sexual suggestion of “top” (Donne at his less bawdy, I admit, but suggestive nonetheless)—and the arbitrariness of the love token as historical record of that sexual intimacy are, thus, conflated. This ring has been to the separate planet of her “thumb,” and his “finger,” in a moment of touch, whether because it has touched upon her thumb or because it rests upon his finger—it stands for something. We are left precisely with the knotty issue of language’s signifying capacity: does it come from the outside (in the form of arbitrariness of materiality, ink, and exchanges), or does it rest within (is the intimate physical encounter enough to make some *thing*—word, manuscript verse, or ring—mean, or achieve a presence in meaning)? If, as Fleming contends, “the signifier operated in the period as an image that neither imitated the world, nor expressed the mind, but was at one and the same time both part of the sensible world, and a mode of displaying the perceptual and intellectual complexities of man’s lived engagement with that world,” what does the ring transport? The arbitrariness of the “compound of natural matter”

⁶² See Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass, *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

removed from human affairs? Or the “artificial form magically disposed to transmit and receive intelligence” of the human experience?⁶³ Donne’s speaker does not necessarily choose, but instead leaves the reader, like the ring and speaker, by “her faith” “broke.”

That this staging of meaning occurs over a ring demonstrates not Donne’s general attitude toward the exchange of love tokens, but rather the ways these objects animate the problems of embodiment and space travel, sex and social circulation, that arise amidst technologies of inscription and reproduction. Davies’s poem, of course, is only one of many poems reflecting love tokens exchanged during courtship in the period. As Pamela Hammons notes, “men and women alike wrote a substantial number of poems—particularly when one includes manuscript verse—focused thematically upon the exchange of a wide variety of material items used as love tokens and upon real property, including rooms, gardens, land, and houses.”⁶⁴ The “wide variety of material items used as love tokens” parallels the variety of inscriptions one could find upon them. These inscriptions—which were inventoried at length by Joan Evans in the mid-twentieth century, include, “I cannot show the love I.O.,” “God aboue increase our loue,” “God’s blessing be with thee and me,” “Leett loue abide till death deuide,” and “Let vertue rule affection.”⁶⁵ Such inscriptions would have been selected from what Charles Oman identifies as “a common stock” of phrases, which “might have been bought ready inscribed,” in a system of consumption and exchange where “few appear to have been inventions of the purchaser.”⁶⁶ These stock phrases and the “wide variety of material items” on which they were written reflect not only the broader system of production,

⁶³ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 132.

⁶⁴ Pamela Hammons, *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse*, Women and Gender in the Early Modern World Series (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), 5.

⁶⁵ These quotations are taken from posy rings in the collection at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, DC.

⁶⁶ Charles Oman, *British Rings 800-1914* (London: Batsford, 1974), 39.

consumption and exchange: they also are the cultural *loci* in which the exchanges of lovers (material and discursive) enter into or already inscribed within that larger system.

Furthermore, these *loci* are distinguishable primarily for their place in language; that is, they are primarily defined through the meeting of figures with the material world: inscription. As Fleming remarks, “While formally a posy must be short [...] its defining characteristic is to be written in such a way that its material embodiment forms an important part of its meaning. The posy, in short, is a saying or poem that is pointed by being written on something.”⁶⁷ Thus, the posy draws particular attention to the materiality in poetics (“being written on something”) and the poetics in materiality (“material embodiment forms an important part of its meaning”). “Posy rings,” as the eighteenth century antiquaries would call them, were recognized by their “amatory inscriptions,” which “in medieval times were usually referred to as *resons*, but from at least 1430 as *posies* (poesy, poetry).”⁶⁸ Thus, they exist in a shared heritage with the poetry of the Renaissance, a sort of material, or stock, social double, highlighting, distorting or dramatizing structural and cultural features inherent in love poetry itself—perhaps the *concetti* or trifles that Kalas describes as part of the sonnet tradition. As Oman remarks, posies began to return to manuscript culture at the end of the sixteenth century: “the earliest collection [of posy inscriptions] occurs at the end of a manuscript book of poetry written soon after 1596.”⁶⁹ Thus, during the period in which Donne writes his erotic verse, the amatory rings which circulate and the inscriptions which define them are (re)introduced into the medium in which the poet works. It is no

⁶⁷ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 42-43.

⁶⁸ Oman, *British Rings 800-1914*, 39.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.

coincidence that Donne refers to a “*Jet Ring*,” as opposed to the gold ring of Davies’s sonnet: “jet” functions as a reminder of origins both of the token and the writing. In the former sense, it alludes to the “hard black semi-precious form of lignite, able to receive a brilliant polish and used ornamentally, esp. in Victorian mourning jewellery.”⁷⁰ As an adjective, here, “jet” more immediately invokes the color associated with the substance, the inky black which lines the inscription not only of the posy, uniting materiality and words to make it what it is, but also verse.⁷¹ His poem, then, imitates the problematics of the “jet ring,” sent into the market of exchange, wittily attempting to convey a relation between lovers, yet capable of becoming utterly banal in its lived existence, neither “endless” nor “soon broke.”

For Hammons, posy rings exist amidst the point of tension all love tokens shared in the period, as tokens which “obligate love and sex”: “by binding lovers together, gifts almost magically ensure ongoing fidelity—not just fickle affection or fleeting sex.”⁷² In other words, they occupied a central place in the gift exchanges of courtships that were supposed to, but did not always, lead to the marriage ceremony. Oman’s assessment of ring exchange, especially as it existed outside the well-delineated rules regarding the exchanges of wedding rings, is a bit less dramatic: “Whereas rigid rules governed the giving of wedding rings there was much diversity of practice with regard to engagement rings. Our ancestors were prone to give a ring on all sorts of occasions and a young man might give his girl friend a ring when his modern descendant might find it safer to present

⁷⁰ “jet, n.2 and adj.”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/101163?rskey=36s4vW&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed May 13, 2015).

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Hammons, *Gender, Sexuality, and Material Objects in English Renaissance Verse*, 40.

a box of chocolates.”⁷³ Oman’s assessment places posy rings in an economy of production and exchange, in which lovers enter and participate; Hammons’s focus, in contrast, is on how the rings signify the “ongoing fidelity” *between* lovers. Both assessments have equal validity: posies have a “common” function as stock elements in a system of commodity production and gift exchange that nevertheless attempts to express or capture some degree of intimacy of their personal unions. Donne’s speaker of “A Jet Ring Sent” turns both relations on their heads, embracing the arbitrary system of meaning in which the ring stands metonymically as an intimate sign of his beloved’s broken faith. “I am cheap and naught but fashion, fling me away” (8) is followed immediately by the reclamation, “Yet stay with me since thou art come” (9), because “She that, oh, broke her faith, would soon break thee” (12). He thus invests the absence of the lovers’ presence (or “properties”) in what may as well be an arbitrary “box of chocolates” with the complete opacity which lies in her broken faith.

If love tokens in Donne’s poems frequently problematize the relation between intimacy and arbitrary systems of meaning, making it difficult to determine what is “personal” and what is “stock,” it is not without a little irony that Donne’s most extensive reflection on tokens is listed by Helen Gardner as *dubia* among Donne’s works. Here, the love poem on love tokens finds a doubtful attribution to Donne’s “body,” as Gardner questions whether the poem belongs to the individual or to a larger system of exchange, of which it is merely another anonymous example. Like “A Jet Ring Sent,” the poem is equally suspicious of the possibility any “token” will be adequate to figure love between speaker and beloved. And yet, typical of Donne, the ambivalence is first expressed in

⁷³ Oman, *British Rings 800-1914*, 38.

confident demand: “Send me some token, that my hope may live” (1). This simple request is then mediated by an inventory of the love tokens, themselves, which the speaker says would be inadequate:

I beg no riband wrought with thine own hands,
To knit our loves in the fantastic strain
Of new-touched youth; nor ring to show the stands
Of our affection, that as that's round and plain,
So should loves meet in simplicity.
No, nor the corals which thy wrist enfold, [...]
No, nor thy picture, though most gracious [...]
Nor witty lines, which are most copious. (5-10, 13, 15)

He continues: “No, nor the corals which thy wrist enfold” (10), “Nor thy picture... (13), “Nor witty lines” (15). Given the ambiguous border between language and materiality which posies represented, there is a certain logic of movement to this inventory, as it progresses from tokens of the “hands” to “picture” to “witty lines.” The movement is from the “riband” borne of the labor of the hands, to objects of market exchange like the ring (though “round and simple,” and thus muting connotations of market value) and corals, to the incomplete idealism of “thy picture” (a Neo-Platonic idealism particularly resonant in the line “because best like the best” [14]), to the “witty lines” which “are most copious” (15)—lines written by the hand of the “most desired” (14), which exist materially “within the writings which thou hast addressed” (16).

In the poem's conclusion, the resolution to the problem of what “token” may ensure “my hope may live” foregoes tokens altogether, for the immediacy of the vow,

returning us once again to the “performative” quality of Donne’s coterie culture. Security is realized in an act of speech: “Send me nor this, nor that, to increase my store, / But swear thou think’st I love thee, and no more” (13-14). The demand for an oath is especially striking because it turns back upon the speaker: he wants to hear her “swear thou think’st I love thee, and no more,” to confirm his own love in her words. The speaker requires an affirmation of his own desire in her voice, her words—a material confirmation of the (performative) utterance. Any other “token” will simply “increase my store,” the inventory, without increasing “hope.” I will not travel by any other ship, he says, but your vow.

The vagaries of manuscript culture leave “The Token” unprinted until 1649, and, as noted, doubts persist over whether it truly belongs to Donne’s hand. Its problematic incorporation depends upon the highly mediated routes in which it arrives to the researcher. The speaker of the poem may close with a desire for unmediated presence and affirmation with his beloved, but most of his lines are spent sifting through the tokens that will fail in that process, as he thus demonstrates an awareness of the material contingencies of one who traded in manuscript. The material world of writing and the hand are, at once, both valued and rendered highly suspect: even as he seeks to preserve the value in the tokens, they simply will not do.

IV. “The Light of Reason,” and Goodbyes in Glass

In a sermon preached at St. Paul’s on Christmas Day 1621, reflecting on John 1.8, “He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light,” Dr. Donne considers

the earthly advantages the “light of Reason” has afforded mankind. In a sweeping overview, he links, at once, print and commerce:

Some men by the benefit of this light of Reason, have found out things profitable and usefull to the whole world; As in particular, Printing, by which the learning of the whole world is communicable to one another, and our minds and our inventions, our wits and compositions may trade and have commerce together, and we may participate of one anothers understandings, as well as of our Clothes, and Wines, and Oyles, and other Merchandize.⁷⁴

Donne’s emphasis on the systemic aspect of “Printing” is essential to articulating the way he sees “the light of Reason” illuminating the world. “Printing” is linked with knowledge production in the pathologically-tinged “communicable,” as “learning” is translated to “our minds,” “our inventions,” “our wits and compositions” and then juxtaposed with “trade” and “commerce.” Viewed negatively, this is nothing less than a sketch of systemic interpellation which places “printing” at its center, where “minds” and “compositions” are all taken up in a vast world system. No room for the intimacy of lovers here. And yet Donne continues, moving from “printing” to “artillery”:

so by the benefit of this light of reason, they have found out artillery, by which wars come to quicker ends than heretofore, and the great expense of blood is avoided: for the numbers of men slain

⁷⁴ John Donne, *Fifty sermons. preached by that learned and reverend divine, John Donne* (London: Printed by Ja. Flesher for M.F., J. Marriot, and R. Royston, 1649), 326; EEBO Wing / D1862.

now, since the invention of artillery, are much less than before,
when the sword was the executioner.⁷⁵

As this assessment progresses, I suggest that we, and Donne's audience at the time, can begin to question the sincerity of this exploration of the "benefit of this light" to mankind. How does one reconcile this valorization of warfare with the writer of "Love's War" who portrayed ships as "carts for executions"? He continues: "Others, by the benefit of this light, have searched and found the secret corners of gain, and profit, wheresoever they lie." From "printing," to "artillery," he moves onto merchants.

The dubious uses to which the "light" is put become most pronounced as Donne speaks of profit: "They have found wherein the weakness of another man consisted, and made their profit of that, by circumventing him in a bargain: they have found his riotous and wasteful inclination, and they have fed and fomented that disorder, and kept open that leak, to their advantage, and the other's ruin."⁷⁶ Metaphorical gestures toward the humoral body here are grafted onto moral values: those who are "riotous and wasteful in inclination" are also those "that leak." And yet, it is not the leaky, consumptive bodies toward which Donne directs his irony, but rather those who "have searched and found the secret corners of gain," who have "kept open that leak, to their advantage." Thus, moral consumption, in a humoral context, is filtered into a system of "gain, and profit," which, in this review of "light," is also systemically linked to technologies of "artillery" and "printing."

As if we had any doubt whether Donne's praise of mankind's use of the "light" is being turned on its head, he pushes further: "They have found where was the easiest, and

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

most accessible way, to solicit the chastity of a woman, whether discourse, music, or presents, and according to that discovery, they have pursued hers, and their own eternal destruction.” The anonymous “they” who tap into leaky bodies also “have found where was the easiest, and most accessible way, to solicit the chastity of a woman.”⁷⁷ “They” know how to tap bodies for gain, both financial and sexual, extraction in leaky consumption and penetration of the fair sex. Women are accessible especially through the vessels of “discourse, music, or presents.” For Donne, these practices are nothing less than “discovery,” facilitated by a vast mercantile-colonial-state-sexual apparatus motivated for “gain, and profit” through the “light” or reason. Although, as Katherine Attie says, “Donne echoes Bacon from the pulpit,” especially in his linking print with gunpowder,⁷⁸ the irony of the sermon demonstrates that Donne is considerably more cynical and suspicious of the proprietary and instrumental use to which these technologies are put. Before turning to the way this “light” can be bent toward God, he offers the concluding remark on the “wisdom of worldly men”: “So the light and wisdom of worldly men seemeth great, because it hath kindled an admiration, or an applause in airy flatterers, not because it is so indeed.”

“Donne thought in systems and structures, and wanted to understand the significance of the detail for the whole,” Parr claims in his assessment of Donne as “travel writer.”⁷⁹ Before arriving at this conclusion, he notes: “If on his travels he stopped to enjoy a view or to admire a building or a flower, he did not find a place for these experiences in his imaginative work unless he could build them into an

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Katherine Bootle Attie, “Selling Science: Bacon, Harvey, and the Commodification of Knowledge,” *Modern Philology* 110, 3 (February 2013): 415-440, 415.

⁷⁹ Anthony Parr, “John Donne, Travel Writer,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70.1 (March 2007): 61-85, 78.

intellectually coherent complex of ideas.”⁸⁰ In his sermon on Christmas Day 1621, we can follow as Donne relates the realm of physical experience to systemic applications of the “light of Reason” in a decidedly critical context. Print, artillery, commercialism, and modes of courtship are all absorbed into the larger system of the “light” which “seemeth great” within the chattering boundaries of “admiration, or an applause in airy flatterers,” *but* “not because it is so indeed.”⁸¹

Donne’s sermon invites us to consider further how manuscripts and print, artillery, commercialism, lived experience, bodies and desires are interconnected—how Donne sees each within a system where the “light of Reason” is the driving force. “Discourse, music, or presents” are metonymic for vessels of access within these broader interlocking workings of print, artillery, commerce, and sex. The speaker’s request, at the close of “The Token,” to “Send me nor this, nor that, to increase my store, / But swear thou think’st I love thee, and no more” (13-14), supposes that “meaning exists in exchange,”⁸² in the immediacy of the vow. This request seeks validation of the speaker’s desire in her words, echoing the appeal in “The Damp” for the “naked” (14) encounter. But how does this supposition of conditions for the presence for desire, as expressed by the other, escape the “discourse, music, or presents” implicated in a system of access and penetration? The speaker’s plea at the close of “The Token” is decidedly removed from any bawdy sense that this “love” is mere sex, but because Donne’s speaker relies on an economy of exchange (even in “trifles”), how can he evade the system, or avoid using another “device to solicit the chastity of women,” and thus becoming record of that

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Wollman, “The ‘Press and the Fire’: Print and Manuscript Culture in Donne’s Circle,” 91.

dubious “wisdom of worldly men”? Indeed, the doubtful place of “The Token” in Donne’s canon relegates it to discourse of an anonymous kind, a marker of “love poetry” in utter distance from Donne’s body and desires.

Of course, anonymity is not necessarily a problem, or, at least, it is only a problem insofar as we, Donne’s readers and critics, desire a kind of direct access to that desiring body, or wish to reproduce it as a singular, coherent figure for scholarship. But, as I hope to have shown, poems like “The Token” are infinitely more interested in exploring conditions of presence in relation to mediation and the materialities that resist translations of lived experiences and disrupt the transport of unmediated desire in the sensible realm. Insofar as Donne spends so much time studying these materialities, he seems to be saying, “This is all we’ve got.” Moments of presence, thus, are fleeting and ephemeral, perhaps even registering off the written page, like the vow at the end of “The Token” that may or may not respond to the speaker’s request to “thou think’st I love thee, and no more” (13-14). If Empson is right that Donne and his lover travel to the “separate planet,” then the planet itself is something that only rarely flashes before the eyes of his readers—both discursively and phenomenally—and then disappears, a place that exists through a reliance also upon non-discursive forms of knowledge that may barely register upon the page, ring, or window. You do not get there through the efficient, well-traveled transports of “discourse, music, or presents,” which fit effortlessly into developing systems of print culture, commerce, warfare and sexual exploitation. Rather, you arrive in modes of transport like the “idle talk” (65) of “dying men” (65) in “Of My Name in the Window.”

Donne's valedictions are among the finest in English language. In one sense, he might even be said to have invented the goodbye in this term, as Targoff notes: "among John Donne's contributions to the English language is the word 'valediction.'" ⁸³ She explains its etymology as follows: "From the Latin *vale*, the imperative of *valere*, 'to be strong,' or 'to be well,' and *dictio*, an 'utterance' or 'saying,' 'valediction' translates literally as the act of saying farewell." ⁸⁴ In the etymological emphasis on orality, the "strong" "utterance" embodies the performative aspect of a speech act at the moment of departure, one that is "strong," direct and present, but nevertheless fleeting, fading within the very moment it registers that presence. The lovers will depart, leaving their "separate planet," such that physical presence becomes a memory. But perhaps that is the best they can do. Amidst the maddening circuit between text, desire, and lived reality, Donne's final disavowal of inscription as the "idle talk" of "dying men" may be less a cynical dismissal than a truth of the circuit itself: all presence is always already disappearing, becoming absence.

"My name engraved herein" (1) at the opening of "Of My Name in the Window" refers less to some purely legible, fully realized inscriptive mark, then, but rather to the truth that inscription—being "Donne"—is always a kind of epitaph. The pun on "engraved" leads us to the window as tomb, and, as with all tombs, we come to know their inhabitants through not only the words that link us to the body, but the genre of the epitaph, its intended effects on the reader, the material substances that make the tomb, and, finally, the social currencies which inform our collective unconscious of what a tomb is supposed to be and do. In the tomb of glass in Donne's poem—in which glass is

⁸³ Targoff, *John Donne, Body and Soul*, 1. The emphasis is mine.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

noted, among other things, “as all confessing, and through-shine as I” (8)—we see not merely how the properties of glass become metaphor for properties of a self, and enter into a religious discursive tradition of Augustine, but, rather, also, how that human self finds its existence in the properties of glass: “The Donne-like Glass,” with all its import of a Christian Neoplatonic reality (of the Augustine tradition) is complemented by “Donne, the Glass Man.” Look further and the two become inseparable. The engraving, Donne’s speaker tells us, “Doth contribute my firmness to this glass” (2), in a reference to “firmness” that resonates not only a sense of the speaker’s constancy and fidelity (as well as being a bawdy pun on the phallic member), but also the material hardness of the glass, and, as Kalas observes, “one of the properties of the engraving diamond.”⁸⁵ Fidelity, erotic play, glass, and writing instrument are all conflated in this moment,⁸⁶ the grave of the inscription a constellation of forces—human and nonhuman—which dictate our understandings of presence and mediation.

It is in the encounter with glass/text—on our part and the writer’s—that Donne invites the reader to engage with its material properties, its form, and the social meanings it represents. In this last sense, Kalas observes, “Dating at least as far back as the reign of Henry VIII, small roundels painted with heraldic arms were inserted into leaded windows of crown glass, and possibly even lattice windows,”⁸⁷ and she goes on to suggest that Donne’s window engraving, in the context of his (socially) disastrous marriage More, would have been a salient reminder of his name’s lack of heraldic import and social

⁸⁵ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 200.

⁸⁶ Fleming, following Derrida, identifies the link between desire and the writing with our “own libidinal cathexes to instruments of speech and writing.” Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 115.

⁸⁷ Kalas, *Frame, Glass, Verse*, 189.

authority.⁸⁸ Thus, the presence of the name “Donne,” as signifier of the social subject, registers primarily an absence, the window scratchings emptied of the social status an early modern reader would otherwise suppose they ought to have: presence as absence, fading here in a social sense. Furthermore, windows, at the time, Kalas tells us, were “moveable property,”⁸⁹ which could often be removed and transferred to other locales when a house or castle was not in use. In other words, they were not understood as fixed “parts of the house.” Lastly, in a formal sense, a window engraving, as Fleming notes, would have been categorized as a posy in the period; after Puttenham, she refers to posies as “portable epigrams.”⁹⁰ Also notable, Puttenham said “an epitaph is but a kind of epigram.”⁹¹ Thus, in Donne’s engraving, we have a text that might at once be called a posy, “portable epigram” and epitaph. As with any posy, moreover, it is “a piece of writing with physical extension [that] cannot exist as text in the abstract.”⁹² In considering these social and formal dimensions of window and inscription, then, we return always to the materiality, a presence in space and time, the early modern and our own. For this “moveable property” of a window with no name of social import has traveled here, a “portable epigram” lies before us, Donne says, and terms of ownership—over the identity, desires and lived experiences we claim with it—are at stake, because the epigram is also an epitaph, the presence of the desiring body behind or within it already faded and continually fading.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ Ibid.

⁹⁰ Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 19.

⁹¹ Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, 144.

⁹² Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England*, 43.

CHAPTER 3
Jonson's "Exotic Inventories": Performance and Parasite Life of *Volpone*

In Act 5 of *Volpone*, Ben Jonson stages the servant Mosca "taking an inventory" of the "deceased" Magnifico's goods. The entire scene unfolds in the dilated enumeration of a list, interrupted periodically by the suitors. The advocate Voltore is the first to arrive onstage: "How now, my Mosca?" he asks, only to hear Mosca enumerate, "Turkey carpets, nine—" (5.3.1). "Taking an inventory? That is well." Mosca continues, "Two suits of bedding, tissue" (5.3.2-3). The other suitors arrive to hear more of the same: for Corbaccio's "Is it done, Mosca?" (5.3.6), the servant counts, "Of several velvets, eight—" (5.3.7); Corvino's demand of the will is met with "Six chests of diaper, four of damask" (5.3.13); and, lastly, Lady Would-Be's "Mosca? / Is his thread spun?" is answered, quite appropriately, "Eight chests of linen—" (5.3.11). As Robert Watson notes, in asking, "Is his thread spun?", "Lady Would-Be alludes to the myth of the Three Fates," *but* "may also subconsciously be responding to the sight of all these expensive fabrics."¹ The pun on "thread" captures Mosca's task and the suitors' interests at this moment: Volpone's "life's thread" may have "spun," but his "linen" must now be sorted. A discourse of completion, which the suitors occupy with questions on "Is it done?" and "Is his thread spun?", intersects with an itemization, or performative *partitio*, where each good stands synecdochally for the Magnifico's estate. Voltore's "That is *well*" puns on the paradox of Volpone's health (or lack thereof) and the processes of transactions required to obtain the estate: what is "well," in Voltore's eyes, is most certainly not the Magnifico, but the

¹ Ben Jonson, *Volpone*, ed. Robert Watson (New York: Methuen Dram, 2014), 131.

efficiency with which the parasite processes the goods of the estate so that he may receive them as heir.

This chapter is an inquiry into the attachments between persons and things in the domestic sphere, as depicted in *Volpone*. I argue that Mosca's performance of an inventory stages a pause, or interruption, in those processes by which persons and things are brought together, and constituted, within that sphere. In his lengthy enumeration of goods, Mosca forces us to take note of the capacious divide which lies between the stock of velvets, diaper and damask, for example, and the subject who wears them; or, "Turkey carpets, nine" (5.3.1), and an interior which is draped in them. The "deceased" Magnifico hides behind a hanging in his own "house"; the actors wear clothes which would most likely have been made of several fabrics on the servant's list. In "taking an inventory," Mosca inhabits a crucial space of mediating labor, tenuously holding together (and apart) the very relations between persons and cloths, tapestries and walls, which the stage so effortlessly displays. In short, his performance demonstrates a process of translation by which the domestic subject and interior are constituted through the raw *materia* of things, bodies, and words on paper.

Mosca's performance is emblematic of Jonson's comedy, which radically destabilizes our sense of persons and things as discrete units, instead highlighting the ways in which both function as parts in processes of transaction. In Jonson's Venice: transactions, first; persons and things, second. For Katharine Eisaman Maus, the foregrounding of transactions occurs at the outset of the play, with Volpone's opening salvo to his gold: "Good morning to the day; and next, my gold: / Open the shrine, that I may see my Saint. Mosca withdraws the curtain, and discoveries piles of gold, plate,

jewels, etc.” (1.1.1-2). Despite the piles of goods onstage, Maus contends, “the treasure-trove points beyond itself, just as the Augustinian signifier does—but it hardly points to God. Rather it memorializes for Volpone a series of pleasurably fraudulent transactions.”² She thus draws our attention to the ways in which the activities of obtaining material wealth are foregrounded in the play, even over the physical presence of that wealth onstage.

In his typically erudite fashion, William Empson lends support to Maus’s observation, argues that “the very basis of operation of *Volpone* is the familiar sentiment about the highwayman or the bootlegger, which though it feels obvious to the whole audience is rather complex.”³ Empson is referring to “outlaw” sentiment of the highwayman or the bootlegger, the way in which they exist at the social fringes in order to tap into, but ultimately stand apart from, the normative cadences and commercial rhythms of society. The bootlegger, the highwayman, and their close affiliate, the huckster—Volpone, with his vast pile of wealth, exists less in the register of Ebenezer Scrooge than that of Jimmy Conway, one of the main characters from Martin Scorsese’s mobster epic *Goodfellas*, who protagonist Henry Hill describes as follows: “what [Jimmy] really loved to do was steal. I mean, he actually enjoyed it. [...] He was one of the city’s biggest hijackers. Clothes. Razor blades. Booze. Cigarettes. Shrimp and lobsters. Shrimp and lobsters were the best. They went fast.”⁴ Volpone is no mobster, of course, but the thrill of the grift—of acquiring wealth outside of established, regulated markets—*does* define him, insofar as he glories in outsmarting the suitors: “I glory /

² Katharine Eisaman Maus, “Idol and Gift in Volpone,” *English Literary Renaissance* 35 (2005): 429-453, 434-435.

³ William Empson, “*Volpone*,” *The Hudson Review*, 21, 4 (Winter, 1968-1969): 651-666, 657.

⁴ *Goodfellas*, dir. Martin Scorsese (Warner Bros. 1990).

More in the cunning purchase of my wealth,” he tells Mosca, “Than in the glad possession; since I gain / No common way; I use no trade, no venture; / I wound no earth with plough-shares; fat no beasts, / To feed the shambles” (1.1.32-35). In short, Volpone prides himself in a singular existence: outside of (and parasitic to) the rapacious rhythms of instrumentalized use-and-gain in the established markets, his goal is to take the suitors’ hopes and “coin ’em into profit” (1.1.86), the value of the goods he acquires deeply interconnected with the fraudulent means by which he acquires them. A purchased bag of chequins and a gifted bag of chequins may have the same commercial value, but, for Volpone, the latter is exceedingly precious.

As Volpone’s language suggests, the logic of the gift has less to do with perceiving persons and things as discrete categories, than in understanding their relationships within a chain that leads, ultimately, to the completed transaction. Volpone offers a basic syntax: “new clients” arrive daily, “bring me presents, send me plate, coin, jewels, / With hope that when I die (which they expect each greedy minutes) it shall then return / Tenfold upon them,” while others “seek to engross me whole,” such that he “play[s] with their hopes” in order to “coin ’em into profit” (1.1.76-86). The flow of suitors-turned-coins is sustained by several key factors: the promise of Volpone’s imminent demise (achieved through his feigned illness); Mosca’s mediations, including reassurances such as, “you still are what you were, sir. Only you, / Of all the rest, are he commands his love” (1.3.1-2); and, lastly, the suitors’ hopes, their committed belief that the gifts they bring “shall then return / Ten-fold upon them.” Each is a necessary element for the completion of the transaction, to satisfy Volpone’s inexhaustible longing to “have possession / Of my new present” (1.2.116-117), but Mosca’s mediation is central: if

Volpone's imminent demise and the suitors' hopes exist at opposite, reciprocal poles (such that the "closer" to death Volpone is, the greater their hopes), the key link is Mosca, insofar as he is in charge of "play[ing] with their hopes," enabling each suitor to believe firmly in his own particular success.

His inventory is a defining moment in the play because it draws the suitors in nearest proximity to the fulfillment of their desires (i.e., Volpone is dead, and *this* is what you shall inherit), and then, just as suddenly, disabuses them of these beliefs. It thus inhabits the cutting irony that makes *Volpone* a comic triumph. Etymologically, "inventory" derives from the Latin *inventārium*, meaning "a list of what is found," which, itself, comes from *invenīre*, "to invent, to find."⁵ With this etymology, as Patricia Parker observes, implicit in every performance of "taking an inventory" is "the uneasy tension within the term 'invention' itself, between the sense of discovering or uncovering something already there and the sense of fictive narration, so something more open to manipulation and control."⁶ In the *inventio* of humanist rhetorical practices of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this "sense of discovering or uncovering" was linked to the "rich storehouse" of *copia*, the collection(s) of *res* and *verba* gleaned from various classical texts since a writer's grammar school days. The "storehouse" was realized—and organized—in what Ann Moss calls the "information-retrieval system" of the Renaissance commonplace-book.⁷ The difference between the storage systems of the early modern probate inventory and the commonplace-book is that the former promised

⁵ "† 'inventar | 'inventaire, n." OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/98961> (accessed May 09, 2014).

⁶ Ibid., 132-3.

⁷ Ann Moss, *Printed Common-Place Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), vi. Moss also notes, "As for the commonplace-book as information-retrieval system, [...] this was not a new feature in Renaissance quotation collections, but a refinement of the mechanisms they inherited," vi.

containment, and boundaries, to a domestic, physical space of moveables (the possibility that moveable goods could be transcribed onto the page, and, thereby, appraised and transferred), while the latter, if a humanist pedagogue succeeded and a student worked diligently enough, resulted in the virtually limitless production of *copia*. It is this tension between physical containment, boundary, and order, on the one hand, and verbal proliferation and fecundity, on the other, that Mosca exploits so deftly in his performance. In “taking an inventory,” Mosca employs a style of domestic management, enacting mechanisms of rhetorical and performative control, which marshals a vast storehouse of *copia* to organize a superabundance of material referents in the domestic space, and, in doing so, secure (a sense of stability in) the transaction, enabling the suitors’ fantasies of possession, that their gifts “shall then return / Tenfold upon them” (1.1.80-81).

As an audience, we are struck by the excess of it all: “Turkey carpets, nine” (5.3.1); “two suits of bedding, tissue” (5.3.2-3); “of several velvets, eight” (5.3.7); “Six chests of diaper, four of damask” (5.3.13); “Down-beds, and bolsters” (5.3.15); “Ten suits of hangings” (5.3.20); “Two cabinets (5.3.28), “One of ebony” (5.3.29), “The other, mother of pearl” (5.3.30); “Item, one salt of agate” (5.3.33); “A perfum'd box [...] made of an onyx” (5.3.33-34); “A table of porphyry” (5.3.79). In one respect, this excess lies in the sheer quantity: by the time Mosca arrives at the table of porphyry, we might do well to ask, have the suitors—and the audience, for that matter—lost count? It is an enumeration—in the rhetorical vocabulary of the period, *enumeratio*, a sub-category of *accumulatio*—that suggests endlessness: Mosca feigns exertion and fatigue, saying, “you see I am troubled” (5.3.34) and “tomorrow, or next day, I shall be at leisure / To talk with

you all” (5.3.35-36). Just *how much*, neither we nor the suitors, know—and that is precisely the point.

Along with quantity, excess is suggested in quality, specifically, the rich sensuousness of the items themselves. We have, for instance, the exoticism of “Turkey carpets” and “Six chests of diaper, four of damask” (“damask,” a term referring to cloth coming from Damascus), but there is also the proliferation of sensory appeals: the tactile softness of “bedding, tissue”, “several velvets,” “down-beds, and bolsters”; the visual registers signaled with “ebony,” “mother of pearl,” “onyx,” and “porphyry”; and, lastly, olfactory appeal of the “perfum’d box.”

If Mosca’s inventory conveys the *excessive* qualities of the estate which Volpone’s heir will inherit, it also exercises considerable control, rhetorical and performative, over the abundance toward which he gestures. Excess is contained, diluted in the pacing of Mosca’s performance, labeled and numbered in the *partitio*, or, more specifically, *enumeratio*, of itemization. In his consideration of enumerative structures, Jeffrey Schnapp argues that “right from the start, enumerations are the focal point of a didactic urge in the Western literary imagination: the object of an appetite for increasingly complex modes of ordering”; furthermore, “The list, the inventory, the category: the whole universe of enumerative structures is under pressure not just to enumerate and record but to make sense in doing so.”⁸ In this, Mosca, paradoxically, shows himself to be a master of restraint, offering a sense of excess and unrestricted

⁸ Schnapp, Jeffrey T. “The Chatter of People and Things,” *MLQ* 72 (2011): 319-339, 319-320. In a different context, evaluating John Stowe’s *Survey of London*, Jean Howard arrives at a similar conclusion, arguing that “in his commemorative narrative, ‘the list’ is his rhetorical signature,” accommodating Stowe’s “attempts to give fixity to a city in flux, to recover what the forces of time and change have obliterated, and to give a lasting record of its great edifices and of the great civic figures eminent in its history,” 5-7. See Jean Howard, *Theater of a City: The Places of London Comedy, 1598-1642* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007).

amplificatio, but only within a measured itemization which indicates the possibility things *can be* ordered and arranged. This restraint allows the inventory to function as synecdoche for Volpone’s entire estate: each item a signal of what the suitors will “engross [...] whole.” Robert Belknap defines the list as “a formally organized block of information that is composed of a set of members.” Following Nicholas Howe, Belknap contends that “the list is simultaneously the sum of its parts and the individual parts themselves. By accretion, the separate units cohere to fulfill some function as a combined whole, and by discontinuity the individuality of each unit is maintained as a particular instance, a particular attribute, a particular object or person.”⁹ The synecdochal relationship between individual items and the whole is reflected in the storage capacity of items like the “six chests”, “two cabinets,” and “perfum’d box.” Such items reaffirm the relation of containment and excess in the inventory itself: that within each item lies more to unpack.

For Belknap, “because of its generative qualities—because it can be considered shapeless it has the capacity to spark endless connections and inclusions in a multiplicity of forms—the list is a device that writers have frequently employed to display the pleasurable infinitude of language.”¹⁰ In this aspect of “pleasurable infinitude,” the list, in Belknap’s terms, resembles the example of *copia* Erasmus demonstrates in the famous closing practice of the first book on *Copia Verborum*, where Erasmus leads the reader through dozens of variations on the phrase “Your letter has delighted me very much” [*“Tuae literae me magnopere delectarunt”*].¹¹ Yet the dimensions of the stage, and the

⁹ Robert E. Belknap, *The List: The Uses and Pleasures of Cataloguing* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 15.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 1-2.

¹¹ Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, 38.

aesthetics of theatrical performance, extend Mosca's inventory. Jonson's oft-noted, rigorous adherence to humanist and classical conceptions of decorum promised fit words for the fit occasion; but the conditions of the Jacobean stage suggested an alternative framework in which the physical world, dimensions in space and time, determined the conditions of possibility in which words could be used. The performance of an inventory transposes the routines of "information-retrieval" implicit in commonplace, as well as its thematics of rhetorical storage, from the verbal register and into the physical realm. As it gestures toward a "sense of discovering or uncovering" within a physical, nondiscursive field, it nevertheless operates within a logic that relies upon the rhetorical dynamics of *inventio*—and its dubious border between discovery and manipulation—as its ghostly double.

And yet, the ontological terrain of Mosca's *amplificatio* and *enumeratio* is deliberately opaque—are these things *really there*, onstage, or is Mosca's list a fantastic *poesis*, in the words of Stephen Greenblatt, a "vertiginous swirl of words"?¹² Perhaps, the answer is that it exists somewhere in between, the items extending into the storehouse of *verba*, *but also* into the physical realm, defining and shaping the domestic space, itself, as a loose affiliation of things, bodies, and words on paper (documents) constellated around human desires. The capacious divide between the items in Mosca's list and the

¹² Stephen Greenblatt, "Volpone's False Ending," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 (1976): 90-104, 90. Although a number of critics have acknowledged Jonson's proclivity for lists, catalogues, menus and recipes, and inventories, a systematic study of these forms in Jonson's work has yet to be undertaken. Greenblatt was one of the first critics to recognize their importance in *Volpone*. *Volpone*, he contends is "a play of lists, recipes, and catalogues," "in Volpone's attempted seduction of Celia," he hears "the ring of an exotic inventory," an extraordinarily detailed 'thingness' [...] in keeping with the characters' obsession with wealth." Stephen Greenblatt, "Volpone's False Ending," *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 75 (1976): 90-104, 90. Also, Anne Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist* (Cambridge, London and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 109. For Barton, furthermore, "Jonson's lists, unlike Shakespeare's, reflect a cluttered, irredeemable urban sprawl so overcrowded with things that it has become almost impossible for people to walk about naturally," 110. Karen Newman expands Barton's observation to Jonson's entire *oeuvre*, arguing that "Jonson's comedies might be characterized generally by a fondness for *copia* enacted through the grammatical series." See Karen Newman, "City Talk: Women and Commodification in Jonson's *Epicoene*," *ELH* 56, 3 (Autumn 1989): 503-518, 511.

domestic subject, or interior, with which we associate them, is not between intact subjects and objects, but rather between raw materials, physical and rhetorical, which are stitched together through the performance of the inventory, in an exercise of *oeconomia*, or “management of the household,”¹³ that stabilizes flows of desires and things in order to secure a chain which leads, ultimately, to a completed transaction—all for the pleasure and thrill of the con, that most illicit path of acquisition.

I. “A Trewe and Perfyte Inventory” (A Fantasy)

As Greenblatt observes, the final act of *Volpone* has remained a persistent source of trouble for critics over the years. Having barely escaped the censure of the Venetian court, Volpone arrives home and takes only the briefest pause in action, reflecting, “Well, I am here; and all this brunt is past” (5.1.1). Despite Mosca’s certainty that “here, we must rest; this is our master-peece” (5.1.13), Volpone sets out, once more, for a “deuice [...] of, rare ingenious knauery, / That would possesse me with a violent laughter” (5.1.14-15). Such a “deuice” is directly equated with debauchery and play, as Volpone asks for “a boule of lustie wine” (5.1.11) amidst his planning, and then requests, at last, “Shal we haue a jig, now?” (5.1.59). The “jig,” as Volpone crafts it, is to lure the suitors with pronouncements of his death, and then have Mosca toy with their desires to inherit his wealth, all as he watches. It culminates in what we might expect would be an otherwise mundane affair: conducting a probate inventory. “Hold, here’s my will,” Volpone instructs Mosca, “Get thee a cap, a count-book, pen and ink, / Papers afore thee; sit as thou wert taking / An inventory of parcels” (5.2.80-4). In the scene Volpone

¹³ “economy, n.”. OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59393?redirectedFrom=economy> (accessed March 12, 2014).

envisions, pieces of paper (once more) become the dramatic focus of the stage: on the one hand, the will, with its inscription already complete, and, on the other, Mosca, writing down the “parcels” which are to be attached to that name in the will. Of course, although Volpone equates the performance with a “rare meal of laughter” (5.2.87), the consequences of these acts of writing and Mosca’s costume change could not be more significant. In the stakes of *this* performance, there is a finality from which neither Volpone nor Mosca can return: the players, themselves, will be irreparably changed in this last act. Volpone, in handing over both his gown and will to his servant, unwittingly gives Mosca the very tools for his betrayal. Mosca, in donning the Magnifico’s attire, violates the Venetian sumptuary laws which circumscribe his social status as servant—and receives his harsh punishment primarily because of this violation (the Avvocato’s command at the close of the play, “Disrobe that parasite” [5.2.103], is the signature act of Mosca’s disempowerment, a reminder that outside the home the rhetorical performance of the inventory has no efficacy, as the legal edict takes precedence).

Rather than following Greenblatt and others in exploring why Volpone so recklessly continues to swindle his suitors at this moment in the play, I would like to consider why the performance of the inventory is such a defining action. In other words, what is so special about *this* particular performance, as compared to the previous ones, that it can seal the fates of Volpone and Mosca so irreparably? In many ways, the answer is quite obvious: by signing the will and feigning his death, Volpone gives away his entire estate to a servant, who needs only to continue to pretend his master is no longer alive in order to retain it. These, we might say, are the two material conditions that have driven the steady flow of suitors into Volpone’s home in the first place: 1) their gifts,

they hope, will influence Volpone to write their names as his heirs, and 2) he will soon be dead. As Corbaccio phrases it, each of the suitor's aims in acquiring Volpone's wealth revolves around the singular, specific fantasy "to be published his heir" (1.4.112). Before the moment Volpone instructs Mosca, "Open that chest and reach / Forth one of those that has the blanks. I'll straight / Put in thy name" (5.2.71-73), the document itself is a mystery, more a fiction of Mosca's talk than an actual legal document. Mosca's sensual articulation of a newly inscribed will to Voltore perhaps most memorably captures the alignment of the suitors' fantasies of possession align with a performance of material inscription: "the wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry / Upon the parchment" (1.3.46-47). A more evocative description of a will is perhaps difficult to find in the period. Most importantly, the description, as well as the entire plot of *Volpone*, relies on a tension between both the sense of finality and instabilities inherent in the document: if a sense of closure or permanence is denoted with the image of ink on the page, or, more dramatically, "to be published his heir" (1.4.112), that closure is suspended by the instabilities of a performance that could, very well, be undone, or, perhaps, done again *differently*: "the wax is warm yet, and the ink scarce dry" (1.3.46-47). Such consummation may satisfy Voltore to an extent, yet it remains provisional. As an advocate, he knows perfectly well that the description is incomplete, even as it promises the fulfillment of his desires. Mosca anticipates his requests for documentation: "When will you have your inventory brought, sir? / Or see a copy of the will? [...] / I'll bring 'em to you, sir (1.3.75-77). Of course, this "evidence" is accompanied by a further deferral from the messenger: "I'll bring 'em to you, sir." Rushed out the door before the next suitor arrives, Voltore is left with a dubious answer to his question, "Am I inscribed

his heir, for certain?" (1.3.33). The answer, of course, and the "certainty" itself, depends on what he thinks of Mosca's performance.

Like the stagings of the will throughout the play, the probate inventory promises fidelity to the material possessions of an estate, while remaining provisional and, at times, highly unstable in its account of material reality. In Volpone's instructions to Mosca—"Get thee a cap, a count-book, pen and ink, / Papers afore thee; sit as thou wert taking / An inventory of parcels" (5.2.80-4)—Jonson underscores the performative qualities inherent in any probate inventory, especially its performative relation to the class of domestic goods defined as "movables." "Probate" is derived from the classical Latin *probātum*, which the *OED* defines as "a thing proved, use[d] as noun of neuter past participle of *probāre*."¹⁴ The classical Latin *probāre*, itself, means "to test, to examine, to put to the proof, to approve, commend, to authorize, sanction, to prove, demonstrate,"¹⁵ and thus emphasizes the empirical, or experimental, epistemological relation the inventory fosters with material goods.¹⁶

Significantly, the relation the inventory documented with an estate *excluded* real property, as Margaret Spufford notes: "The inventory only legally listed goods belonging to the administrator, or executrix, of an estate. These included movable goods and leasehold land, but not real property."¹⁷ Because real property was transferred through

¹⁴ "probate, n." *OED Online*. June 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151701?rskey=xAl7dG&result=1> (accessed July 13, 2014).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ On the epistemic shift that comes with the rise of empirical experimentation in the sixteenth century, see Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), and Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. by Catherine Porter (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1993). A study which compares the practices of the probate inventory to the rise of empirical science seems quite promising, but is beyond the scope of this chapter.

¹⁷ Spufford, Margaret, "The Limitations of the Probate Inventory," in *English Rural Society, 1500-1800: Essays in Honour of Joan Thirsk*, John Chartres, David Hey, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990): 139-174, 142. Spufford continues: "Real property included copyhold land, which would descend according to the custom of the

other means, the work of the inventory consisted entirely in examining this category of movables. In his popular legal guide to property statutes from the period, Henry Swinburne categorizes movables, or “*bona mobilia*” as follows:

Movables are also divided into animate and inanimate; by the first is comprehended all such Movables which are active in their Motion, as Cowes, Horses, &c. which all pass by the Word Movables; and so likewise Movables inanimate which are passive in Motion, such as Books, Desks, Cabinets, and all Manner of Household Goods.¹⁸

Despite this rather clear delineation, the category was especially troublesome for Swinburne, perhaps partly because its definition was so closely bound to the performance of those conducting the inventory. In other words, one can imagine an unscrupulous probate commission encountering any number of items that they determine “should” be included in the inventory, and thus as factors in the estate’s debts or surplus. Swinburne appears to anticipate this on a page detailing “Things that are to be put into the Inventory.” Not to be included: things fixed to the house, such as windows (whether nailed or bolted down) and wainscot; “the Gras or Trees so growing”; “Fishes in the Ponds, and of Doves in the Dove-cote.”¹⁹ The inclusion of “Gras,” “Fishes” and “Doves” seems especially self-evident, but Swinburne intended his work to serve as a legal reference for the entire country, and, thus, like the statutes he explained, was eminently

manor if it was not bequeathed in a will, and freehold land, which descended according to common law, if it, similarly, was not bequeathed,” 142.

¹⁸ Henry Swinburne, *A Treatise of testaments and Last Wills, ... By Henry Swinburne, ... The sixth edition, corrected and very much enlarged* (London, 1743) *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale. Brown University Library. 13 July 2014, 186.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 421-22.

pragmatic in detailing what might be encountered and appraised. This meant attending to the variables inherent in the empirical performance.

Studying the rise of consumerism in early modern England, Natasha Korda offers another convincing reason for why the category of movables would have been so challenging. Citing then, an extensive list of goods included in the category, Korda argues:

Swinburne's effort to fix the proper signification of household stuff is thwarted by the category's material and linguistic superfluity: by the increasing diversity and sumptuousness of goods that were coming to shape what constituted a 'proper' household, and by the term's unstable and multiple referents (one testator's 'utensil' is another's 'ornament').²⁰

In other words, the category was not merely difficult to determine because it was subject to the vagaries of performance, but also, because of a material influx of goods into the domestic sphere at the time. As practices of consumption increasingly shaped the interior of the early modern home, the quantity and variety of goods outpaced the boundaries set by the legal definition. In conjunction with this material proliferation came a "linguistic superfluity," that is, a problem of language arising with "the term's unstable and multiple referents." Korda thus highlights the ways in which the material conditions in the early modern domestic space, and linguistic production around a legal term, allowed for a performance of the probate inventory which, while claiming fidelity to the material value of an estate, could, in fact, be highly subjective.

²⁰ Natasha Korda, *Shakespeares Domestic Economies: Gender and Property in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 3-4.

When Mosca sits at his desk with “cap, a count-book, pen and ink, / Papers afore thee” (5.2.80-3), in Volpone’s gown, Jonson brings these subjective, performative qualities of the inventory into relief. A probate inventory functioned as both an epistemological and social tool for the management of domestic space. Mosca’s performance highlights the radical instabilities that could riddle relations between words, things and desires, even as those relations constitute proprietary claims, shaping attachments and experiences in that domestic space. The instabilities are, in fact, scripted in Volpone’s instructions: “sit as thou wert taking / An inventory of parcels” (5.2.80-4). The difficulty this pronouncement causes for interpretation has striking implications: does Mosca actually “take an inventory,” identifying physical household goods and writing them onto the page? Or is his enumeration a spectacular *poesis*, a *copia* of *res* and *verba* entirely detached from material reference? To what extent can we ever know that these “Turkey carpets, nine” (5.3.1), for instance, exist materially in the domestic space that the stage represented?

The epistemological uncertainty generated in Mosca’s performance is different in degree, but not in kind, from the uncertainties revolving around the production of any probate inventory. In other words, we should not reduce these questions of reference and materiality to the presence or absence of certain props onstage. Rather than framing issues with respect to performance history, these questions should prompt us to consider the ways in which the archive of history *is always* performative. Lena Cowen Orlin, I believe, invites such a perspective when she critiques early modern historians for too

frequently treating probate inventories as “transparent texts.”²¹ Orlin contends their form contributes to the illusion of their “unimpeachable objectivity”:

First, there is the inventory itself: a list of chattels divided neatly into categories; the categories blandly generic or locational; the items appraised in tidy columns of pounds, shillings, and pence. The whole is uncontaminated by narrative, allows for little description, and presents numbers as its innocuous vocabulary.”²²

Orlin finds particular cause for concern in historical projects that rely upon inventories to reconstruct specific material conditions of early modern homes, whether in their architectural layouts or the goods which one would find in them. Such projects participate in a set of assumptions about how the form of the inventory, with its “chattels divided neatly into categories” and “innocuous vocabulary,” registers relations of words, things and desires, specifically, the uncomplicated mimesis of things and words. In contrast to such approaches, Orlin advocates a perspective which treats the inventory as a social production, which could often fail to list a room, such as a hall or gallery, if it did not contain any goods, or neglect even to count a particular item if it was not considered of value.

Rather than treating such documents as “objective” impressions of material conditions, Orlin reads them through the function of their use-value, “for the transmission of capital.” In doing so, she allows for the possibility of “collusive fictions” as parts of the process of production:

²¹ Lena Cowen Orlin, “Fictions of the Early Modern Probate Inventory,” in Henry S. Turner, ed., *The Culture of Capital* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002), 51-84, 52.

²² *Ibid.*, 52-53.

Early moderns relied upon their network of interrelated probate documents to do significant social and economic work in their own time. If the ‘impartial men’ of the probate inventories purveyed fictions—listing, for example, goods at pawn—these were usually collusive fictions, strategically if not materially valid for accomplishing larger goals that were generally accepted for the representation, appraisal, and transmission of capital.²³

Of course, such “collusive fictions” need not be considered malicious distortions of legal statutes, but instead may simply be taken as constitutive of the performative nature inherent in the juridical structure of the documents themselves. In statute *21 Henry VIII c. 5 (1530)*, entitled “An Act Concerning Fines and Sums of Money to be taken by the Ministers of Bishops and other Ordinaries of Holy Church for the Probate of Testaments,” the Tudor court codified the process by which a probate inventory was to be taken, requiring one for any individual whose estate was worth more than £5. The inventory, the statute specifies, is to be conducted by “such person or persons two at the least to whome the said persons soo dyeng was indetted or made any legacye, and upon their refusell or absence twoo other honest persons beyng next of kynne to the person soo dyeng, and in their defaute or absence two other honest persons.”²⁴ In designating the members of the probate to consist of, firstly, two people to whom the deceased owed debts, and, next, “twoo other honest persons beynd next of kynne,” and, lastly, quite simply, “two other honest persons,” the statute describes the conditions for the production of “a trewe and perfyte Inventory” in terms of a performative epistemology similar to that

²³ Ibid., 74.

²⁴ *21 Henry VIII c. 5 (1530)*

of a sixteenth century experiment, in which veracity is authenticated, and error avoided, by diligent observation, a scrupulous, self-correcting audience, and paper and pen. The production requires, significantly, two persons working together in impartiality, perhaps generating “collusive fictions” but ultimately absent of desires that would undermine the collective project. Of course, in a bit of legal paradox, we might observe that impartiality was applied to those very persons who were most invested in the appraisal of the estate, those “to whom the said persons so dyeng was indetted or many any legacy.”

Of course, Volpone’s decision to feign death and sign his will to Mosca initiates not the collusion, but the rupture, of their own cooperative project; and yet, Mosca’s performance of the inventory still relies on their collusion, their working together to produce an effect on the suitors. After scripting the scene, Volpone steps away as observer: “I’ll get up / Behind the curtain, on a stool, and hearken; / Sometime peep over, see how they do look” (5.2.83-85). Mosca, in contrast, sits in full attire and begins his performance. Of the various executors of an estate, Swinburne differentiates between those which “are to receive some Benefit,” and those who “do reap no Commodity by the Testament”; the latter, he calls “nude Executors.”²⁵ In addition to his performance of the probate inventory, Mosca may be assumed by the suitors as a natural choice to serve as the “nude Executor” of Volpone’s estate; his new clothes should tell them otherwise, of course, and the appearance of the will with his name on it finally does. Although he has lent those clothes and signed over his will, Volpone sees Mosca as the suitors do for the duration of his performance. In other words, his servant remains “nude” in his eyes, an extension or prosthesis of his self and his estate, the clothes merely part of the

²⁵ Swinburne, *A Treatise of testaments and Last Wills*, 382.

performance hiding the reality. But the performance becomes the reality; the parasite displaces the host. In the next section, I explore the role of the parasite in the home, and consider the threat he poses to both Volpone's domestic system and Jonson's poetics.

II. Parasite *Inventio*

If the performativity that comprises the social use-value of the probate inventory complicates the epistemological claims we can ascribe to the relations of words, things, and desires that it produces, the rhetorical dimension of the inventory adds a further layer of complexity. In a chapter entitled "Rhetorics of Property: Exploration, Inventory, Blazon" from her seminal work *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property*, Patricia Parker highlights the etymological relation between "inventory" and "invention."²⁶ This relation allows Parker to demonstrate that, far from "innocuous" or "objective" description, the inventory can function rhetorically, much in the same way as the Petrarchan blazon, to expose and conquer the silent female subject. In a reading of *Cymbeline*, Parker demonstrates how Iachimo's inventory of Imogen's bedchamber works rhetorically to refer his listener to "the particulars of a property and to the details of a narrative account."²⁷ In other words, the inventory invokes mimetic fidelity to material realities (in Imogen's bedchamber, for instance) at the same time that produces a manipulative, fictitious account of adultery. Parker describes this relationship as "the crossing the text suggests between 'invention' and 'inventory,' between the finding of a copious fertile matter and the itemizing of it."²⁸ Early moderns like Jonson, educated

²⁶ Patricia Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp 126-54.

²⁷ Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies*, 135.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 132-3.

since early childhood in humanist rhetorical practices, would have been quite familiar, in their writing practices, with the relation “between the finding of a copious fertile matter and the itemizing of it.” As emphasized by Erasmus, *inventio* derived from a tireless dedication to the classical corpus, resulting in the collection of a “rich store” of *verba* and *res* in the commonplace book.²⁹ *Inventio* had less to do with strict dialectic adherence to the places—or *loci communes*—in order to find the subject matter for argument, than in developing reading practices which prioritized collecting and itemizing, as well as imitating and memorizing, textual selections. “With vigilant eyes,” Erasmus instructs the reader of *De Copia*, “we should note all figures in them, store up in our memory what we have noted, imitate what we have stored up, and by frequent use make it a habit to have them ready at hand.”³⁰ Parker’s attention to the etymological link between “inventory” and *inventārium* underscores the storehouse from which *res* and *verba* are drawn, as they define the boundaries of a collection, “the inventory,” we perhaps too easily define, in our thoroughly cultivated empirical sensibilities, as exclusively referential to material reality. Moreover, the tension in agency Parker highlights in the concept of invention would have been keenly felt by a writer like Jonson, who advertised his respect for his classical predecessors even as he sought to establish himself as a singular talent in Jacobean society.

Once we take into account the vast storehouse which Jonson and the humanist tradition sought to compile and access, and from which they imitated, we open our investigation of lists, series, and inventories to another terrain of materiality: the *materia*

²⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *On Copia of Words and Ideas*, trans. Donald King, seventh edition (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Marquette University Press, 2012), 19.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 17-8.

of language. Importantly, late northern humanism's understanding of the materiality of language was not simply metaphorical. Erasmus and those who followed him stressed the physical dimensions of the language to be stored in the commonplace; that is, the need to physically write down words and topics into a material commonplace book. In so doing, he appealed to his reader's senses, particularly vision, to the material locale of the "rich store": "Nor will it be sufficient to have prepared an abundant supply and rich store of such words unless you have them not only ready, but *in sight*, so that even without being sought they may come instantly to mind."³¹ Joan Marie Lechner explains how the shift toward the "rich store" in the commonplace (in the material world) reflects a broader shift in rhetorical practices from the classical tradition to the Renaissance: "The classical tradition with its concept of knowledge as situated within the confines of the mental regions is diametrically opposed to the Renaissance concept with its objective view of knowledge as contained in books. This diversity of outlook results from a change in the Renaissance approach to learning which has become more *visile* than *audile*."³² Marjorie Swann expands Lechner's claim on the material dimensions perceived in the "rich store":

Rhetorical *copia* had a long association with notions of material abundance, and sixteenth-century descriptions of the notebook method emphasize the physicality of the reader's collection of sayings, often

³¹ Ibid., 19. Emphasis mine.

³² Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), 174-5. For a more recent discussion on the important place of the commonplace book in Elizabethan conceptions of knowledge, see Ann Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996) and Jeffrey Paxton Hehmeyer, "Heralding the Commonplace: Authorship, Voice, and the Commonplace in Shakespeare's Rape of Lucrece," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 64, 2 (Summer 2013): 139-164.

figuring the gathered textual fragments as a treasury of jewels or a storehouse of bricks.³³

As Terence Cave has observed, *copia* has its own etymological roots in the synthesis of “co-ops,” signaling “domain of material riches, natural plenty” as affiliated with the Roman goddess Ops (“plenty”).³⁴ In many ways, then, the emphasis on the physicality of *res* and *verba* in the period literalized—or materialized, through the prosthesis of the commonplace—a trope at the very root of verbal production.

If the probate inventory consisted of a performance which managed or worked with a flow, or translation, of movables from the physical dimensions of an estate to inscriptions on paper, the rhetorical dimension of the list or series required also a shaping of the raw matter of discourse into its highly structured syntactical form. In other words, both the social performance which produces the probate inventory and the rhetorical performance which structures the list require negotiations with different kinds of *materia*.

As his recurrent use of *silva* metaphors in *The Forest*, *Underwoods* and *Timber*, or *Discoveries* indicates, Jonson was especially invested in the processes by which discursive matter was digested and reappropriated for new contexts. In the preface to *Timber*, for example, he states that the *silva* tradition in which he participates is not only meant to reflect the diversity and multitude contained within the text, as classical rhetoric would have it, but also to demonstrate his *own* digestion of *hyle*, the raw material of language, into an organized multiplicity: the text is “made upon men and matter: as they have flowed out of his daily readings; or had their reflux to his peculiar notion of the

³³ Marjorie Swann, *Curiosities and Texts: The Culture of Collecting in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 153.

³⁴ Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 3.

times” (1-2). As the OED observes, “reflux” in the sixteenth century signaled “a flowing back, ebbing, refluxence, return,” which was especially related to ebbs and flows of “the sea, a river, water, or air,” a sense appropriated for figurative contexts.³⁵ In the mid-seventeenth century, it entered medical terminology, referring to “blood, gastric fluid, urine, etc.” as it would “flow backwards, especially through a valve or sphincter.”³⁶ If we see these material and physiological senses inflected in Jonson’s own description of his reliance upon decorum as a principle of poetic conduct, his emphasis on the flow of *verba* and *res* “out of his daily readings” highlights the balanced material relation he has developed between the classical corpus and its reappropriation in his work. Notably, because the reprocessing of *res* and *verb* “had their reflux to his peculiar notion of the times,” Jonson is suggested his harmonious, natural balance, on the order of tidal waves, with his moment in time.

That sin was one he reserved for John Marston, whose improper digestion of Latinate words Jonson depicts in *The Poetaster* (1601). In the final act of the play, the character Crispinus, representing Marston, comes down with a most remarkable illness: “Oh, I am sick—” to which the Jonsonian Horace requests a basin. What happens next is perhaps one of the earliest stagings on record of what we might refer to as “word vomit”:

CRISPINUS: Oh – *retrograde – reciprocal – incubus*... Oh

glibbery-- lubrical – defunct – oh –

HORACE: Well said: here’s some store.

VIRGIL: What are they?

³⁵ “reflux, n.”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/160973> (accessed May 06, 2015).

³⁶ “reflux, v. 1.b.”. OED Online. March 2015. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/160974?rskey=ujiTQT&result=2&isAdvanced=false> (accessed May 06, 2015).

HORACE: *Glibbery, lubrical and defunct.*

GALLAS: Oh, they came up easy. (5.3.457-69)

The basin fills. Horace and Virgil remark upon the nature of the contents expelled from Crispinus's mouth, the former referring directly to the "store" of *verba* and *res* that Crispinus perhaps compiled during his studies. The sense of Crispinus's words parallels the action onstage: "*glibbery*" and "*lubrical*"—both meaning "slippery"—"came up easy," Gallas remarks. Marston's tendency, according to Jonson, to use bombastic, indecorous words, utterly inappropriate for their occasions, ends in a particularly appropriate finale: "*defunct.*" The staging of Crispinus's verbal expulsion alerts us, again, to Jonson's keen sense of both the humanist processes one had to inhabit to generate *copia* (accessing "some store") and the physicality of *res* and *verba* (the words pour into an actual basin). It also highlights bad digestion, particularly, the failure to differentiate, measure and make use of words for the proper occasion. Crispinus lacks all discretion: his words are brute stuff, his "list" the equivalent of a probate inventory that simply transcribes every *thing* without any sense of its value or proper signification.

In a study on Jonson's relation to the *silva* tradition in classical rhetoric, Alastair Fowler considers Jonson's attention in *The Forest* to his treatment of "multifarious matter," "the crowded variety of the things mentioned," and, notably, he observes "their ordered arrangement, as in the calendrical passages; and their repeated moral contrasts (town and country, contentment and ambition)."³⁷ In Jonson's references to "curléd woods, and painted meades" ("To Sir Robert Wroth"), Fowler discerns a "presentation of nature as artificial [...] common enough in Jacobean poetry; but in Jonson's *silva* it has a

³⁷ Alastair Fowler, "The Silva Tradition in Jonson's *The Forrest*," in *Poetic Traditions of the English Renaissance*, eds., Maynard Mack and George deForest Lord (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1982), 168.

special force. Since the Durrants [*sic*] nature is ordered, there can be no material exactly raw.”³⁸ “No material exactly raw”—this is precisely the result of Jonson’s dynamic exchanges with classical texts in his reading and poetic production, transforming *hyle* into ordered composition. For Fowler, Jonson’s entrance into the *silva* tradition prioritizes order over multiplicity: “We may suppose that Jonson gave full attention to [Julius] Scaliger’s emphasis on the *silva*’s crowded variety, but even more to his disposition rules for component genres. He seems to have shared Quintilian’s suspicion of the *silva*’s informality and casual arrangement.”³⁹ Fowler comments on *The Forest*, “The things and people [...] are far from giving an overpolished raffine impression, yet they certainly seem highly organized.”⁴⁰ In other words, *silva* metaphors provided a rubric of multiplicity and containment in Jonson’s poetic projects: it allowed for “crowded variety” subsumed under “disposition rules for component genres.”

The problem that Mosca and the figure of the parasite poses, for both Volpone and Jonson, is that he, too, has a vast control over the matter of discourse. As Jonson writes in *Timber*, parasites also “invent tales that shall please” (1965) and “fit their discourse to the persons, and occasions” (1970-1). Mosca even appears to value demonstrating his learning as much as Jonson does, asking Volpone after his triumphant performance in court, “Was it not carry’d learnedly?” (5.2.5). In fact, the rhythmic play between Volpone and Mosca often resembles that of an instructor and student. Volpone emphasizes the successes in that latter’s oratorical, and performative, labors: “Oh, but thy working, and thy placing it!” (1.4.136), Volpone tells Mosca, explicitly linking his effort

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid., 170.

⁴⁰ Fowler, “The Silva Tradition in Jonson’s *The Forrest*,” 174.

with rhetorical achievement. “Placing” here signals Mosca’s achievement in at least four of the five parts of oration: invention (*inventio*), arrangement (*dispositio*), expression (*elocutio*), and deliver or action (*pronuntiatio sive actio*). The performance onstage allows Volpone—as well as the audience—to collapse the distinctions between these parts, and recognize in Mosca a sort of all-encompassing, ur-power of arrangement: from the channeling of places for discourse in invention, to the arrangement of words, their expression, and, lastly, their delivery to the suitors. Mosca deflects his master’s praise, but does so by signalling the capaciousness of his performative powers, the ways in which “instructions” become words, which become physical presences onstage as “oil”: “Alas, sir, I but do as I am taught: / Follow your grave instructions, give ’em words, / Pour oil into their ears, and send them hence” (1.4.139-141). The oil of *res* and *verba* which Mosca pours from his mouth to the suitors lies in stark contrast to Crispinus’s verbal discharge. For Volpone, Mosca’s skill lies in his uncanny ability to arrange words as the occasion demands, in order to tease out the fantasies of the gulls.

For Erasmus, *copia* generated through the reading and selection of classical textual model, could produce infinite variations in speech and discourse. As Ann Moss observes, “a harvest of *res* becomes a language capable of a limitless range of permutations and combinations. [...] In the sample compositions Erasmus conjures from his ideal commonplace-book we enter a purely linguistic world of infinite and shifting variety.”⁴¹ Notably, Erasmus promises that a diligent study of commonplaces leads to such “infinite shifting and variety” as manifest in automatic access to a “never ending series”: “Whoever trains himself for eloquence ought to examine individual places and go

⁴¹ Moss, *Printed Commonplace Books and the Structure of Renaissance Thought*, 112.

over them in detail to see what he can elicit from them. Practice will result in their suggesting themselves automatically in a never ending series [*deincepts sponte occurrant*].”⁴² The ideal of disciplined study and examination of these places yields what Will West describes as the “universal encyclopedia.”⁴³

Ultimately, though, the ideal of the “never ending series,” the automatic access to a “universal store,” is co-opted by the presence of the parasite or, more precisely, by the performances of the parasite. For Arthur Marotti, “At the very center of Jonson's poetic world is the idea of imposture,”⁴⁴ but, in fact, imposture functions less as an idea and more as the physical manifestation of an ultimately duplicitous performance. Maus reads the theatricality in Jonson’s parasite as a sign of his indebtedness to Roman Stoicism, particularly an ambivalence toward theatricality, which is itself conditional on Stoic ambivalence toward materiality:

In *Sejanus* and *Volpone*, as he begins to cope with the collision between his original moral values and his theatrical values, Jonson displays a characteristically Roman ambivalence toward the adaptable, inventive character; his most memorable figures are time-servers, flatters, and parasites who, unhindered by any sense of personal integrity, exploit

⁴² Erasmus, *Of Words and Ideas*, 67.

⁴³ William N. West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). West says the following of Jonson’s “encyclopedism”: “What characterizes Jonson in all his works, and what has been variously identified as mechanistic aesthetics, a manifestation of anal eroticism, empirical materialism, and above all antitheatricalism, can instead be explained as encyclopedism, a desire to find a means to present his own ‘universal store in himself, to the knowledge of all nature’ without sliding into the error Jonson warns against in *Timber* of mechanically ‘putting all letters in single words’ and ‘all places in particular discourses,’” 145.

⁴⁴ Arthur Marotti, “All About Jonson's Poetry,” *ELH* 39, 2 (June 1972): 208-237, 228.

circumstances for all they are worth. They incarnate both the dangers and the attractions of the theater for Jonson at this point in his career.⁴⁵

The parasite is Jonson's foil, an equally skillful rhetorical performer, one who can obey the codes of decorum but whose superficial, external adherence to values is in fact only a sign of utter deprivation and absence of all values. It is ultimately Mosca—not Volpone—who manages flows of desires and materialities, who holds a pen, and defines the order of the household.

One cannot overemphasize what a radical displacement of value we are treated to with Mosca's "taking an inventory" at center stage. In the performance, Mosca's virtuoso rhetorical capacities are aligned with those provisional, performative qualities inherent in the probate inventory (with its "collusive fictions"). The result is an epistemological performance in which relationships between words, things, and desires become utterly opaque to all observers. And yet, despite this complete disorientation, the performance is constitutive of attachments between persons and things in that world; or, to put it more strongly, within the house, our sense of subjects and objects, as discrete units, is displaced by a parasitic ontology: the parasite, the one who stands "next to" or "beside," who dominates the relations of that which comes in and out of the house, and defines who is who and what is what. It is no wonder that Mosca describes the parasite both in terms of transcendence and immanence: "O! Your parasite / Is a most precious thing, dropt from aboue, / Not bred 'mongst the clods, and clot-poles here on earth" (3.1.7-9) and "All the wise world is little else, in nature, / But Parasites, or Sub-parasites" (3.1.12-13). It is the central irony of Jonson's comedy: that Mosca's performance is so

⁴⁵ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Ben Jonson and the Roman Frame of Mind* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 67-8.

important and powerful, so instrumental in defining the relations of the household, and yet, as the parasite, his superficial adherence to values that enable him to enact his performance is a sign of his complete absence of value. This places the audience in the odd position of identifying with the suitors, laughing while Mosca's performance runs circles around them, allowing them to firmly believe they understand the state of things, while remaining utterly blind to what lies behind the curtain. As an audience, we watch Mosca, understand fully his capabilities to arrange the domestic sphere of Volpone's estate, but have absolutely no sense of what lies beneath, what values he stands for—because those are completely opaque to us. One can almost not blame Jonson for locking up such a character in the final act.

III. “Center Attractives”: *Oeconomia* and the Surface of Things

In the Induction of his late comedy *The Magnetic Lady*, Jonson, through the character of a boy, explains the dramatic principle of the “center attractive” as follows:

A Lady, a brave bountiful House-
keeper, and a vertuous Widow: who having a young Neice,
ripe for a Man and marriageable, hee makes that his Center
attractive, to draw thither a diversity of Guests, all Persons
of different humours to make up his Perimeter. (106-110)

The “center attractive,” as he calls it, imbricates erotic, physical and social coordinates, “draw[ing] thither” “Guests” from the “Perimeter” in a model echoed throughout

Jonson's career.⁴⁶ From the ideals of "To Penshurst" and "To Sir Robert Drury" to *Volpone* and *The Alchemist*, relationships of movement vis-à-vis a "centre attractive" dominate Jonson's poetic concerns. As *Volpone* tells us in the play's opening:

I have no wife, no parent, child, ally,
To give my substance to; but whom I make,
Must be my heir; and this makes me observe me,
This draws new clients, daily, to my house. (1.1.73-76)

It is perhaps unsurprising that the "center attractive" in Jonson's dramatic work becomes conflated with the house or home. Jonson, as Thomas M. Greene so memorably puts it, concerns us with a poetics of the center and the circle, in which each serve as "symbols, not only of harmony and completeness but of stability, repose, fixation, duration, and the incompleted [*sic*] circle, uncentered and misshapen, comes to symbolize a flux or a mobility, grotesquely or dazzlingly fluid."⁴⁷ Furthermore, Greene contends that "perhaps the closest dramatic equivalent to the gathered self, living 'at home,' is the literal house, putative center of bourgeois dramatic existence."⁴⁸

Movements to and from the house (*oikos*, *domos*)—traffic in words, things, desires, persons—involve rules and principles of management, which govern the distributions of those flows: in other words, they concern us with *nomos*, or "the law." As Korda notes, "the term *oikos* [...] derives from the verb *oikeo*, meaning 'to inhabit, occupy,' but also 'to manage, direct, govern'; while *nomos* "carries the further meanings

⁴⁶ The "center attractive" complements Greene's reading perfectly. It is surprising, therefore, that Greene does not cite the concept in his account. In referencing it, I am simply offering further support for Greene's argument.

⁴⁷ Thomas M. Greene, "Ben Jonson and the Centered Self," *SEL* 10, 2 (Spring, 1970): 325-348, 326.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 334.

of ‘to deal out, distribute, dispense,’ and ‘to have as one's portion... to hold, possess.’”⁴⁹ We derive the word “economy” from this basic relation between the house and principles of distribution (“*oikos*” + “*nomos*” = *oeconomia*, “management of the household”).⁵⁰ In Jonson’s comedies, of course, Greene and others have found very little in the way of “management,” or, at the very least, the *nomos* in this “putative center of bourgeois dramatic existence” has spiraled out of control: “the weakness of the house as refuge or protective fortress seems to mirror the weakness of a centerless society.”⁵¹ The outside, “centerless society” determines the conditions of failed *oeconomia* within the house.

Jonson’s middle comedies represent the most condensed version of this thesis, staging “household management” utterly corrupted by the worlds outside the domicile’s doors. *Volpone* foregrounds exchanges that constitute a relation with that outside world, in the series of gift-giving efforts from its suitors/gulls; *Epicoene* offers the inverse of such openness, a parody of Stoic withdrawal, in Morose’s failed attempt to close himself entirely off from a world of noise; and *The Alchemist* presents a substitute *oeconomia* in the face of a displaced, absentee landlord. For Ian Donaldson, “[such houses] are by turns comforting, protective, sinister, attractive. They are not merely ‘settings’: they are also in a deeply symbolic sense what the plays are about.”⁵²

Volpone opens with the Magnifico’s famous salute to his riches: “Good morning to the day; and next, my gold / Open the shrine, that I may see my saint. / Hail the

⁴⁹ Korda proceeds to describe how the role of the housewife is determined by these etymological derivations: “The housewife's oeconomy, her duty as keeper, thus positioned her in an active, managerial role that required her not only to keep or hold goods, but to deal out, distribute and dispense them, and thereby to ‘govern’ the household economy,” 27.

⁵⁰ “economy, n.” OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/59393?redirectedFrom=economy> (accessed March 12, 2014).

⁵¹ Greene, “Ben Jonson and the Centered Self,” 334.

⁵² Ian Donaldson, *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1997), 72.

world's soul, and mine" (1.1.1-3). As Volpone speaks, stage directions indicate that Mosca "uncovers the treasure" (1.1.2). Thus, the audience's first exposure to the domestic sphere that will dominate the narrative is through an unveiling of this vast heap of riches. Jonson, then, highlights in this very opening what Natasha Korda has elsewhere described as "the ideological redefinition of the home as a sphere of consumption rather than production [in the early modern period]."⁵³ In this ideological shift, the value of "household stuff" changes:

For the role of objects within a household economy based on domestic production is to serve as use-values within and for the home. With the transition to a market economy, however, the value and significance of household objects was determined outside the home, by the market and by the culture at large.⁵⁴

Volpone's salute to his riches invites us to see objects and goods as "household objects" whose value is determined predominantly "outside the home, by the market and by the culture at large." Importantly, the "soul" of the market resides not only within the Magnifico and "the world," but, also, the *oikos*.

In other words, the opening highlights that *this* house, this *oeconomia*, is not a self-sustaining, self-enclosed system of production, where the value of household goods is determined by their use, but rather that it is an *oeconomia* whose fundamental value is determined in relation to what lies outside: the market. What follows in Act 1—the orderly, serial visitation of the three suitors—is simply an illustration of this economy at work, as Volpone and Mosca foster relations with that outside to bring in suitors and their

⁵³ Korda, *Domestic Economies*, 33.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

gifts. Their project, as that of all bootleggers, is to form their own market, to divert wealth and goods from legitimate venues—such as St. Mark’s—to what in our contemporary mob and heist films is either pejoratively, or affectionately, deemed “the underground” or “black market.” In this alternative, or parasitic, market to which Volpone’s home is the focal point, household management is dominated by Mosca’s arrangement of internal affairs, as I have detailed, so that he can facilitate the incoming flow of goods and customers from the outside world.

To illustrate this point, let me briefly consider the counterexample of Corvino’s home. After Scoto’s performance outside, we find the husband upbraiding his wife: “Death of mine honour, with the city’s fool? / A juggling, tooth-drawing, prating mountebank? / And at a public window? (2.5.1-3). The juxtaposition of Corvino’s home to the piazza—St. Mark’s?—where Scoto peddles his merchandise, as well as the emphasis on the “public window,” highlight the fluidity between the domestic sphere and the public market. Indeed, the very movement of Scoto’s powder to Corvino’s home emphasizes the porousness of boundaries between home and market. The powder, Scoto maintains, has its origins as a gift from Apollo to Venus, then, “from her derived to Helen, and at the sack of Troy unfortunately lost” (2.2.246-7), until its discovery “out of some ruins of Asia” (2.2.248), and subsequent entrance “to the courts of France [...] wherewith the ladies there now colour their hair” (2.2.249-51). This account of the powder’s metempsychosis, itself a list, ends with Corvino’s entrance and his efforts to stop its movement from market to home: “No house but mine to make your scene?” (2.3.1). As Scoto is chased away, Corvino focuses on the indeterminate boundary between the mountebank’s stand and his home, attempting to reclaim the real estate he

believes to have lost to Scoto: “No windows on the whole Piazza here / To make your properties but mine? But mine?” (2.3.4-5).

Once in his home, Corvino’s possessiveness turns toward Celia, as he describes the Mountebank in order to define what exactly it was that attracted her:

Or were you enamoured on his copper rings,
His saffron jewel with the toad-stone in ’t,
Or his embroidered suit with the cope-stitch,
Made of a hearse cloth? Or his old-tilt feather?
Or his starched beard? (2.5.9-15)

In this list of Scoto’s attire, Barton rightly observes, “Scoto becomes the sum of his parts, an aggregate of details, each one of which has been observed with such preternatural clarity that it takes on an independent life of its own, pressing against the sense of this man as a unified entity.”⁵⁵ Thus, Corvino’s list allows us to perceive the things which make the man, the actants which lead us to the “subject” that is Scoto. The list that describes Scoto serves as the marker of a threshold through which flows of desires, words and things (in and out of the house), are managed as a series of inputs to yield outputs within the categorical boundaries of subjects and objects; if a threshold, it is a decidedly performative one. In this case, the patriarch of the household asserts his ownership by fixing his wife’s desires to discrete objects: “copper rings,” “saffron jewel,” “embroidered suit,” “old-tilt feather,” and “starched beard.” In the list, Scoto is reduced to “an aggregate of details,” as Barton observes, but each detail, “observed with such preternatural clarity,” is intended to highlight the female desire Corvino is now

⁵⁵ Barton, *Ben Jonson, Dramatist*, 109.

attempting to control. Thus, both the Mountebank and female desire are domesticated in this performance: Scoto reduced to a collection of things and Celia's (potential) desire for attachment to those things named and circumscribed. It is no surprise that Corvino follows this list with physical constraints, saying, "First, I will have this bawdy light dammed up" (2.4.51), and, then, "I'll chalk a line; o'er which, if thou but chance / To set thy desp'rate foot, more hell, more horror" (2.4.53-4).⁵⁶ These physical constraints intensify with Corvino's resolutions to keep her "backwards" and implement a chastity belt. He justifies such actions by her "too open" behavior: "Being too open, makes me use you thus" (2.5.63).

Corvino's example demonstrates one way in which the flow of goods, persons and desires through the *oikos* is managed, or controlled, in the list. Such a management, we can see, is not merely rhetorical (though the details of Scoto are significant), but invariably concerns the physical dimensions of the stage (Corvino's subsequent effort to "chalk a line") as well as social dimensions (the patriarch seeking to control his wife's desires). It is, in other words, a performance that produces a certain kind of domestic reality, one in which libidinal flows are regulated, domestic roles assigned, and the physical space managed. Of course, Corvino's hyperbolic efforts toward closure are ironically short-lived, trumped by his desire to become Volpone's heir. The domestic reality abruptly shifts, as Corvino agrees to lend Celia to Volpone. In fact, what Corvino fails to realize, is that his home is entering into another economy, the market Volpone and Mosca work so tirelessly to cultivate and sustain.

⁵⁶ The trope of a chalk line, or physical divide, in the domestic space is one which occupies domestic comedies to this day, perhaps most memorably in an early episode of *I Love Lucy*, "Men are Messy," where a frustrated Lucy divides her portion of the space with Dezi due to his sloppy habits. I will have more to say on Volpone's place in this tradition, but for now, let me simply observe that it is the patriarch, not the housewife, who divides the space, toward the end of controlling female desire.

The ease with which Mosca convinces Corvino to reconstitute his household is stunning, especially if we assume Corvino behaves according to deeply held beliefs of patriarchal ownership. The shift serves primarily, though, to emphasize the effect of the different model of *oeconomia* by which Volpone's home operates in Venice. In contrast to the closed-off domestic space Corvino hopes to achieve, Volpone's home relies precisely on a fluid relation between the *oikos* and the world outside its doors—Mosca's venturing outside, in fact, is *part* of his management of the household, redirecting flows of things, persons and desires toward Volpone's bedside. As Corvino readily agrees to participate in this flow, his sense of patriarchal ownership, and Celia's identity as faithful wife, are liquidated, absorbed, or reappropriated, for Volpone and Mosca's ends. If Corvino's list of Scoto's attributes arranges the mountebank for the production of a certain domestic reality, what we encounter in Volpone's home is, in fact, a more radical constitution of subjects, objects, goods and desires.

The rapid, yet highly structured, succession of gift-giving in the opening act demonstrates the key elements of *oeconomia* at work in Volpone's house, as well as Mosca's significant role in household management. Once we have been introduced to Volpone and his gold, as well as Mosca, Nano and Castrone, Jonson begins the series of suitors' visitations to Volpone's bedside. If the window represented the point of access to the outside in Corvino's home, in Volpone's house, it is the door, and more specifically, the knock, through which the outside world is most often registered. When we hear the first knock, Mosca responds, "'Tis Signor Voltore, the advocate; I know him by his knock" (1.2.82-3), demonstrating his rather uncanny ability to determine the suitor by the sound at the door. Upon hearing the second suitor knock, he instructs Volpone,

saying, “Keep you still, sir. / Here is Corbaccio” (1.3.79-80). With the final suitor, when Volpone asks, “Who’s that there, now? A third?” (1.4.159), Mosca replies “Close, to your couch again; I hear his voice. / It is Corvino, our spruce merchant (1.4.160-161). As this series progresses, Mosca’s skillful management outdoes Volpone, who often does not know exactly who is knocking, and so, in the last visitation, must take instructions from his servant on how he should perform (“Close, to your couch again”). This tension in power between the two will finally reach its breaking point when Volpone hands over his attire to Mosca.

Of the “arrangement of action [in] the sharply restricted spaces and proliferating activity” in Jonson’s middle comedies, Will West argues that a spatial logic is paramount: “Rather than plot in the sense of action, Jonson’s work here is plotting in the sense of ballistics, the art of the air traffic controller rather than the more conventionally cited one of the weaver.”⁵⁷ Moreover, West continues, “[characters’] restriction to one location is a conspicuous spatialization of Aristotle’s dictum about a play concerning a single action. Jonson’s characters are spectacular trajectories across the stage.”⁵⁸ Indeed, in Act 1 alone, the movement across the stage is frenetic, with Mosca playing the part of “air traffic controller,” and “plotting in the sense of ballistics” how suitors will enter and exit. It is a plotting that utterly fails in Act 3, when Bonario rescues Celia from Volpone.

The logic of “plotting” in Act 1 is fairly straightforward: Mosca hears a knock, identifies the suitor, receives him and his gift, bringing both to Volpone. In the economy

⁵⁷ William N. West, *Theatres and Encyclopedias in Early Modern Europe*, Cambridge Studies in Renaissance Literature and Culture (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 151.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

Mosca and Volpone cultivate, the relay from the knock to the gift is the ultimate concern, as illustrated in this exchange between the two over Voltore's arrival:

VOLPONE: How now? the news?

MOSCA: A piece of plate, sir.

VOLPONE: Of what bigness?

MOSCA: Huge, massy, and antique, with your name inscribed,

And arms engraven. (1.2.91-93)

Here Mosca illustrates a sense of the fluid ontological values through which he manages for transfer the suitor and his gift, the “massy” silver plate, are managed for transfer: the knock becomes “the news,” information to be relayed, which is nothing other than the thing, “the piece of plate,” which, once described in its physical form, “huge, and massy,” is rendered into a discursive network of proprietary ownership, the engraving indicating Volpone's claim—quite literally, physically—upon it. From “news” to unwieldy object to inscription, Mosca makes the “silver plate” through the process of mediation.

If in the *oeconomia* of Corvino's home, Scoto was nothing but an “aggregate of details,” then here the subject known as Voltore is virtually eliminated as Mosca consolidates the value of exchange into its bare essentials: “news” and plate, “huge, massy, and antique” “with your name inscribed.” This logic of exchange—and mediation vis-à-vis the parasite—is also depicted onstage: Mosca leads Voltore to Volpone, saying, “Sir, Signor Voltore is come this morning [...] And hath brought / A piece of antique plate, bought of St. Mark” (1.3.8-11). When Voltore approaches, the dialogue indicates a shift of emphasis toward the plate. It is a shift to which he, Mosca and Volpone, consent:

VOLPONE: Mosca.

MOSCA: My patron?

VOLPONE: Bring him near. Where is he? I long to feel his
hand.

MOSCA: [*Prompting Voltore*] The plate is here, sir. (1.3.14-16)

This exchange lends itself to a performance in which “his hand” blends together with “the plate,” with the Magnifico reaching out blindly, and the servant guiding Voltore with gift-in-hand, or, perhaps better, “hand-as-gift.” Importantly, the suitors, themselves, recognize the value of the physical presence of the gift over their bodily presence; best to give the plate rather than to appear empty-handed.

Corvino is especially sensitive to this logic of transfer. When Volpone calls to him, “Signor Corvino!” and Mosca mediates, “He calls you. Step and give it him” (1.15.11-12), Corvino responds,

CORVINO: How do you, sir?

[*To Mosca*] Tell him it doubles the twelfth carat.

MOSCA: Sir,

He cannot understand, his hearing’s gone;

And yet it comforts him to see you—

CORVINO: Say I have a diamond for him, too. (1.5.13-17)

Not one for small talk, Corvino eschews any pretensions that this meeting is anything other than an exchange of goods, with particular values. While Mosca maintains, if half-heartedly, the illusion of a personal visit to the sickbed (“yet it comforts him to see you”), Corvino knows otherwise, and instructs the servant in the pearl’s worth, “Tell him it doubles the twelfth carat,” before adding, “I have a diamond for him, too.” The exchange

ends with the “deaf” and “blind” Volpone wildly seizing the diamond Corvino holds out for him.

In its brute, physical simplicity, this completed transfer illustrates Volpone’s endgame: to dispossess the wealthy of their possessions. The labor required for this end is considerable, and Mosca’s management over the domestic sphere is essential for channeling the knock at the door to the gift in Volpone’s hands. The suitors are less persons than indistinct participants in a flow of actants – bodies, things, words – across the threshold Mosca manages. If, as West contends, “Jonson’s characters are spectacular trajectories across the stage,”⁵⁹ Mosca serves as the agent, rather through trajectories are organized and redistributed through the house, as coins, hands, plates, words, etc. His praise of Voltore is paradigmatic of such labor. When Voltore asks why Volpone selected him as the heir, Mosca replies, “I oft have heard him say how he admired / Men of your large profession” (1.3.52-53), and, after a great deal of praise for that profession, concludes, “every word / Your worship but lets fall is a *chequin*!” (1.3.65-66). The stage directions indicate precisely at this moment that “*Another knocks*,” and, sure enough, we soon meet Corbaccio, who proclaims, “Here I have bought a bag of bright chequins / Will quite weigh down his plate” (1.4.69-70). The sequence moves breathlessly from the first suitor to the second, with the *chequins* linking each together. As a successful advocate, Mosca says, Voltore is little more than a coin-producing machine, “every word [...] a chequin!” The withering Corbaccio, whose patent refusal to acknowledge the limitations of his own age is one of his most striking features, follows him. Yet here, Corbaccio’s function in the economy is to outweigh Voltore’s plate: like Corvino, he readily obeys the

⁵⁹ Ibid.

rhythms in the flows of capital which Mosca manages. What counts in Volpone's house is not Corbaccio's physical presence, but rather the weight of the bag of chequins he brings, which is nothing other than their value in comparison to the plate.

West's comparison of Jonson's dramaturgy to the "ballistics" of the "air traffic controller" emphasizes the utterly flat, even modernist, spatial logic by which Jonson works. It is as if "plotting in the sense of ballistics" finds its logical, if hyperbolized, fulfillment in the minimalism of Samuel Beckett's *Quadrat I + II*, wordless performances in which four unnamed characters, dressed in colored cloaks, move in prescribed patterns across the stage to steady percussion. Volpone's lists offer a flat rhetorical analogy: numbering, stark identificatory features (like colored cloaks), and organizing movements within the *domus*. One can sense also the deep appeal Jonson's "poetry of the surface" had for another modernist, T.S. Eliot, who argued that Jonson's deliberate attention to "the surfaces of life" allowed his dramatic worlds to function "like systems of non-Euclidean geometry."⁶⁰ Jonson's project, Eliot contended, is not necessarily to "fill in" his outlines as Shakespeare does: "He did not get the third dimension, but he was not trying to get it."⁶¹ This emphasis on surfaces has specific implications in the domestic sphere, where, onstage, characters are stripped of any qualities deemed unnecessary in the *oeconomia* of Volpone's house. Thus, quite easily, Corvino's jealousy can suddenly alter; Corbaccio, another wealthy patriarch, can disinherit his son. In Volpone's house,

⁶⁰ T.S. Eliot, "Ben Jonson," in *The Sacred Wood* (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, 1998), 60, 67. Jonas Barish describes Eliot's influence on critical interest in structures within Jonson's *oeuvre* from half a century ago: "the quest begun by Eliot [after the romantic's collective dismissal of Jonson as the un-Shakespeare], and pursued by younger critics, for structural principles in Jonsonian drama other than the threadbare and nearly unusable ones of 'intrigue' and 'character' (understood in their old-fashioned senses), has begun to bear fruit in studies of symbolism, significant allusion, and generic form." Jonas A. Barish, "Introduction," *Ben Jonson: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed., Jonas Barish (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1963), 10-11.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 69.

their basic consumptive drives are laid bare.⁶² Through Mosca's management, we encounter these desires and their material registers, from the knock at the door to the plate in Volpone's hands. In between, there are talking coin machines, old men turned to chequins, and hands turned into plate.

In its investment in *oeconomia* of the domestic space, and the constellations of words, things, and bodies which are arranged through it, Volpone brings a darkly comic interpretation to Donne's assertion that love "makes a little room an everywhere" (11).⁶³ If Donne claims here that desire can transcend the small spaces in which loving bodies are contained, Jonson offers a countering vision, in which desire is contained, managed, and manipulated all in a "little room." Of course, in opening this room to the stage, *Volpone* highlights the performative aspect of *oeconomia*, the way in which the physical space of "moveables" and bodies intersects with rhetorical (and inscriptive) performances, to generate the conditions we define under the rubric of "domestic." In Titus, we witnessed a tragic vision of the interdependence of rhetorical and physical *materia* and human desires, where the power to perform one's version of experience within the dimensions of the stage manifested in grotesque violence. In *Volpone*, Jonson uses Mosca's performance of the probate inventory to realize a comic vision of the interdependence of rhetorical and physical *materia* and human desires, where power lies not in exercising violence but, rather, enabling multiple (and contradictory) versions of

⁶² Donaldson says the following on Jonson's use of space: "Part of Jonson's power as a dramatist lies in his understanding of the pressures and excitements associated with confined spaces. No dramatist before him (and none after, until recent times) so fully explores the psychology of urban indoor living, so instinctively perceives the correspondence between the fixed space of a house and the fixed space of the stage on which the actors must work," 71.

⁶³ "The Good Morrow," in *The Complete Poems of John Donne*, ed. Robin Robbins, Longman Annotated English Poets Series (Edinburgh Gate, Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2008).

experience out of a singular event within the dimensions of the stage. In other words, to allow each suitor to make “his little room an everywhere.” Unlike Donne’s lovers, Jonson’s suitors do not do any traveling (for all of Sir Politic Would-Be’s talk of worldliness, he does not leave Venice). Rather, Jonson has them scurry back-and-forth across the stage, with each movement, driving deeper the wedge of irony between what their desires and hopes, and the realities of their experiences. It is this irony that is lingers amidst *Volpone*’s frenetic pace, which leaves the abiding impression that any experience is inherently opaque, that any arrangement of rhetorical and physical *materia* is always a con, a grift, set to elicit desire even as it prevents us from seeing the full conditions from which that desire arises.

CHAPTER 4

Britomart in Flames: Chastity, Eroticism, and Elemental Desire in *The Faerie Queene*

As early modern material culture studies go, one would perhaps be hard-pressed to find a less “material” text than Edmund Spenser’s 1590 *The Faerie Queene*. Spenser’s allegory of knights and maidens galloping through Faeryland, addressed to an idealized Queen Elizabeth (“Mirrour of grace and Maiestie diuine” [Proem I.4.2]), that seems very much a world apart from the tactile, even mundane, physical objects which populate studies of early modern material culture. Samuel Taylor Coleridge was struck precisely by “the marvelous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time in the *Faery Queene*.” “It is,” he continued, “in the domains neither of history or geography; it is ignorant of all artificial boundary, all material obstacles; it is truly in land of Faery, that is, of mental space.”¹ Yet, as Thomas Roche observes, Coleridge qualifies, or even flatly contradicts, this assertion, with the following statement: “In Spenser we see the brightest and purest form of that nationality which was so common a characteristic of our elder poets.”² For Roche, Coleridge’s conflicting observations are simply part of the allegory’s readerly experience: “In reading Spenser one feels no sudden jarring shift from the land of ‘mental space’ back to the real world of history and geography, from the green world of Faeryland to the red and white world of Tudor history. On the contrary one senses what C.S. Lewis has called ‘the seamless continuity of the whole.’”³ But, if *The Faerie Queene* refuses—or eludes—this “jarring shift” from an imaginative ‘mental space’ to Tudor history, as Roche says, where does that leave the status of things? As I

¹ Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Literary Remains of Samuel Taylor Coleridge Vol. I*, ed. by Henry Nelson Coleridge (London: William Pickering, 1836), 94-96.

² Thomas P. Roche, Jr., *The Kindly Flame: A Study of the Third and Fourth Books of Spenser’s Faerie Queen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1964), 33.

³ Ibid.

have considered them throughout, “things” can be viewed as “gatherings” or rhetorical, social, and physical practices.⁴ If Coleridge is correct on Faeryland’s “marvelous independence and true imaginative absence of all particular space or time,” then, it would seem, it fails to meet Latour’s definition, for Latour requires participants, or actors, from/in/of the physical world, within space and time, to collectively make up the “gathering” we identify as a thing. As an imaginative, ideal terrain, *The Faerie Queene* does not admit those physical practices, in space and time, which we observed were essential components to the “gathering” of the woods, for instance, in *Titus Andronicus*, or, the probate inventory, in *Volpone*.

Stephen Greenblatt’s memorable conception of Renaissance self-fashioning, a term he borrowed from Spenser’s prefatory letter to Sir Walter Raleigh in the 1590 edition of *The Faerie Queene*, has offered one of the most compelling recent models for understanding the disparity (and congruence) between the imaginative and the real in Spenser’s text. By translating Coleridge’s “mental space” into a densely layered semiotic realm, a “poetics of culture,” consisting of a system of signs, or intersecting discourses, Greenblatt and the critical heritage he influenced could explain Roche’s observation of the absence of “a sudden jarring shift from the land of ‘mental space’ back to the real world of history and geography,” as follows: Faeryland and Tudor England are threaded through with the same symbolic structures, the imaginary and cultural constituting the generative products of various, competing discourses in which self-fashioning, the “encounter between an authority and an alien,” is repeatedly staged.⁵ This staging had an

⁴ See Bruno Latour’s discussion of Heidegger’s *dasein* in “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225-248.

⁵ Stephen Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 4-5, 9.

immense appeal for scholars conceptualizing the early modern self: in the struggle between absolute Authority and alien Other, Greenblatt discerned the *différance* in our own identities, the way in which “any achieved identity always contains within itself the signs of its own subversion or loss.”⁶ Physical practices—materially embedded encounters, interactions, and relations in space and time—are within this model absorbed into a cultural poetics, the “encounter between an authority and an alien” always-already occurring in a semiotic domain where “signs” form the ultimate ontological groundwork. Such a model, for example, allows Greenblatt to read Guyon’s assault of the Bower of Bliss as *both* the symptom of an enthusiastic act of Freudian psychological repression *and* the sign of physical acts of repression exercised in the Irish colonialist project. In Greenblatt’s treatment, Spenser’s allegory offers a site for studies of semiotic capaciousness—but not things.

In the aftermath of Greenblatt’s work, and especially with the turn to things, the search for a “material *Faerie Queene*” would seem to consist of an uncovering, or recovering, of the physical practices to which Spenser’s poem alludes. Christopher Burlinson’s *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser* offers one such provocative study of the ways in which Spenserian allegory encodes historical materialities and physical spaces in its text. In Burlinson’s view, Spenser’s poetics are inscribed by those “social exchanges and forces” that participated in the “material production of objects and spaces” in Elizabethan England.⁷ Following Walter Benjamin’s *Trauerspiel* study of Baroque German drama, Burlinson contends that “we

⁶ Ibid., 9.

⁷ Christopher Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World in the Writings of Edmund Spenser*, Studies in Renaissance Literature 17 (Cambridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2006), 42.

should look for a rupture within the allegory, which exposes the material content of the allegorical image,”⁸ a content which registers a deeply ideological view of that material production. Burlinson finds *The Faerie Queene*’s investment in materiality especially evident in Spenser’s practice of “syntactic excess”: “Spenser’s is a poetry that emphasizes terms like ‘masse’ and ‘substance,’” Burlinson observes. “It guides its readers towards an allegorized and moral meaning, but it also flaunts its own descriptions of and interest in substances and objects.”⁹ In linking the materiality of allegory with ideology and the cultural forces of production, Burlinson’s analysis is not only deeply indebted to Benjamin but also to the British Marxist tradition of Terry Eagleton.

The framework for such an analysis hinges considerably on Burlinson’s interpretation of what Spenser, himself, means by “matter” in his letter to Raleigh:

The generall end therefore of all the booke is to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline: Which for that I conceived shoulde be most plausible and pleasing, being coloured with an historicall fiction, the which the most part of men delight to read, rather for variety of matter, then for profite of the ensample. (7-10)¹⁰

As A.C. Hamilton observes, “In offering discipline that is pleasing, Spenser follows the Horatian commonplace that the poet seeks to profit (*prodesse*) and delight (*delectare*), mingling the useful (*utile*) with the sweet (*dulce*).”¹¹ In this context, Spenser is justifying his “continued Allegory, or dark conceit” within the well-known grounds of classical

⁸ Ibid., 17. See also Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. John Osborne (New York: Verso, 2009).

⁹ Ibid., 19.

¹⁰ All references to Spenser’s text, unless otherwise specified, are to *The Faerie Queene*, ed. A. C. Hamilton, 2nd ed. (Harlow, England: 2001). When I cite Hamilton’s notes, I provide the page number on which they can be found.

¹¹ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 715.

rhetorical theory. His readers, trained under such paradigms with humanist rhetorical pedagogy, would, thus, expect to “delight to read” the “variety of matter” and, furthermore, “profite of the ensample.”

For Burlinson, however, the rhetorical context in which Spenser presents his “matter” is overshadowed by a burgeoning sense of “matter” *as substance*:

When he says that this method provides ‘variety of matter’, distinct from the ‘ensample’ and apparently a result of the ‘historicall fiction’ that colours the work, Spenser seems to be stressing the partial extraneousness, if not redundancy, of the ‘matter’. The word ‘matter’ does not come to mean substance until 1690, according to the *OED*, *but* what it does at least denote here, as the context makes clear, is *an element of superfluity*.¹²

Although it may at first seem strange for Burlinson to locate matter-as-substance in a passage where Spenser affirms his allegory’s place in the tradition of classical rhetoric, as I have emphasized throughout my project, the dual sense of “matter” in the period—as rhetorical and physical—is precisely where the critical stakes in contemporary studies of things and materiality intensify. Burlinson, invested in a Marxist conception of materiality very much informed by a post-empiricist sensibility of things as “out there,” discerns in Spenser’s “variety of matter” a “partial extraneousness,” “redundancy,” and “superfluity”: qualities that are characteristic of processes in a physical world.¹³ Quoting

¹² Burlinson, *Allegory, Space and the Material World*, 12. The emphasis is mine.

¹³ There is an important distinction to be made between Marxist materialism and post-empiricist positivism. In their introduction to *Staged Properties of the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), Natasha Korda and Jonathan Gil Harris offer a particularly useful clarification of the distinction between “materiality” and “physicality”: “Aristotle thus understood materiality as a synonym not for physical presence, but for dynamic process; matter, in his analysis, is always *worked upon*.” Similarly, “Marx understood the materiality of objects to embrace as well the domain of labor and praxis, and thus to entail social relations of production—relations, Marx argued, that are effaced in the commodity form.” They conclude with an observation on material cultural studies which anticipates Burlinson’s position: “Increasingly, scholarship on early modern material culture is returning to Marx’s more dynamic,

Benjamin, he finds a materiality in Spenserian allegory that is in contrast to the very “matter” of rhetoric to which Spenser refers: “*als Stuckwerk aber starren aus dem allegorischen Gebild die Ding*” [it is as something incomplete and imperfect that objects stare out from the symbolic structure].¹⁴ Although such an approach offers a productive methodology for recovering the thingliness which lies behind *The Faerie Queene*’s richly layered semiotics, it raises questions over what is lost in Burlinson’s critical perspective when “matter” is so readily equated with the physical, and when the rhetorical sense is occluded or effaced.

In our pursuit of materiality—of a “material *Faerie Queene*”—and the various permutations of theoretical investments in objects and things currently circulating in scholarship—Actor Network Theory, Object-Oriented Ontology, Speculative Realism, or animism, for instance—the turn away from the “matter” of rhetoric seems a foregone conclusion. In Spenser’s “variety of matter,” Burlinson recognizes *only* the ephemeral, superfluous, externalized state of being that *we now* associate with “material existence”; he does not consider the primary, rhetorical sense of “matter” for Spenser and his early modern readership. In fact, the rush toward matter often ends up reproducing the very kinds of materialities borne in our post-empiricist theoretical models, whether Marxism or historical phenomenology. This critical tendency, furthermore, fails to consider the fuller implications of what matter might have meant *before* the seventeenth-century institutionalization of empiricism.

labor-oriented theories of materiality,” 17. My point concerning Burlinson’s emphasis on “superfluity,” “redundancy,” and “extraneousness” in Spenser’s “variety of matter” is not that he reductively equates this matter entirely with a post-empiricist sense of “physical presence,” but that the dynamic processes that he considers through Marxist theory do require *some sense* of physical presence to be “*worked upon*,” and, ultimately, he elides the rhetorical sense because of this.

¹⁴ Qtd. in Burlinson, 17.

Ben Jonson's remarks on Spenser's poetics in *Timber, or Discoveries* linger as a reminder the *other* sense of matter in the early modern period: "Spencer [sic] in affecting the Ancients, writ no language. Yet I would have him read for his matter; but as Virgil read Ennius."¹⁵ The "matter" to which Jonson refers is the "*res*"—the *copia argumentorum, copia exemplorum, copia sententiarum*—of rhetorical and dialectical practice.¹⁶ Replete with philosophical, moral, and theological import, it functions as the fountain for substantial speech and writing. In its value to *copia*, we might, in fact, regard it as the foil to that conception of physical "matter" developed in the seventeenth century, the "*res extensa*" which, for Bruno Latour, came to be understood as inherently "devoid of any meaning, except that of being the ultimate reality, made of fully silent entities that were yet able, through the mysterious intervention of Science devoid of any meaning, except that of being the ultimate reality."¹⁷ For Latour, the "ultimate reality" of *res extensa* became embedded in "matters of fact,"¹⁸ a phrase that, for all its association with scientific enterprise *after* the sixteenth century, still relies on a sense of "matter" that borrows from rhetorical theory, with traces of the "*matter*" which Jonson found so valuable in Spenser's work. In other words, rather than signalling the very *res extensa* to which facts appeal for their existence, the "matter" in "matters of fact" is *not* physical, or substantial, in an empirical sense, but appeals to a discursive field through which those facts are produced and sustained.¹⁹

¹⁵ Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries*, in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson*, Second Volume (1635), 116.

¹⁶ I draw these Latin equivalents from the invaluable work of Terence Cave, which I rely on throughout this chapter. See Terence Cave, *The Cornucopia Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), 6.

¹⁷ Bruno Latour, "An Attempt at a 'Compositionist Manifesto,'" *New Literary History* 41 (2010): 471–490, 476.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ In pushing against "matters of fact," Latour appears to be searching for a fuller, or more complete, sense of matter that was available before the stabilization of empiricism: "Matters of fact are not all that is given in experience," he says. "[They] are only very partial and, I would argue, very polemical, very political renderings of matters of concern and

While we may speak of different kinds of “matter,” find the “foil” of the rhetorical in the physical, or, more dramatically, parse categories between the “real” and rhetorical, Spenser and Jonson’s “matter” refuses such divisions, revealing them as historical anachronisms we project upon the poets. In his analysis of Desiderius Erasmus’s seminal rhetorical handbook *De Utraque Verborum ac Rerum Copia*, Terence Cave reminds us of the encompassing work *res* does in the period:

If *res*, as the counterpart of *verbum*, moves towards the domain of “thought” (*sententia*), it also includes the whole domain of physical objects conceived of as materials for rhetorical elaboration: in other words, one of the functions of *copia rerum* is the unfolding of object-things within language.²⁰

For Cave, *res* and *verba* function together in an upward movement towards “the domain of ‘thought’ (*sententia*).” Importantly, *res*, by itself, does not signify “idea” for Erasmus. For Cave, “To render *res* itself as ‘idea’ would be to confuse or rather over-simplify the issue. In some contexts, it is true, *res* could be defined as the extra-linguistic reality apprehended by the mind and reproduced in the form of *verba*.”²¹ In Cave’s view, Erasmus’s *De Copia* complicates this classical mimetic model in which “words copy or represent the objects of thought,” by illustrating the ways in which *res* and *verba* function together in a register that encompasses *both* the domains of “thought” *and* “physical objects conceived of as materials for rhetorical elaboration.” Cave’s analysis offers a satisfying conceptualization of “matter” in Erasmus’s text, by refusing to reduce it to

only a subset of what could also be called *states of affairs*.” See Latour, “Why Has Critique Run out of Steam? From Matters of Fact to Matters of Concern,” *Critical Inquiry* 30 (Winter 2004): 225-248, 232.

²⁰ Cave, *The Cornucopia Text*, 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 19.

either mere physicality or untethered ideality, an, instead, lingering in its complexity as a functional interface between these two domains, a circuit board in which the physical world is wired through a set (or sets) of *verba* toward the generation of an idea.

If Cave productively complicates “matter,” reinvigorating our sense of its rhetorical dimension, his deconstructive mode may raise concerns. Specifically, does this rhetorical sense of *res* erase, or write out, the very physicality (or processes related to that physical world) that are the focal points of studies of materiality like Burlinson’s? If Burlinson’s reading of Spenser’s “syntactic excess” leads us all too easily to the physical matter of space and time,²² does a study of Spenserian *ekphrasis*, conversely, delimit the very possibility of accessing that world? “*Mimesis, enargia, ekphrasis, evidentia, illustratio, descriptio, demonstratio*,” all terms employed to characterize the relay between the physical world and the circuit board, for Cave, “witness our fascination and futile effort to represent world in language, and also how we see the world in language.”²³ In this “futile effort” of representation, does *copia rerum* leave us once more confined to language, circulating in a domain similar, if not precisely the same, to Greenblatt’s “cultural poetics,” in which “signs” form the ultimate ontological groundwork?

There is, I want to suggest, a way of handling this dilemma, of potentially inhabiting an early modern perspective of “matter” that takes into account the physical without reducing the richness of the rhetorical. This chapter offers a methodological answer through a reading of *The Faerie Queene*. Cave’s treatment of *res* has the considerable benefit of elaborating relational coordinates between a physical world and

²² Ibid., 19.

²³ Ibid., 29.

an ideal one: in my analogy, *res* exists as a circuit board, wiring the physical world through *verba* toward the “domain of thought (*sententia*).”²⁴ If we cannot uncover, or recover, that physical world, we may at least consider how it offers conditions (of possibility) with which *res* and *verba* must work. In other words, to take a basic example, when Spenser writes of Britomart’s “enchanted speare” (IV.vi.46.4), “speare” opens to a set of physical objects within which the reader understands a “speare” to exist. We do not, for instance, expect the *res* and *verba* to unfold the domain of physical objects classified as “shields.” The physical world offers the basic conditions of possibility by which a reader will understand a “speare” as a long, pointed weapon. As Cave illustrates, however, “*verba*, coalescing into *res*, point towards a *sententia* (‘idea’).”²⁵ Therefore, the conditions of possibility allowed by the physical world are with *copia rerum* set in relation to the *sententia*, or idea, toward which Spenser’s text works: Britomart’s “enchanted speare” (IV.vi.46.4), for instance, is related to her martial prowess but also her special role in Book III, as the Knight of Chastity (III.iii.60). Without being too reductive, then, we might say that the physical domain of objects, which would include a “speare,” that unfold in this moment of *The Faerie Queene* are interfaced with an idea(l) of chastity that Spenser strives to convey.

The Faerie Queene does not admit those physical practices, in space and time, which, we observed, were essential components to the “gathering” of rhetorical, social, and physical practices that made things in my previous chapters. Rather, the interface is purely conditioned, as circuit boards are, by the rules, or algorithms, that govern the physical world and the definition (rule) of chastity that Spenser wishes to convey.

²⁴ Cave, *The Cornucopia Text*, 28.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21.

Spenser's poetic task is to coordinate the principle, or virtue, of chastity with what the physical world permits. He can take considerable liberties: Britomart's "speare," for instance, can be "enchanted" (III.i.7); or, toward the end of Book III, she can "assayl[]" with sword and shield the "flames" at the Porch of Busirane's House (III.xi.25). Of course, in these examples, we could enter into a conversation about the conventions of genre, and the prominent tropes of the romance. But, if we can bracket such considerations, we conclude that Spenser must obey *some* rules of the physical world: the interface of *res* and *verba*, in order to convince his early modern readers of the virtue of chastity as something *in the world*, and, more importantly, *in their queen*, cannot detach from the *physis* to which that world is, to some extent, bound. A "speare" may be "enchanted," but it cannot, by definition, be a shield. We are, no doubt, in remarkably tricky territory, where the rules of physics, logic, and rhetoric intertwine and overlap. But this is precisely where the "matter" of the Renaissance leads us, and precisely what *The Faerie Queene*, unimpeded to a large, if not complete, degree by the physical world, brings to the fore.

To understand this "matter," we must look to the knowledge that is formed in those overlaps of physics, logic, and rhetoric, where Spenser negotiates the conditions of possibility in the physical world with the possibilities of rhetoric and poetry. Take, for example, Britomart and her "enchanted speare": by Book IV, she is known primarily *because* of her spear. Spenser's narrator directly attributes her success in the Tournament of Canto iv to it: "for no power of man / Could bide the force of that enchanted speare, / The which this famous Britomart did beare / With which she wondrous deeds of arms atchieved, / And ouerthrew, what euer came her neare" (IV.iv.46.3-7). Arthegall, later

reflecting on his defeat, describes Britomart to Scudamour: “A stranger knight, sayd he, vnknowne by name, / But knowne by fame, and by an Hebene speare, / With which he all that met him, down did beare” (IV.vi.6.3-5); to which, Scudamor responds, “When [he] heard mention of that speare, / He wist right well, that it was Britomart” (IV.vi.7.1-2). For Judith Anderson, “although Britomart also has a sword, the spear is her ultimate weapon, and it is alike an attribute of Mars and Minerva.”²⁶ In addition, “While her Saxon armor is not magical, her ebony spear, made by Bladud, a Briton king, has been produced by magic and has magical powers that an opposing rider cannot withstand.”²⁷ Indeed, although we might expect the Knight of Chastity to be defined through that which protects and covers her—the shield—Spenser repeatedly associates her with a martial performance that includes spear *and* shield. As Britomart tells Arthur, “I haue beene trained vp in warlike stowre, / To tossen speare and shield” (III.ii.6.3-4). Britomart here echoes Glauce’s advice, “Let vs in feigned armes our selues disguise, / And our weake hands (need makes good schollers) teach / The dreadful speare and shield to exercize” (III.iii.53.2-4). And, again, when the narrator describes her armament, the pair come together: “Both speare and shield of great powre, for her purpose fit” (III.iii.60.9).

The accompaniment of spear and shield reflects Britomart’s martial prowess in Faeryland, insofar as she is not merely capable of defending herself, but actively in pursuit of Arthegall, in a quest which will unite erotic desire with generative productivity. The spear is crucial to the performance of this quest, as it enables Britomart—one representative of chastity—to triumph against the “lesser” knights whom she encounters.

²⁶ Judith Anderson, “Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: Reopening Cultural Matters of Gender and Figuration,” *English Literary Renaissance* 39, 1 (Feb. 2009): 74–96, 79.

²⁷ Ibid.

Guyon and Marinell are both defeated by Britomart's "enchanted spear," and, as Hamilton notes, measured by chastity in the process. For Guyon, "Nigh a speares length behind his crouper fell" (III.i.6.7); and, likewise, for Marinell, "Beyond his croupe, the length of all her launce, / Till sadly soucing on the sandy shore, / He tumbled on an heape, and wallowd in his fore" (III.iv.16). As Britomart attacks Marinell, in fact, Spenser explicitly links the spear *with* knowledge: "Ne lenger stayd for th'other to reply, / But with sharpe speares the rest made dearly knowne" (III.iv.15.5-6). Her performance, then, comes with certain epistemological claims: her actions testify to how we, Spenser's readers, come to know chastity's effect in the world.

Interesting, then, that the spear, if it is "her ultimate weapon," is so unhelpful in key moments. For instance, when she encounters Arthegall a second time, it is discarded for the sword: "And casting from her that enchanted lance, / Vnto her sword and shield her soone betoke; / And therewithal at him right furiously she stroke" (IV.vi.14.7-9). Anderson contends that, because she receives the spear from Bladud, and "in II.x.25-26, Bladud is portrayed as a beneficial leader possessing wondrous arts who eventually overreaches," "her Bladudian spear is rendered ineffectual in her climactic battle with Artegall" because Spenser wishes "perhaps to shield Britomart from such hubris."²⁸ This explanation, however, overlooks other instances in Book III when sword is substituted for spear: after Britomart is wounded by Gardante's arrow in Castle Joyeous and avenges her attackers with "flaming sword"; when she "assayle[s]" the flames in front of Busirane's House with "swords point directing forward right" (III.xi.25.3-4); and, lastly, when she "did extend / Her sword high ouer [Busirane]," as he reads to undo the spell upon Amoret

²⁸ Ibid.

(III.xii.36.8-9). These moments suggest not merely that the power of the “enchanted speare” is limited, but that the measure of chastity associated with the spear also reaches a limit point outside itself. If the performance of the Knight of Chastity succeeds when she “tossen[s] speare and shield” (III.ii.6.3-4),” if “both speare and shield of great powre, for her purpose fit” (III.iii.60.9), the ineffectiveness of the spear suggests moments where “her purpose” meets an outside, or external, threat or force which it cannot overcome but with which it must nevertheless be reconciled.

My interest in this chapter lies with such limit points, incompatibilities between the “matter” of chastity and the world in which it unfolds. Let’s call them “glitches” in the system, where the wiring of the *res-verba* interface, which generates the idea of chastity, is crossed with incompatible inputs from the domain of the physical world, where an “enchanted spear” fails to measure, or must be altogether tossed aside. Gordon Teskey’s framing of Spenser’s allegory within the vocabulary of information theory is helpful in developing this point:

Although we are expected to think of the ‘darke conceit’ as a presence hidden inside the text, more detached analysis will show that it is a convention or rule governing information around a circuit: the narrative is accompanied by iconic details suggesting a deeper meaning inside it, these details are used by the reader to incorporate other elements of the narrative into a comprehensive structure of meaning, and this structure is in turn modified and enriched by further reading.²⁹

²⁹ Gordon Teskey, “Allegory,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. by A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 16.

Teskey's understanding of the readerly experience of *The Faerie Queene*—an interest he shares with Thomas Roche, Paul Alpers, and Maureen Quilligan³⁰—is sympathetic with the view I have been sketching of Spenserian “matter” as a *res-verba* interface. Teskey translates the notion of allegory as containing “a presence hidden inside the text” to “a convention or rule governing information around a circuit,” whereby the “iconic details” provided by *verba*—vis-à-vis *enargia*, *descriptio*, etc.—slide together with *res* to suggest “a deeper meaning inside.” In Book III, for example, the reader enters into and engages with this circuit, in an active, participatory process, to produce the “comprehensive structure of meaning” of the idea of chastity.³¹ Despite these affinities, my concern is not, like Teskey's, with the readerly experience, but with the circuit board, particularly where “the convention or rule governing information in the circuit” must rely upon other rules to generate that “comprehensive structure of meaning.” That is, if Spenser writes the rule governing the circuitry that generates—with the reader—the idea of chastity, what other circuits, with their own potential detours, might be embedded within this loop? What other loops are implicit in this process, and where might they lead us?

As I will demonstrate, in Book III, one such glitch—a circuit on which Spenser relies, yet which could easily derail, or permanently detour, his conception of chastity—manifests in the fires of eroticism. The use of fire as a trope for erotic desire was a commonplace in Spenser's time, as it is in our own.³² Thomas Wilson, in *The Rule of*

³⁰ Roche, *The Kindly Flame* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1962); Paul Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene* (Rpt. Princeton University Press, 1967; Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1982); Maureen Quilligan, *The Language of Allegory* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1979).

³¹ If we follow Spenser in his letter to Raleigh, and Greenblatt's conclusion, the reader should be, in fact, transformed by this process, morally edified by his or her exposure to the text.

³² Instances of this trope are too numerous to name. For Renaissance examples, see Petrarch, Sidney, Daniel, etc. For contemporary examples, we need only turn on the radio. See The Doors' “Light My Fire” or the chorus to Pink's “Try It”: “Where there is desire / There is gonna be a flame / Where there is a flame / Someone's bound to get burned.” I cite these “lower” cultural registers to indicate the pervasiveness of the trope, something, I want to suggest, which

Reason, makes it his primary example in a section on metaphor: “The interpretacion of a thing,” Wilson observes, “is then thought to be, when a metaphore or translation is vsed, & the meanyng thereof taken. As when this word *Ignis* (fire) betokeneth loue.”³³

Recorde, like Spenser, relies on Ovid as a classical source for the trope: “*Quis enim celauerit ignem / Lumine qui semper proditur ipse suom*,” which he translates, “Who can kepe close the fire, or hide the burnyng heate. / That doth betraie it selfe alwaye with lyght of flame so great.”³⁴ Wilson interprets Ovid’s use of the metaphor as follows:

“Wherin is nothyng els signified but loue, whiche is so hote of it selfe that it must nedes breake out into flames, and shewe it selfe at one tyme, or other.”³⁵ Like *The*

Metamorphoses, Spenser’s Book III is replete with examples of this commonplace:

Guyon’s horse’s “fiery feete” (III.i.5); Malecasta’s “inburning fire” (III.i.53); the “drie withered stocke” of the elderly boatman’s lust for Florimell (III.viii.25); the “burning hart” on Sir Paridell’s chest (III.viii.45). In fact, the trope appears to take on a life of its own as Book III progresses, the metaphors for erotic desire metamorphosizing into the *actual* flames in Malbecco’s Castle, as well as the memory of those flames which destroyed Troy (both examples of lust transformed into physical fire), until, in the last episode of the book, Spenser’s heroine must face the flames at the Porch of Busirane’s House, demonstrating through action what Paul Alpers deems her “magical immunity.”³⁶

Britomart’s strange magic is part of Spenser’s own confrontation with the trope that threatens the very virtue he intends to illustrate. Spenser’s narrator may differentiate

indicates its possession of an agency or operability in itself. As I will argue, this self-sustaining, generative quality of the trope is a threat to the control Spenser wishes to establish with his conception of chastity in Book III.

³³ Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason Containing the Arte of Logic*, (London: Richard Grafton, 1551); EEBO STC (2d edn.) 25809. The page number is not included on the page which includes this citation. Electronically, the page is available on “document image [96].”

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Alpers, *The Poetry of The Faerie Queene*, 400.

kinds of fire, emphasizing how a “Most sacred fyre, that burnest mightily / In liuing brests, ykindled first aboue” (III.iii.1) and “goodly fire / That to all high desert and honor aspire” (III.v.1) are *distinct* from the “filthy lust inflame” (III.iii.1) that plagues the majority of Book III’s characters. With Britomart’s “goodly fire,” chastity becomes defined as a channeling of libidinal energy into a constancy of action, guided by “eternall prouidence” (III.iii.24), toward dynastic generation. Yet the consistent reliance upon the trope of fire, to convey the effect desire has upon the body, threatens to detour the idea of chastity into an elemental sexual functionality indistinguishable from those lesser forms of lust and passion.

In what follows, I focus first on the concerns Spenser expresses in the proem to Book III and, next, on Guyon’s “turne” on Britomart at its opening, in order to illustrate the systemic threat which fire, as a trope, poses to Spenser’s text. I then consider Britomart’s confrontation with the flames in front of Busirane’s House, focusing on how she—and, by proxy, Spenser—resolve the dilemma of chastity’s place amidst the fires of eroticism. I supplement this analysis with classical and Renaissance logical and rhetorical treatises which focus on fire as a primary example of efficient causation.

I. Sex in the Heliotrope³⁷

At the outset of Book III, Spenser’s narrator expresses a deep sense of reluctance toward his subject: “It falls on me to write of Chastity” (Proem III.1.1). This reluctance

³⁷ I borrow the term “heliotrope” from Jacques Derrida’s “White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy,” trans. F.C.T. Moore, *New Literary History* 6, 1 (Autumn 1974): 5-74. By “heliotropic metaphors,” Derrida means those metaphors which rely upon the sun as a vehicle for their tenors. Reading Aristotle’s *Poetics*, Derrida argues that such metaphors are based on an imperfect knowledge of the sensible sun, and that, furthermore, these metaphors are exemplary of metaphor itself, which functions as a mode of knowledge that is always epistemologically imperfect and incomplete. Derrida argues that such imperfection lies at the origins of the Western philosophical tradition.

echoes the *topos* of humility in the proems of Book's I and II, where Spenser wondered, respectively, whether he was up to the poetic task of singing "Knights and Ladies gentle deeds" (Proem I.1.5), and whether his poem would be judged "th'abundance of an ydle braine" and "painted of forgery" (Proem II.1.3-4). These are both, in different respects, representational problems, and Spenser resolves them by appealing to the figure of the ("faire") "mirroure" (Proem I.4.2; Proem II.4.7). What is striking about the proem of Book III is that the problem lies in figuring *any* kind of mirror, as the issue of representation has joined with a deeper epistemological problem: "what needs me fetch from Faery / Forreine ensamples, it to haue exprest? / Sith [chastity] is shrined in my Soueraines brest" (Proem III.1.3-5). If Spenser must write on chastity, and yet chastity exists purely within Elizabeth, then how could his poem be anything other than superfluous—the unnecessary outsider's supplement?³⁸ As Richard Rambuss phrases the question: "Why offer a representation at all when the real thing is at hand?"³⁹

Despite this genuine representational (and epistemological) problem, Spenser, by the proem's end, produces not merely one mirror for Elizabeth, but, rather, "mirroures *more then one* her selfe to see" (Proem III.5.6; my emphasis). Importantly, the formulation of the "text-as-mirror conceit" occurs *only after* he details the process by which the "mirroures more then one" are produced. As the narrator acknowledges, he cannot represent chastity because that is the queen herself, *but* he is inspired to produce

³⁸ The etymologies of "forrein" and "ensample" highlights not only Spenser's outsider status from Elizabeth's court, but the supplementarity in his poetics. In its literal, etymological meaning, "forrein ensample" means "outside taking out": "forrein," deriving from the Old French *for-*, *fors-*, identical with *fors* adv. (modern French *hors*) outside, out," which come from the Latin *foris*, *forās*; and "ensample," deriving from the Latin *exemplum*, The primary sense is thus 'something taken out, a sample n., specimen'." These etymologies are both provided by the *OED*. See "foreign, adj. and n.". *OED Online*. December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/73063?rskey=u34SXB&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 25, 2015); and "example, n.". *OED Online*. December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/65593?rskey=10yGA1&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 25, 2015).

³⁹ Richard Rambuss, *Spenser's Secret Career* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 74.

“mirrours more then one” by his encounter with Raleigh’s “sweete verse” (Proem III.4.4). Rambuss reads this encounter as an “impregnation” which anticipates Chrysogonee’s conception of Belpheobe and Amoret in Canto vi: “Spenser finds that, like the ‘slombring swowne’ (6.7.3) Chrysogonee slips into after bathing in a fountain of ‘all the sweetest flowres’ (6.6.9), his own ‘senses lulled are in slomber of delight’ by Raleigh’s ‘Nectar sprinckeled’ poem.”⁴⁰ Taking a respite in Faeryland, as Redcross knows fully well, can be extremely precarious. In Canto vii of Book I, Redcross, “disarmed” (2.8), “feedes vpon the cooling shade” (3.1), only to face, initially, Duessa’s reproach, and, then, the giant Orgoglio. But, here, the “slomber[s]” of Spenser and Chrysogonee, as well as the lull of the senses which accompany them, occur under the sun, and it is the sun’s generative effect that Spenser emphasizes. As Rambuss says, “In this state of poetic ravishment, [Spenser] too is penetrated by “beames bright,” just as Chrysogonee is “pierst into her wombe” with “sun-beames bright” (6.7.5-7).⁴¹ In describing the effect of Raleigh’s poetic verse, then, Spenser offers a productive, generative moment in which readerly pleasure is mediated through light (“beames bright”) and heat (“melting sweetness”). It is, we might also note, a highly erotic encounter, a precursor not only to Chrysogonee’s conception but the many stagings of erotic activity (both validated and condemned) in Book III, in which the phenomenal and metaphoric dimensions of sun, light, heat, and flames serve as the principle tropes.

Spenser acknowledges the impossibility of representing chastity mimetically because representation, particularly “want of words,” may distort knowledge and “her excellence marre” (Proem 2.9). And yet, if the virtue cannot be accessed through the

⁴⁰ Ibid., 75.

⁴¹ Ibid.

field of representation—vis-à-vis mimesis—it can be poetically achieved through an erotic encounter that converts the pleasure of the textual experience into a generative mode which yields knowledge. In Book III, then, before the mirror, the flame—or, the sun, light, and heat. Chastity: a knowledge mediated, conceived in the pleasure of mediation.

What, then, of the relation of this pleasure to flame, sun, light, and heat? After the “straunge ensample” of Chrysogonee’s conception, Spenser’s narrator waxes philosophical on the nature of the sunbeams: “The fruitfull seades / Of all things liuing, through impression / Of the sunbeams in moyst complexion, / Doe life conceiue, and quickened are by kind” (III.vi.8.2-5). By the close of the stanza, this narrator-become-naturalist begins to broach upon a generative mythology which the canto will later amplify in the Garden of Adonis: “Infinite shapes of creatures men doe fynd, / Informed in the mud, on which the Sunne hath shynd” (III.vi.8.7-9). The account of “sunbeames” and “Sunne,” though perhaps helpful in explaining Chrysogonee’s conception, excises the sensuousness in the actual encounter in the previous stanza, where a play of the naked body and sunbeams is the focus. In fact, in the following stanza, when the narrator proposes, rather archly, “Great father he of generation / Is rightly cald, th’author of life and light” (III.vi.9.1-2), a kind of distillation, or abstraction, of the sensuous is completed. In other words, the eroticism of “sunbeams bright vpon her body” (III.vi.7.5) in Chrysogonee’s miraculous conception are, first, naturalized through an ecological account in which “Sunne” is central, and, then, idealized in the theological trope of “th’author of life and light.”

The movement from the erotic sunbeam's play to the *eidos* of "th'author of life and light" is consistent with the cosmological order to which Spenser and his fellow Elizabethans subscribed. In other words, the progression of "sunbeames," "Sunne, and "light" exists within the Great Chain of Being, which, as E.M.W. Tillyard famously observed, was the predominant Renaissance conception of ordering humans within the world, in relation to both insensible matter (below) and spiritual beings (above).⁴² Roche is particularly helpful in tracing the fiery elements' places within the different levels of this order: specifically, "the sublunary, the fallen world in which we live, subject to change and decay; the celestial, the unchanging world of the planets and stars; [and] the supercelestial, the dwelling of angels and the Godhead."⁴³ Sunbeams, the sun, and light map neatly onto these three worlds, which, Roche notes, "are held together by God's Love and are analogically correspondent."⁴⁴ He continues:

Thus, in the sublunary world fire burns, while in the celestial world its analogue the sun not only burns but by its burning nourishes life, and in the supercelestial world the seraphim burn with love for their Creator.

The three worlds are a progression away from the material and toward the spiritual, and just as our image of the purely spiritual seraphim is drawn from our knowledge of the visible fire and sun, so too is our knowledge of universal truths drawn (in part) from our reading of the imitation of the visible worlds.⁴⁵

⁴² E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1944).

⁴³ Roche, *The Kindly Flame*, 7.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

Roche brings into sharp focus not only the material and spiritual transformations fire and sun undergo as they transition between worlds, but also the structure of knowledge this cosmological order sanctions. The epistemological order is conveyed in Roche's closing analogy, which bears repeating: "just as our image of the purely spiritual seraphim is drawn from our knowledge of the visible fire and sun, so too is our knowledge of universal truths drawn (in part) from our reading of the imitation of the visible worlds." In order for Spenser to justify the sensuous penetration of Chrysogonee, his narrator must key into this epistemological template: the spiritual "light" is drawn from our knowledge of "the Sunne [that] hath shynd," which is merely the general element of the "sunbeames" which "playd" upon Chrysogonee's body. A universal, idealized truth—of chastity preserved *amidst* conception—is conveyed by the appeal to the visible world.

We might ask, though, whether *The Faerie Queene* truly permits the translation to this universal truth which the cosmological order appears to guarantee. "Heliotropic metaphors," says Jacques Derrida, "are always imperfect metaphors. They give us too little knowledge because one of the terms directly or indirectly implied in the substitution (the sensible sun) cannot be properly known."⁴⁶ Furthermore, this epistemological problem with the heliotrope derives from its relation to the sensible world: "the sensible sun is always improperly known and therefore improperly named. In general, that which is sensible does not limit our knowledge of it for reasons intrinsic to the way in which it is present; but primarily because the *aistheton* [sensible, that which is perceived by the senses] may always fail to be present, may be hidden or absent. It is not available on

⁴⁶ Jacques Derrida, "White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy," *New Literary History* 6, 1 (Autumn 1974): 5-74, 52.

command, and we cannot control its presence.”⁴⁷ The sun may give life and light, through its heat and play upon Chrysogonee, producing the two little mirrors of chastity in Amoret and Belphebe. But, Derrida suggests, we don’t *know* it. Something “may always fail to be present, may be hidden or absent [...] We cannot control its presence.”

Derrida arrives at his conclusions through a reading of Aristotle’s *Poetics*, and, more generally, the Western philosophical tradition that lays claim to “proper” knowledge through appeals to (the tropes of) vision, light, and truth. For Derrida, the (sensible) sun, quite simply, gets in the way: “Indeed, it is difficult to know what is proper to the sun, properly so-called: to the sensible sun. Consequently any metaphor implying the sun (as tenor or vehicle) fails to bring clear and certain knowledge.”⁴⁸ Descartes, of course, lingers in this last line, the “sensible” a jot within the “clear and distinct” knowledge of Cartesian rational consciousness. The problem, as Derrida illustrates throughout his essay, is that philosophical discourse purports to divest itself of the impurities of metaphor in its quest for such “clear and certain knowledge,” and yet, metaphor remains—most emphatically, in the form (or the thing?) of the sun: “The trope of metaphor always implies a sensible kernel, or rather something which, like what is sensible, may always fail to be present actually and in person. And the sun, in this respect, is above all the sensible signifier of what is sensible, the sensible model of the sensible (the Form, paradigm, or parable of the sensible). For these reasons, the orbit of the sun is the trajectory of metaphor.”⁴⁹ Spenser’s narrator, working well within the parameters of the Elizabethan cosmos, assumes a similarly philosophically freighted use

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

of the sun: it is the origin of life, the procreative energy source par excellence, “the Form, paradigm, or paradigm of the sensible.” In the case of Chrysogonee, it is also, we might add, the source of a *sensible fuck*.

At the moment of Chrysogonee’s conception, we notice not the abstract, idealized “light and life,” but, rather, the sensual, erotic play of soft surfaces and deep penetration, the open and accessible (“displayd”) juxtaposed with the hidden, “secret power” of the “wombe”:

Till faint through yrkesome weariness, adowne
Vpon the grassy ground her selfe she layd
To sleepe, the whiles a gentle slombring swowne
Vpon her fell all naked bare displayed;
The sunbeams bright vpon her body playd
Being through former bathing mollified,
And pierst into her wombe, where they embayd
With so sweet sence and secret power vnspide,
That in her pregnant flesh they shortly fructified. (III.vi.7)

Although Spenser’s narrator prefaces this account with the assurance, “It were a goodly storie” (III.vi.5.1), the circumstances suggest otherwise: Chrysogonee “in this wilde forrest wandring all alone” (III.vi.5.4), finally acquiesces to “yrksome weariness” and falls asleep. We need only consider Book I’s “wandring wood” of “*Errors Den*” (i.13.6) or the later episode in Book III of Scudamour “wallowd / Vpon the grassy ground” (III.xi.7.3-4) to recognize the negative correlaries to this moment. The difference here? The sun is shining: “It was vpon a Sommers shinie day, / When Titan faire his beames

did display” (III.vi.6.4-5). The heavenly attribution of the “beames” suggests divine security, as Titan’s “*display*” anticipates Chrysogonee’s “naked bare *displayd*” body to come. The attribution of Titan also avoids the Jovian associations of the “beames,” with all their fraught, violent connotations, as depicted on Busirane’s tapestries.

In other words, Spenser’s narrator establishes a symbiosis between the human figure of Chrysogonee and the natural elements which surround her, suggesting that she not so much relinquishes her body’s agency to their power but, instead, engages in concert with their forces. This symbiosis is reflected in the poetic movement which brings Chrysogonee to her “slombring swowne”: in acknowledgment of her agency, the active verb “layd” is used to indicate “her selfe she layd.” She, therefore, maintains a degree of control. The control is complemented with the simultaneity of “the whiles,” as Spenser shifts abruptly to indicate the agential force of the “slombring swowne” (importantly, “a gentle” one) which “vpon her fell all naked bare displayed.” Chrysogonee occupies the sort of agential/submissive relationship that Spenser first announced *for himself* in the opening of Book III: “It *falls* on me to write of Chastity” (Proem III.1.1; emphasis mine). Spenser, the poet of Book III, is not the encumbered wit, but neither is he the entirely submissive, passive vessel. Similarly, Chrysogonee lays herself down, and the “swowne” falls upon her. There is a shared agency afforded by the opportunity she permits and the power nature has.

This sense of shared agency recurs throughout the stanza. “The sunbeams bright vpon her body playd” *because* “through former bathing [her skin was] mollified”: in other words, she has prepared her body—“made tender, as seed softened by moisture is

germinated by the sun,” as Hamilton glosses “mollified”⁵⁰—to permit the play, its softness an indication of receptivity to the natural light. Even more striking, when this surface play turns toward penetration—“And pierst into her wombe”—the fruition is made possible only insofar as the “sunbeames” “embayd / With so sweet sence and secret power vnspide.” “Vnspide,” *in vitro*, the “sweet sence and secret power” cannot be attributed entirely to the “sunbeames,” nor to Chrysogonee’s “pregnant flesh,” but, rather, exist as a shared erotic entanglement of sensuousness and desire.

Just as Spenser’s knowledge of chastity in the proem is mediated through light (“beames bright”) and heat (“melting sweetness”), so is Chrysogonee conceived through the mediation of “sunbeames,” “sweet sence,” and “secret power.” These are tropes which Spenser’s narrator may idealize and abstract into “th’heuens fruitfull ray” (III.vi.6.2) and “th’author of life and light” (III.vi.9.2), but they can just as well resist such grand epistemological (or theological, philosophical, etc.) gestures. In fact, as heliotropic metaphors, they are “always imperfect metaphors,” and therefore remain to some degree unknowable, or, as Derrida puts it, “they give us too little knowledge because one of the terms directly or indirectly implied in the substitution (the sensible sun) cannot be properly known.”⁵¹

Another famous deconstructionist, Paul De Man, offers a useful clarification of the relationship between knowledge and substitution in metaphor with a definition of tropes he derives, in a reading of Blaise Pascal’s *Reflexions*.⁵² In reading Pascal, de Man encounters a word that, he says, “does not function as a sign or a name,” but rather, “as a

⁵⁰ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, Second Edition, 342.

⁵¹ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 52.

⁵² Paul de Man, “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion,” in *Aesthetic Ideology*, ed. by Andrzej Warminski (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996): 51-69, 56.

vector, a directional motion that is manifest only as a turn, since the target toward which it turns remains unknown.”⁵³ He defines this word-as-vector according to a principle of substitution similar to Derrida’s: “the sign has become a trope, a substitutive relationship that has to posit a meaning whose existence cannot be verified, but that confers upon the sign an unavoidable signifying function.”⁵⁴ In highlighting “the directional motion” of the trope, de Man’s definition has the benefit of clarifying the function of the heliotrope in the Elizabethan Great Chain of Being. The substitutive relationship afforded by the “sunbeames”/“Sunne”/“light” triad can “posit a meaning whose existence cannot be verified”; it can engender a “directional motion” toward a target “which remains unknown.” Spenser relies on the substitution of the sensible sun to convey a knowledge of chastity, and it is precisely this “substitutive relationship” that allows the upward cosmological movement, from base matter to spiritual ideality. The heliotrope, then, transports the reader up the scale, providing the vehicle by which the “pure and vnspotted” can rise above “all loathly crime, / That is ingenerate in fleshly slime” (III.vi.3.4-5). And yet, the “substitutive relationship” afforded through metaphor and the truth of chastity Book III’s narrator wishes to convey *may not* be compatible. As Derrida warns, “let us not be too hasty in making metaphor a form of truth. Are we sure that we know what the heliotrope is?”⁵⁵

In the context of our reading of Spenser, Derrida takes on a parental tone: sexual heliotrope is dangerous, kids. Mind the gap: the absence in knowledge at the point of the heliotrope precludes the very control which chastity would seem to require, the very

⁵³ Ibid., 56.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

knowledge Spenser portends in his mirror production. For, if anything, chastity requires control—ideological, juridical, social, etc.—over human bodies, or, in a Neoplatonic, idealist sense, which views Chastity as an entity in itself, it would exist ontologically prior to the physical, sexual relationships and erotic desires. In addition, as Spenser emphasizes with regard to Britomart, (c/C)hastity exists in the order of “eternall prouidence,” in a performance where our heroine foregoes her own, limited “desires” for the “will” of God (III.iii.24). Ultimately, although the human practice of chastity is coordinated within this order of the cosmos, Spenser relies on the “substitutive relationship” of the heliotrope—such as the “sunbeames” which play upon Chrysogonee’s body—as the generative sparks from which knowledge of chastity is produced. How can (c/C)hastity assert control when its very matter relies on handing over the keys of meaning to that “substitutive relationship” whose participants are nonhuman metaphorical vehicles?⁵⁶ How do we know the vehicle doesn’t carry away the tenor, the “substitutive relationship” overwrite the relation which it is supposed to represent? In short, when does the sun become the flame?⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Such a reading has considerable implications on whether Spenser channels the libidinal energies flowing throughout Book III into productive, heteronormative versions of sexuality, and therefore has bearing on C.S. Lewis’s famous distinction between the generative sexuality in the Garden of Adonis and the wasteful, deviant sexuality of the Bower of Bliss. The idealization of Spenser’s narrator with Chrysogonee’s light appears to support Lewis’s point: her sexual experience is made purposive and (socially) productive in the form of Book III’s mirrors of chastity, Amoret and Belphebe. Yet such a reading reduces the “matter of chastity” to ideology—with all its juridical, ethical, and social connotations—perhaps too quickly, and, as Harry Berger observes, may overemphasize the “policing” function of Spenser’s text at the expense of a countervoice that challenges and interrogates the authority of that function. Most importantly, it fails to acknowledge the uncertainty inherent in the substitution of the sun in the sexual experience. It may make sex safe, but it does so at the expense of the heliotrope. See C.S. Lewis, *The Allegory of Love: A Study of the Medieval Tradition* (Rpt. 1936; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 326; and Harry Berger, “Resisting Translation: Britomart in Book 3 of Spenser’s *Faerie Queen*,” in *Translating Desire in Medieval and Early Modern Literature*, ed. Craig Berry and Heather Hayton (Arizona Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 2005): 235-282, especially 215-222. For a recent response to Lewis framed in a posthumanist vocabulary, see Jonathan Goldberg, *The Seeds of Things: Theorizing Sexuality and Materiality in the Renaissance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009). Although Goldberg discerns in the Chrysogonee episode “the fundamentally inhuman nature of sexuality in the poem and its connection to materialized forms of embodiment in which human being is not central” (98), he is less interested in the nonhuman *per se* than the human self as modeled by Foucault’s theorization of askesis.

⁵⁷ Again, the Great Chain of Being becomes particularly relevant to this consideration, as it coordinates fire into a hierarchical structure, from the lowest (flames), to the planetary (the sun), to the spiritual (angels), until we have

II. Faeryland is Burning

Book III opens with Guyon, fresh from his destruction of the Bower of Bliss, traveling with Arthur “to make more trials of his hardiment, / And seeke adventures” (III.i.2.8-9): “At last through an open plaine they yode, / They spide a knight, that towards pricked fayre” (III.i.4.1-2). The unnamed knight, of course, is Britomart, traveling with her nurse Glauce in search of her beloved Arthegall. Her appearance here gestures back to Redcross’s initial appearance in Book I—“A Gentle knight was *pricking* on the plaine” (I.i.1; my emphasis)—in this case, merging “pricked” with “fayre,” which the proem associates with chastity, “the *fayrest* vertue” (Proem III.1.2). As with Redcross’s “pricking,” there is a bawdy sense of “prick,” as penis, latent in the text, which Ian Frederick Moulton, among others, has detailed at length in his study of early modern erotic writing.⁵⁸ In his gloss of “the fayrest vertue,” A.C. Hamilton argues that “the phrase acknowledges that virtue is associated with *virtu*, manliness, but also, as it belongs to the Queen, that it is associated with woman’s beauty.”⁵⁹ The hermaphroditic qualities of Britomart’s character, then, as seen throughout Book III—specifically, her martial prowess and feminine beauty—begin to unfold, then, immediately.⁶⁰

Notably, the ambiguities in these qualities are presented in the context of Guyon’s and Arthur’s inability to understand the meaning of the heraldic description displayed on

reached God. In my reading, I am considering what distinguishes the “most sacred flame” (III.iii.1.1)—or that fire of chastity associated with a higher spiritual quality—from the brute flame of lust, which is farther from the spiritual domain.

⁵⁸ Ian Frederick Moulton, *Before Pornography: Erotic Writing in Early Modern England*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

⁵⁹ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 287.

⁶⁰ Anderson’s “Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*” explores at length how Britomart’s armor especially complicates her place in strict gender binaries. See Anderson, “Britomart’s Armor,” *English Literary Renaissance* 39, 1 (Feb. 2009): 74–96.

Britomart's "goodly shield / That bore a Lion passant in a golden field" (III.i.4.8-9). As the reader will learn in Canto iii, the heraldry is a sign of Britomart's descent from Brutus.⁶¹ Ideally, Arthur and Guyon would understand the meaning of Britomart's heraldry, and thereby avoid the violent encounter which ensues. In fact, this is precisely what occurs when Guyon and Redcross "ymett" (II.i.26.6) in Book II. Guyon, deceived by Archimago into battle with Redcross, suddenly withholds and begs pardon, attributing his sudden pause to his recognition of Redcross's heraldry:

Mercie Sir knight, and mercie Lord,
For mine offence and heedelesse hardiment,
That had almost committed crime abhord,
And with reproachfull shame mine honour shent,
Whiles curst steele against that badge I bent,
The sacred badge of my Redeemers death,
Which on your shield is set for ornament.

(II.i.27.1-7; emphasis mine)

Guyon's appeal to the "sacred badge" "set for ornament" on Redcross's shield characterizes the allegorical transition from Holiness to Temperance by the mitigation of force through discursive legibility: Guyon understands the meaning of the "sacred badge," the "Redeemers death" a code for the shared Christian community in which each

⁶¹ Ibid., 289. The reader, in this moment, is in a position similar to that of Guyon and Arthur, unsure of who this knight is and what his or her heraldry signifies. This type of readerly experience, in which allegory is a process of unfolding meaning in the narrative, is precisely what Roche, Alpers, Quilligan, and Teskey argue is the distinguishing feature of Spenser's text. For example, Alpers observes that "knowledge in *The Faerie Queene* is inseparable from the process of reading," arguing that Spenser's poetics are not primarily driven by the startling iconography, but, instead, a play with the verbal presentation that brings the reader into the psychological experience of the characters (208). I have provided citation information for Roche, Alpers, and Quilligan in note 27. For Teskey's argument, see *Allegory and Violence* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

participates, and the swords go down. As a “sacred badge,” it is also the locus, or meeting-point, of a providential narrative in human history.

Not so for the transition between Temperance and Chastity. Britomart’s shield means nothing to Guyon: it signifies not the “sacred badge” of providence but a human history, a lineage or heritage, of which the faery is unaware. Because he cannot discern the place of the heraldry in this history, Guyon moves to act: he “deare besought / The Prince of grace, to let him ronne that turne” (III.i.5.1-2). In an action rather unbecoming for the Knight of Temperance, Guyon rashly proceeds to attack: “the Faery quickly raught / His poynant speare, and sharply gan to spurne / His fomy steed, whose fiery feete did burne / The verdant gras, as he thereon did tread” (III.i.5.3-6). The encounter is charged with sexual overtones: Guyon has observed this knight “prick[ing] fayre” and begs to “ronne that turne,” an act defined by the “raught” “poynant speare,” and “fomy steed” with “fiery feete.” In my discussion of *Titus Andronicus* in Chapter 1, I observed how Aaron instructs Chiron and Demetrius to “There speak, and strike, brave boys, and take your turns” (2.1.129-130), allowing the euphemism, “take your turns,” from humanist education to speak for Lavinia’s rape in Rome’s woods. Spenser’s “ronne that turne” is hardly so obvious a sexual allusion, but, combined with the phallic resonance of Guyon’s “poynant speare,” it does carry sexual aggression. It also signals Guyon’s “turne” away from the discursive register to which he appealed in his initial encounter with Redcross, into an engagement defined purely by force and physical contact, conveyed primarily through the nonhuman trope the steed’s “fiery feete.” In this realm, Guyon and the horse on which he rides (Arthur’s steed) are united in their fervor to attack, and the unification of action invites us to see knight and horse less as separate

entities, than as a subtle, if short-lived, metamorphosis of “Good Sir *Guyon*” (i.5.1) into a satyr-like figure. The classical *topos* of horse as a metaphor for the passions, most familiar from Socrates’s mythology from the *Phaedrus*, also underlies the action.

The conversion (or expression) of passion into action, realized in this symbiosis of man and horse, is combustible: the “fomy steed”’s “fiery feete did burne the verdant gras, as he thereon did tread; / Ne did the other backe his foote return” (i.5.5-7). Guyon’s “turne” produces a heated, destructive motion forward, a force or vector in whose trajectory Guyon’s own agency has been absorbed. The burning tread upon the “verdant gras” not only refers to the effect Guyon’s passions have upon the pastoral setting—indicating that, in Book III, eroticism will be something different than the idling passivity (*otios*) found in the Bower of Bliss, something, in fact, far more forceful and violent—but, even more importantly, signals the erasure of one of Guyon’s signature achievements at the close of Book II: the rescue of Acrasia’s bound lover, Verdant. As David R. Shore remarks, “Verdant’s subjection to Acrasia is an exemplum of the consequences of intemperance,” and, “without Guyon’s intervention [...] Verdant’s history would exemplify only a sterile cycle.”⁶² For Shore, Guyon’s intervention “makes possible the triumph of chastity”: “only when [Verdant] is freed from Acrasia is there the possibility of a love that is genuinely life-giving and spring-giving: only then [...] does the poem turn to celebrate the capacity for love in Book III.”⁶³ With his poetic “feete” moving forward,

⁶² David R. Shore, “Verdant,” in *The Spenser Encyclopedia*, ed. by A.C. Hamilton (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 710. Shore finds a correlary for this “cycle of sterility” in John Florio’s 1611 Italian-English dictionary entry for *verde* that is particularly of interest to this discussion of fire and flames: “‘Petrarke hath used the word Verde for a finall end, when he saith, gionto al verde, alluding to a Candle, which they were wont to colour greene [...] at the big end [...] as we would say in English, burning in the socket, decaying, drawing to an end, almost consumed, or beginning to faint’ 1611:594).” In the context of this chapter, this reference to Petrarch’s “Candle” for a finall end is especially interesting, as the flame is the medium through which “the big end” is produced.

⁶³ Ibid. Shore contends the “freeing of Verdant from Acrasia anticipates Britomart’s freeing of Amoret from Busirane, another enchanter, and the joyous release of sexual love into the Christian context of *The Faerie Queene*,” 710.

Spenser indicates that the narrative is transitioning from this triumph, what it represented, to a new problematic, one for which the Knight of Temperance is ill-equipped.

The irony of Guyon's destructive movement is more striking when we consider Spenser's account of Verdant's rescue in Book II: "But Verdant (so he hight) he soone vntyde, / And counsell sage in steed thereof to him applyde" (II.xii.82.8-9). At the opening of Book III, it is not "counsell sage in steed" that Guyon "applyde" in his race toward Britomart, but, rather, the "fomy steed" that has dictated "counsell," or reason, as the "verdant gras" "did burne." "Verdant," as Hamilton notes, means "one who gives spring or life (Latin for *ver* + *dans*)"⁶⁴; this life-giving grass, and its organic growth, is consumed by a different kind of organic, life-giving force, an erotic force that takes on its own life in the steed's movement and Guyon's metamorphosis. After Guyon is defeated, Arthur "laid the blame, not to his carriage, / But to his starting steed, that swaru'd aside" (III.i.11.5-6), but this attribution refuses to acknowledge that Guyon already "swaru'd" once he "ronne that turne."

Guyon's "turne"—the flames it ignites, and which represent it—follows the rhetorical logic of the heliotrope: in this case, "burne" shifts from a word that "functions as a sign or a name," to "a vector, a directional motion that is manifest only as a turn, since the target toward which it turns remains unknown."⁶⁵ The lack of control, as well as the epistemological gap, in the heliotrope metastasizes in the steed's "fiery feete." Not merely functioning as "a sign or name" for eroticism, libidinal energy, or sexual aggression, "burne" registers in phenomenal terms the very "turne" Guyon makes away from the discursive field toward a realm of force, an erotic, violent trajectory whose

⁶⁴ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 285.

⁶⁵ De Man, "Pascal's Allegory of Persuasion," in *Aesthetic Ideology*, 56.

determinacy, or expressibility on the page, is questionable: the “target toward which it [Guyon, horse, or the word ‘burne’ itself] turns remains unknown.” Guyon’s movement incurs a tropological formation to which his agency is bound, and one which, if we can continue to follow de Man, provides “a substitutive relationship that has to posit a meaning whose existence cannot be verified, but that confers upon the sign an unavoidable signifying function.”⁶⁶ By this, I mean that “burne” becomes the controlling term for describing Guyon’s relation to his world at this point, a metaphor for the force of his desire, a desire which remains ineffable and yet which has an effect in his world. The metaphor of his relation to the “gras” is, then, also a description of that relationship, which is why it is impossible to determine whether the grass “really” “burne[s].”

Guyon’s “turne” ignites the first flames of Book III. As I hope to have demonstrated, to understand this fire as a metaphor for erotic desire only marks the beginning of an analysis.⁶⁷ The very character of erotic desire, its nature as a threat to chastity, is shaped through the flames of Book III. Its fires signal the threat of an organic, nonhuman ineffable erotic force that invades—and, strangely, seems imminent in—human sexuality, by rhetorically staging the (re)definition of human agency and interactions in terms of the nonhuman trope. Flames provide a metaphor for the terms of agency and relations that, in the absence of other expressible terms, threaten to be *the defining account* of that agency and those relationships.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ It is interesting that amidst the turn to material culture, scholarship has not explored critical readings organized around the elemental flames in Spenser’s text. This is perhaps because they are so easily transcribed as metaphors, and the analysis stops there. Examples of work that focus specifically on flames, specifically the dragon’s fire of Book I, include Carol V. Kaske, “The Dragon’s Spark and Sting and the Structure of Red Cross’s Dragon-fight: *The Faerie Queene*, I. xi-xii,” *SP* 66 (July 1969), 609-638; John W. Crawford, “The Fire from Spenser’s Dragon: ‘The Faerie Queene,’ I. XI,” *The South Central Bulletin* 30, 4 (Winter 1970): 176-178. For a recent article that takes up fire in Shakespeare, see Chris Barrett, “On Burning: *Pericles* and Shakespeare’s Uncanny Fire,” *The Hare*, 2.2 (July 2014).

Dangerous modes of erotic desire pervade Book III, and all are organized around the trope of fire. In Canto i, Britomart enters Castle Ioyeous, where Malecasta's "inburning fire" for her drives an erotic bedroom episode that erupts in violence (III.i.53). No less a figure than Arthur succumbs to a "firy zeale" in his pursuit of Florimell (III.iv.45), and fantasizes she is Gloriana. In the second half of the book, after the Garden of Adonis, the effects of the trope intensify: the Witch's Son, in love with Florimell, is consumed: "Closely the wicked flame his bowels brent, / And shortly grew into outrageous fire" (III.vii.16); the giantess Argante "burned in that lustfull fyre" (III.vii.48) whereby she seeks insatiable sexual gratification; Sir Paridell's "burning hart" (III.viii.45), his lineage from Paris "by whome / That warre was kindled, which did Troy inflame" (III.ix.34), attracts the "second *Helene*, fayre Dame Hellenore," who "fyr'd for sport, or for despight" (III.x.12) Malbecco's Castle; and, lastly, the "flaming fire, ymixt with smouldry smoke, / And stinking Sulphure, that with griesly hate" at the Porch of Busirane's House prevents Scudamour and Britomart from entering (xi.20).

The fires of these erotic encounters take on the cast of natural phenomena in Faeryland. The challenge for Spenser is to articulate how Britomart's "no vsuall fire, no vsuall rage" (III.ii.37) is of a *different kind* than this "filthy lust inflame" (III.iii.1). To illustrate this difference, he must not only inscribe her desire within a providential narrative; he must also demonstrate how the force of Britomart's narratological action—her "noble cheuisaunce" (III.xi.24.6), that is, her narratological movement toward Arthegall, and, indeed, the force of chastity itself—is unimpeded by the force of *eros*. Like any element to put to technological use, the flames of erotic desire must be managed and controlled by a force which is greater: Spenser accomplishes this feat with

Britomart's "assayl[ing the flame]" at Busirane's Porch. By condensing the trope of the erotic flame into the singular narrative space and time of the Porch, Spenser reasserts his rhetorical control. Having handed over the governing meaning of erotic desire to a trope built upon the nonhuman element, he reclaims that meaning by generating a performative knowledge over the flames with Britomart's impossible feat. In this respect, he emphasizes that one cannot know the flames which govern, or express, erotic desires and interactions in a cognitive or logical sense, but one can develop a performative knowledge, or epistemology, with those flames through the boldness of their use as *techne*. The words above Busirane's doors linger. "*Be bolde, be bolde,*" but "*Be not too bold*" (III.xi.54). Use the fire. Do not get burned.

III. The "hard beginne" (An Ending)

When Scudamour and Britomart arrive at Busirane's House to rescue the captive Amoret, Scudamour's beloved, what they encounter challenges Britomart's very bearing of her self:

But in the Porch, that did them sore amate,
A flaming fire, ymixt with smouldry smoke,
And stinking Sulphure, that with griesly hate
And dreadfull horreur did all entraunce choke,

Enforced them their forward footing to reuoke. (III.xi.20.5-9)

The sustained alliteration in "flaming fyre" (6), "smouldry smoke, / And stinking Sulphure, that with griesly hate" (7), "enforced them their forward footing to reuoke" (9) lead us auditorially along to a conclusion—the premature end to their quest—that appears

inevitable. Whereas Redcross's "forward footing" in Error's Den reflected his rash adventuring, the central issue here is the "footing"—or path of action—which the "flaming fire" repels.

The response to this overwhelming flow of alliteration and the elements is Britomart's temporary loss of self: "Greatly thereat was Britomart dismayd, / Ne in that stownd wist, how her self to beare" (III.xi.22.1-2). Hamilton notes the pun on "dismayd"—she is "unmade"⁶⁸—but we may also think of "dis-maid": if her quest, the definition of her action, is her constant pursuit of Arthegall, to continue on, "forward footing," then this "dreadfull horror [which] did all entraunce choke," would refuse the very identity she is destined to embrace. Here, in this "dis-made" state, Britomart knows not "how her self to beare."

It is no surprise that the next lines focus on her contact with "that cruel element": The elemental encounter is characterized in terms of action ("assayed"), psychology ("feared"), and physical pain ("suffren") (III.xi.22). The crucial fifth line, the turn of the entire stanza, underscores the central problem of proximity to the nonhuman element, which we considered in Chrysgonee and Guyon: what occurs to human agency in exposure to elemental contact? This problem leads to the larger allegorical, and moral, question: how can this Knight of Chastity "approchen," stand in any proximity with to "flaming fire" that has consumed so many of Book III's lovers? "For daunger vaine it were, to haue assayd / That cruell element, which all things feare, / Ne none can suffer to approchen neare" (III.xi.22.3-5). Britomart anticipates the role of the good empiricist in this argument, making considerable practical sense: her focus lies on the nature of "that

⁶⁸ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 392.

cruell element” fire, defined by its psychological effect on “all things,” and the pain it inflicts when any “approchen near” (proximity).

The “cruell element” phenomenalizes that “hard beginne” of which Merlin warned earlier in Book III: “let no whit thee dismay / The hard beginne, that meets thee in the door / And with sharpe fits thy tender heart oppreseth sore” (III.iii.21.7-9). Upon seeing Arthegall’s image in Merlin’s mirror, Britomart comes as close to the condition of vulnerability of Amoret as she will be throughout the narrative: “sharpe fits thy tender heart oppreseth sore” indicates a violence—if less graphic, perhaps no less traumatic—to Britomart’s heart, as Busirane’s “cruell steele, which thrild [Amoret’s] dying hart” (III.xii.38.1). Love, in this “hard beginne,” asserts a power over her: specifically, the power to prevent action. The “subject,” Aristotle says in the *Metaphysics*, is “the thing that suffereth, as the water is the subiect whereon the fire induceth the shape of heating, for here the water is said to be passiue, and the fire actiue” (I.12).⁶⁹ Spenser leaves Britomart in a similar conundrum to that of the other lovers in Book III: she, too, becomes the subject of erotic desires, and suffers from the cause. Her encounter with the flames intensifies her subjugation, emphasizing her contact with, attachment, and relation to erotic desire as an elemental nonhuman entity.

And yet, when Scudamour validates the force of this entity, “for neither may / This fire be quencht by any witt or might, / Ne yet by any meanes remou’d away” (III.xi.23.6-8), Britomart strikingly changes tack and presents an argument for attempting the flames. In an example of the humanist argumentative practice of *in utramque partem* (“arguing from opposite sides”), she forms a position which shifts the “matter” of the

⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon (New York: The Modern Library, 2001).

argument from that “cruell element,” and its inherent properties, to her own “noble cheuisaunce” and the qualities required for it to persist: “for shameful thing / Yt were t’abandon noble cheuisaunce,” she says, “For shewe of perill, without venturing: / Rather let try extremities of chaunce, / Then enterprised praise for dread to disaunce” (III.xi.24.5-9). Britomart’s argument reduces the inherent properties of “that cruell element”—which “all things feare” and “ne none can suffer to approchen neare”—into “shewe of perill.” What was “daunger vaine” to assay is now “noble cheuisaunce” and “venturing.” According to the terms of the first argument, the attempt to overcome something so frightening and painful is an unreasonable risk; in the second, it is shameful to abandon an enterprise for mere “shewe of perill,” *without* attempting the challenge. Certainty becomes show; “danger vaine,” “noble” action. According to the terms of the second argument, the performance—Britomart’s action, her enterprise, and “noble cheuisaunce”—trumps the flame; in fact, the performance redefines the element, redefines the encounter.⁷⁰

Given the tropological problem presented by the nonhuman throughout Book III, Spenser requires this elemental encounter to validate what chastity is. Chastity is defined in this performance, in contact with the flames, and here is where Spenser diverges from its etymology, in the Latin *castus*, “cut off”: for Britomart’s triumph is not in her isolation or removal from the world (although Belphebe serves as an example of this),

⁷⁰ The definitions of “cheuisaunce” in the *OED* offer a richer understanding of the term, and also describe Spenser’s “misuse” of it: “8a. Regarded as the action of the lender: The furnishing of funds, money-lending on security. Also, app. The lending of goods, etc., for profit; and sometimes, merely, Dealing for profit; 8b. Misused by Spenser and others after him, who have erroneously confounded the word with *chevance*, *chivalry*, *chevauchee*, etc.: Enterprise, performance; chivalrous enterprise or achievement; expedition on horseback; chivalry; prowess, etc.” The *OED* cites the following example from *The Shepheardes Cal.* May 92: “They maken many a wrong cheuisaunce [EK gloss., Cheuisaunce, sometime of Chaucer vsed for gaine: sometime of other for spoyle, or bootie, or enterprise, and sometime for chiefdome].” “† ‘chevisance, n.1”. *OED Online*. December 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/31461?rskey=ayQ7Y4&result=1&isAdvanced=false> (accessed February 08, 2015).

but in the performance of her quest, in her engagement with that world, and that union which will produce the Tudor dynasty. As her encounter with the flames describes, her performance transforms a *physis* into a *technis*.

When Britomart does traverse the flames, Spenser highlights that what we are truly witnessing is a contact between forces, Britomart's "might" versus the "force" of the flames, which, at the close of the stanza "reuolt." These forces are linked through her intent to "proue" her power: "Therewith resolu'd to proue her vtmost might, / Her ample shield she threw before her face, / And her swords point directing her forward right, / Assayld the flame, the which eftesoones gaue place" (III.xi.25.1-4). As noted in my previous chapter, in which I discussed the etymology of the word "probate," "prove" is derived from classical Latin *probāre*, meaning "to test, to examine, to put to the proof, to approve, commend, to authorize, sanction, to prove, demonstrate."⁷¹ In that analysis, I commented how his etymology emphasizes the empirical, or experimental, epistemological relation the inventory fosters with material goods. In the context of Britomart's actions, Spenser's "proue" exists in a much different sense: "to proue her vtmost might" operates less in the sense of testing and examining, than in sanctioning, commending, and demonstrating. This sense of "proue" is about the sanctioning of the law, specifically, God's law and her place in "eternall prouidence" (III.iii.24). It is, hence, a nomological performance, but one which justifies the law as much in its enactment as in its inherent basis in the law.

The proof becomes evident in the careful arrangement of Britomart's armor in action: "Her ample shield she threw before her face, / And her swords point directing her

⁷¹ "probate, n." OED Online. June 2014. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/151701?rskey=xAl7dG&result=1> (accessed July 13, 2014).

forward right.” The face, Julian Yates suggests, is a “site of figuration, [...] a zone of emergence or horizon, where signs are linked to matter, enabling action, organizing practice, and producing narrative.”⁷² Ultimately, “faces transform the body into a surface on which signs form for us to read. They enable us to convert what we see as a wrinkle, a smile, a nose, a frown, a wink, a lazy eye—into what we call an ‘expression.’”⁷³ In covering her face, Britomart refuses this basic zone of legibility.

Of course, as we observed in her initial encounter with Guyon and Arthur, Britomart’s shield has problematized the issue of legibility from the start—the “goodly shield / That bore a Lion passant in a golden field” (III.i.4.8-9) was unrecognizable to Guyon and Arthur, even as it may have been legible to Spenser’s English reader. Hamilton notes that the “Lion passant” “was displayed on the arms of Brutus from whom Britomart is descended.”⁷⁴ Furthermore, as Merlin emphasizes in his prophecy, the lion also refers to the offspring of Britomart and Arthegall, Conan, who, “*Like as a Lyon*, that in drowsie caue / Hath long time slept, himselfe so shall he shake, / And coming forth, *shall spred his banner braue* / Ouer the troubled South” (III.iii.30.1-4; emphasis mine). The iconography of Britomart’s shield, therefore, gestures not only toward her heritage but also a future, all of which unfolds as a play between icon (heraldry) and “liuing” history: Britomart’s lion *passant gules* will become the “Lyon,” her son, who, we are told, is “that liuing him” of Arthegell’s “ymage dead” (III.iii.29.2-3). The son, in turn, folds once more through Merlin’s prophetic language into the heraldic iconography, his success *figurable*: “[he] shall spred his banner braue / Ouer the troubled South.”

⁷² Julian Yates, *Error, Misuse and Failure: Object Lessons in the English Renaissance* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 31-32.

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 289.

Britomart's "ample shield" at the flames of Busirane's Porch carries with it, implicitly, this heritage and futurity of historical iconicity, but Spenser refuses the image: here, Britomart's success is guaranteed not by her place in dynastic history (an order conveyed by heraldic iconography), but in a performance that ensures her illegibility, or inscrutability, in the face of the nonhuman flames of erotic desire. Her "ample shield" carries the writing of English history across the threshold, but the *human* face of that history will not remain illegible to the inscriptions of erotic desire.

In contrast to Britomart's shield's covering effect, her sword—with its "point directing her forward right"—is explicitly phallic, as Anderson has recognized, functioning as an almost profane realization of Britomart's earlier warning on attacking the fire, "so we a God inuade" (III.xi.22.9).⁷⁵ But why "inuade" with sword, rather than spear? Although used less frequently than its counterpart, Britomart's sword is in fact especially suited for the flames. It first appears in Castle Joyeous, after Gardante ("looking") sends an "arrow keene" (i.65.2) which "fell intent against the virgin sheene" (III.i.65.4): "Wherewith enrag'd, she fiercely at them flew, / And with her flaming sword about her layd" (III.i.66.1-2). Like her use of the sword at Busirane's Porch, Britomart wields the "flaming sword" to "assayl[]" a dangerous eroticism that has invaded her bed, in this case, in the form of Malecasta.

In this earlier episode, feigning with "fine forgerye" (III.i.53.8) "the outward sparkes of her inburning fire" (III.i.53.3), Malecasta leads Britomart toward a "vulnerable disarmament," as Joseph Campana observes,⁷⁶ because the latter mistakenly assumes

⁷⁵ Anderson, "Britomart's Armor in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*," 80.

⁷⁶ Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012), 187.

(“misconstruing”) “that from like inward fire that outward smoke had steemd” (III.i.55.8-9). Britomart’s misreading relies on the epistemological tensions inherent between “inward fire” and “outward smoke,” Malecasta’s “false instilled fire” (III.i.56.3) and her “faire semblaunce” (III.i.54.7). These tensions revolve around the trope of fire, as Spenser asks Britomart—and, implicitly, the reader—how one determines what kind of desire, exactly, that trope is mediating. Although Campana finds fault in Britomart’s lack of openness—specifically, “[her] rejecting a kind of vulnerability, an openness to the pain of others”⁷⁷—if anything, it seems Britomart is *too open* to Malecasta, showing herself to be an undiscerning reader, who naively assumes the phenomena before her are generated from a similar libidinal source. Britomart’s problem is the reader’s, and Spenser’s too: the trope of fire inhabits a “substitutive relationship” for libidinal desire, and, in doing so, leaves us to guess toward which target those flames point, what “vector” or “directional motion” they indicate.⁷⁸

“Oft fire is without smoke, / And perill without show,” Una warns Redcross, in the very first mention of fire in *The Faerie Queene* (I.i.12.4-5), explicitly signalling the problematic relation between flame and sign. As Hamilton notes, though, “Una inverts the common proverb: ‘there is no fire without smoke’ in order to adapt it to the knight’s state,”⁷⁹ suggesting that *the relation itself* is capable of manipulation. With Malecasta,

⁷⁷ Ibid., 188. In his interest in vulnerability and pain, Campana argues that the love-sick Malecasta should be taken as a sympathetic figure, especially because, ultimately, although she invades Britomart’s bed, “she doesn’t touch Britomart,” 187. Such a perspective misses the point of the episode: it is not about sexual violation in a physical sense, but, rather, violation in a representational sense. The desires of Malecasta and Britomart, as Spenser’s narrator emphasizes throughout Book III, are of two *different* kinds, and must be treated as such. Our sympathy for Malecasta can only go so far, as the episode suggests with Britomart’s misreading of the superficial, “outward” qualities of Malecasta’s performance: she may appear to suffer the same erotic pangs as Britomart, but they are of a fundamentally different “inward” source.

⁷⁸ De Man, “Pascal’s Allegory of Persuasion,” 56.

⁷⁹ Hamilton, *The Faerie Queene*, 34. Hamilton finds the attribution of this proverb to Una’s phrase in Charles G. Smith, *Spenser’s Proverb Lore: With Special Reference to His Use of the Sententiae of Leonard Culman and Publilius Syrus* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 263.

Spenser explores what occurs when we, and the Knight of Chastity, are bound to a surface of signs governed by the indeterminacy of the trope of fire. Malecasta's bedroom intrusion stages a series of movements past the outward signs of the sleeping Britomart to the disarmed knight. "And to her bed approaching, first she proou'd, / Whether she slept or wakte, with her softe hande / She softly felt, if any member moou'd, / And lent her wary eare to vnderstand, / If any puffe for breath, or signe of sence shee fond" (III.i.60.5-9). From Malecasta's perspective, Britomart is a collection of outward signs loosely affiliated with the rhythms of the body. After she correctly reads these signs, Malecasta peels back another layer, "th'embroderd quilt": "And by her side her selfe she softly layd, / Of euery finest fingers touch affrayd" (III.i.61.3-5). As Britomart is slowly unfolded before our eyes, through Malecasta's reading of her outward "signe[s] of sense" and uplifting of "th'embroderd quilt," the repeated emphasis on "she" and "her" blurs the two characters, until both are aligned in the parallel structure of "and by her side her selfe she softly layde." In the parallelism enabled by this bare surface contact, how do we know the difference between Britomart and Malecasta? How do we differentiate their inner fires, if both can be rendered as a collection of phenomenal "signe[s] of sence"? And, lastly, might we, the reader, make the same mistake as Britomart has, in judging the "outward smoke" for an "inward fire" within *her* that does not exist?

Just as the "false instilled fire" (III.i.56.4) appears as if it could consume all of the inhabitants of Castle Joyeous, including our heroine, Britomart wields her "flaming sword." In doing so, she reasserts her erotic control, reminding us that she is something more than surfaces, more than the "virgin sheene" (65.4) of "soft silken skin" (65.7): her erotic desire is, in fact, inseparable from her actions, her adventure, and its ultimate

fulfillment with Arthegall. Britomart's "flaming sword," therefore, disrupts the tropological formation which situates fire as the conduit between outer surfaces and inner depths, and posits instead the trope of fire-in-use, control and management of the flames through the tool/weapon of the sword. The effect of this trope—and of the tool, for that matter—is to create space between Britomart and her attackers: "Here, there, and euery where about her swayd / Her wrathfull steele, that none mote abyde" (III.i.665-6), the "steele" allowing her to reassert her difference from the inhabitants of Castle Joyeous, and get safely out the door.

If, however, Britomart's use of the "flaming sword" shifts the logic of the trope of fire from inside and outside to action and use, echoing her argumentative shift at the gates of Busirane's House, the question of the relation the flames have to the sword remains. In other words, how much do the flames—the rage of her passions, her arousal or overreaction in this form of militant chastity—guide the sword, and how much does the sword guide the flames?⁸⁰ The "flaming sword" challenges our sense of whether Britomart controls her desires, or whether they control her. It is, in short, desire wielded as a blunt instrument to ward off contact, when, in fact, as the flames at Busirane's Porch testify, Britomart must "approchen," inhabit the fire (if only momentarily), and "assayle[]" the flames, for chastity to find a place *within* erotic desire.

This is precisely what Britomart's assault on the flames at Busirane's Porch, with its careful arrangement of (protective) shield and (penetrating) sword, achieves: her contact, and reconciliation, with the fires of erotic desire. Scudamour fails this very test

⁸⁰ In this sense, I think Campana is correct in recognizing Britomart's failure in openness, but it is not a failure to recognize the shared pain and vulnerability of others' lovesickness—for Britomart's "inburning fire" is *not* the same as all other lover's. Rather, it is a failure of openness to her own desires, a heavy-handed channelling of libidinal energies toward a sensibility of chastity as "cut off" and unconnected, precisely the version of chastity that Britomart's quest for Arthegall challenges.

because his desire, and passions, are too hot: “With greedy will, and enuious desire, / [He] bad the flames to yield him way” (III.xi.26.3-4). The flames “would not obay, / His threatful pride,” we are told (III.xi.26.5-6). In other words, they do not respond to human passions, or desires, nor do they obey human discourse. Britomart’s assault succeeds in its simplicity: “Her ample shield she threw before her face, / And her swords point directing her forward right” (III.xi.25.4-5). Her force—“might” (III.xi.25.1)—is guided by a direction (“forward right”) in the providential scheme which leads her to Arthegall (a direction which was notably cut off when she first encountered the flames with Scudamour and they “enforced them their forward footing to reuoke” [III.xi.21.9]). More precisely, with face covered, she is a (non)figure shielded from legibility, who nevertheless penetrates the flames. We might even say, albeit a bit perversely, her action is portrayed as an unfigurable, primal phallic fuck into the “flaming fire” (III.xi.21.6). “Shield” and “point” protect the subject while “assayl[ing]” what lies without; the image of Britomart-in-action exists in a space of zegro degree interiority, and zero degree external contact.

IV. “Eftesoones gaue place”: Girl Finds Space

The central issue in the movement that brings Britomart into proximity with the flames concerns, as it has throughout Book III, the relationship between human and nonhuman agency: does *eros* control chastity, or can chastity govern *eros*? With respect to tropological formations, the question is a bit different: to what extent does the reliance on (nonhuman) fire as the trope of/for erotic desire characterize the very nature of that desire in chastity? How can we grasp chastity in the midst, or mediation, of the

heliotrope and its fiery variants? Agency and meaning here converge: can the Knight of Chastity control her own destiny amidst the flames of erotic desire? Can Spenser, the poet, control the meaning of that chastity, as a human performance, amidst a trope that so heavily relies on the qualities of the nonhuman?

As with the “flaming sword” in the Castle Joyeous, Britomart’s assault will work to create a space for her amidst the flames, only here it is within the fire itself, as Spenser challenges both the logical and natural rules which govern the element. Poised with shield and sword, Britomart “assayld the flame, the which eftesoones gaue place. / And did it selfe diuide with equall space” (III.xi.25.4-5). This fourth line opens, notably, with the action “assayld,” a human intervention, and proceeds to describe *its* effect on the flame (“eftesoones gaue place”), in a rhetorical condensation of cause and effect. Such a relation of cause and effect does not, we should know, tend to work this way when it comes to the fiery element. In the classical tradition, fire is most often associated with efficient causation. Cicero in the *Topica*, following Aristotle, includes “fire burns” as his first example to distinguish between efficient and material causation:

There are then two kinds of causes; one which of its own force to a certainty produces that effect which is subordinate to it; as, ‘Fire burns;’ the other is that which has no nature able to produce the effect in question, though still that effect cannot be produced without it; as, if any one were to say, that ‘brass was the cause of a statue; because a statue cannot be made without it.’⁸¹

⁸¹ Cicero, *Topica*, XVI.

In other words, there is the material cause, which must be worked upon in order to produce the effect in question, and there is the efficient cause, which is self-sustaining in the cause-effect relationship, making it more of a principle than a material to be used.

Renaissance rhetorical and logical treatises followed this classical division, relying repeatedly on the example of “fire burns” to illuminate the quality of efficient causation. Thomas Wilson, in *The Rule of Reason*, calls the efficient cause “the working cause, by whose meanes, thynges are brought to passe,” and goes on to note, “Of those that are workyng causes, some by nature bring thynges to passe, some by aduisement, and by a fore purposed choyse.”⁸² Similarly, for Abraham Fraunce: “The efficient woorketh eyther of it selfe and by his owne proper force, or els accidentally and by some external power.”⁸³ In each case, Wilson and Fraunce expound on their definitions of that which “woorketh” “by his owne proper force” with reference to fire, Fraunce observing, simply, that an efficient cause is “as the windes blowe, the fire heateth, or with aduice and voluntary deliberation as man in his seuerall actions.”⁸⁴

Wilson offers lengthier examples of “thynges [that] worke by nature (and that necessarily) which lacke knowlege to chuse this, or that, & haue no iudgement, to discerne thynges”:

As the Sonne, the fire, herbes, precious stones. The sonne, euen by nature, geueth light to the daie, and cannot other wise doo. the fire burneth naturally Herbes kepe their vertue of necessitie. The Adamant draweth

⁸² Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason*. The page number is not included on the page which includes this citation. Electronically, the page is available on “document image [84]” and “document image [85].”

⁸³ Abraham Fraunce, *The laviuers logike exemplifying the praecepts of logike by the practise of the common lawe, by Abraham Fraunce* (London: William How, for Thomas Gubbin, and T. Newman, 1588), 11; EEBO STC (2nd ed.) / 11344.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

Iron, euen by nature. And so the bloud stone, stoppeth bloud. Some of these causes worke by the force and violence of nature, some by an outward powre, beyng strained thervnto. Thei worke by the force and violence of nature, whose beginnyng, is within theimselfes: beyng ayded by none other outward thing. As fire burneth, euen by the natural force of heate, which is in the substance therof.⁸⁵

With his reference to the “Sonne” and “fire,” both which “worke by the force and violence of nature,” Wilson furthers our understanding of Derrida’s misgivings over the heliotrope and my own consideration of tropes of fire in Book III. It is not only that such metaphors are imperfect insofar as “they give us too little knowledge because one of the terms directly or indirectly implied in the substitution (the sensible sun) cannot be properly known.”⁸⁶ Rather, “Sonne” and “fire” don’t seem to need us at all: they are self-sustaining, *nonhuman* circuits of cause and effect that need not concern themselves with the sexual politics of chastity in sixteenth century Elizabethan England. In condensing cause and effect into a single line, Spenser frames Britomart as a force equal to what Thomas Blundeville deems the “Cause Absolute” of nature.⁸⁷ Chastity, it seems, can intervene, involving itself with the self-sustaining, nonhuman circuit of cause and effect.

The performance of chastity challenges the rules of metaphysics as much as it does the rules of logic. In the line that follows Britomart’s assault on the flame, Spenser amplifies what it means that it “eftesoones gaue place”: “And did it selfe diuide with

⁸⁵ Thomas Wilson, *The Rule of Reason*, 72; EEBO STC (2nsd ed.) 25809.

⁸⁶ Derrida, “White Mythology,” 52.

⁸⁷ Thomas Blundeville, *The arte of logick Plainely taught in the English tongue, according to the best approued authors. Very necessary for all students in any profession, how to defend any argument against all subtill sophisters, and cauelling schismatikes, and how to confute their false syllogismes, and captious arguments* (1599; Rpt. London: William Stansby, 1617), 104-105; EEBO STC (2nd ed.) / 3143.

equall space.” Britomart’s reference to the fire as “that cruell element” (III.xi.22.4) earlier in the episode signals its place as one of the four elements, and here, Spenser, through Britomart, achieves the miraculous: the division of elemental nature. “Element,” Aristotle observes in the *Metaphysics*, includes the following characteristics:

(I) the primary component immanent in a thing, and indivisible in kind into other kinds; e.g., the elements of speech are the parts of which speech consists and into which it is ultimately divided, while they are no longer divided into other forms of speech different in kind from them. (27-35)⁸⁸

In other words, the defining characteristic of an element is indivisibility. And yet, division is precisely what Britomart accomplishes. The act is also a rhetorical division (*divisio*): “And did it selfe diuide with equall space” is the fifth line of the stanza, thereby placing the line as the physical divider between the first quatrain and the last quatrain. Curiously, Britomart is still not given entire agency over the flame: she “assayld” it, and it “gaue space, / And did *it self diuide* with equall space” (emphasis mine). As an element, fire cannot divide. Here, though, fire takes on, or causes through its own yielding, the effect of division. This is, perhaps, as close as we will get to the anthropomorphization of the flame: that it possesses a “self” which can “diuide,” and that Britomart has entered the very nature of the element to achieve this effect.

No longer self-identifying, self-sustaining, or self-efficient, the flame is manageable, framed in “equall space.” The inversion, or perversion, of properties we associate with “that cruell element” (III.xi.22.4) is expressed directly in the final line of the stanza, which succinctly informs us, “so to her yold the flames, and did their force

⁸⁸ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. by Richard McKeon.

reuolt” (III.xi.25.9). Indeed, the very properties—the force—that we associate with fire as an element “reuolt” here under the sway of Britomart’s—and Spenser’s—performative (and rhetorical) might. Their force acquiesces to the greater power of chastity, defying the very logical and elemental characteristics which define them.

In Britomart’s action, Spenser also works to transform our conception of elemental fire into something that can be shaped—to its very core—by performance. The ending rhymes—“might,” “face,” and “right”—emphasize the links between force, figuration, and law that Britomart’s performance sustains. It is a triad which is further emphasized in the simile that takes up the latter half of the stanza: “That through she passed, as a thonder bolt / Perceth the yielding ayre, and doth displace / The soring clouds into sad showres ymolt” (III.xi.25.6-8). Anderson argues that this image is “distinctively Jovian; that Jove’s cerebral offspring Minerva can also be represented hurling the thunderbolt makes it no less so. Like father, like son; is it really like daughter, too?”⁸⁹ The constellation of force, figuration, and law also finds a theological place in *The Book of Psalms*: “The voice of the Lord strikes with flashes of lightning” (29:7). The shared agency we considered in Chrysogonee’s conception here becomes a shared elemental being: the force, figurative power, and law of the flames meets the force, figurative capacity, and law of chastity. Their modes of being participate in one another, neither flame nor body dominating, each governed by the performance of the chaste knight.

As we enter the point of this grouping’s effect on the flame, the closing end rhymes shift to “place” and “space,” words which have as much significance in rhetorical registers as the natural, philosophical, or theological: in fact, by placing the division in

⁸⁹ Anderson, “Britomart’s Armor in Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*,” 80.

“equall space” in the fifth, central line, Spenser signals the union between the rhetorical and physical. “Place,” in humanist rhetorical practices, refers to *topoi* or commonplace (*locus communis*). As Joan Marie Lechner observes, “Aristotle’s definition of a place or *topos* is a ‘place where’ one finds arguments, or a pigeonhole in the mind (as Lane Cooper expands the meaning).”⁹⁰ She continues: “One can think of a *topos* as an abstract general term similar to the categories and ‘predicables’ (genus, species, etc.) inviting analysis. Such would be the definition, division, causes, effects, adjuncts, witnesses, and the like. These would rarely occur as headings in commonplace books.”⁹¹ In rhetorical theory, “place” distinguishes the category whereby argumentative, dialectical thought is contained and, then, expressed in oratory or writing. It was a highly fraught category of knowledge, where theorists debated over its standing at the intersections of logic and rhetoric. As Lechner notes in one example, “Melanchthon in his desire to unify all knowledge attempts, in his *Elementorum rhetorices* (1519), to include every function of the commonplace in his explanation: ‘The commonplace contains the major premise of the syllogism; it contains every plan for persuading and moving minds to virtue or away from vice; the places are fonts of ornaments and regions of arguments; the places contain every kind of doctrine which are the font and summation of the art.’”⁹² Despite the logical claims in Melanchthon’s assessment (in particular the relation to the syllogism which he posits), according to Lechner, the conception of the commonplace ultimately held strong rhetorical connections: “[the commonplace reaches full maturity only when it has been amplified and distinguished by the rhetorical embellishments which adorn it, by

⁹⁰ Joan Marie Lechner, *Renaissance Concepts of the Commonplaces*, Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1962), 66.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Ibid., 75.

the content of virtue or vice, and when it has been brought into the formal speech for teaching, delighting, and moving to action.”⁹³

What could “eftsoones gaue place” mean in the context of this tradition? Does it mean amplify within an already existing *topos*, or, instead, allow for a further amplification where there was not a “place” before? Spenser, through Britomart, suggests that the flame gives way for the opportunity of action, that Britomart’s performance opens, within the very composition of fire, a *topos* where there once was no place. The element itself undergoes a change: “diuides itself into equall space” indicates the moment where *physis* becomes *techne*, where Britomart and Spenser use (or make use) of the flames—in a “use” that is at once rhetorical, juridical, ontological, and even theological—that have been so troubling throughout Book III.

If it is a fantasy of rhetorical and physical control, of the power of human performance in the world, it is one starkly resonant with the effect *eros* has in that world. No less a figure than Socrates was displaced by its force. In his lengthiest and most enduring treatment on the subject of love, Plato imagines the famed philosopher uncharacteristically outside of Athens’ walls, as Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff observe. To inhabit *eros*, Socrates is literally “out of place” (*atopotatos*).⁹⁴ Spenser recognizes this force. The poetics of *The Faerie Queene* inhabit it: its version of chastity is less an intangible ideal hovering above the text than a living poetic force, set in balance within and against *eros*, creating its own place.

The heliotrope and its fiery variants are reconciled not with “pure” and “proper” knowledge, but through a performative negotiation with both the limits and capacities of

⁹³ Ibid., 74.

⁹⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans. Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (New York: Hackett, 1995), ix.

mediation. The functional interface between the physical world and idealized *sententiae*, that circuit board in which the physical world is wired through a set (or sets) of *verba* toward the generation of an idea, means that Chastity exists *only in* the rhetorical performance, in the play between the limits of rhetoric and conditions of possibility afforded by our world. That Britomart—and Spenser—flaunt the rules of elemental logic and metaphysics to “assayl[]” the flames at Busirane’s Porch suggests not an ignorance of *physis* but the ambition of poetic *technis*, to make the flames usable: in short, to allow that the uncertainties in the heliotrope give way to performative measures and modes of shared agency, whereby human and nonhuman work in concert to achieve a space that is neither a purely human ideal of Chastity, nor elemental lust. The knowledge of chastity lies in between, “out of place,” in a *topos* that is neither ideal nor base.

In this final sense, Spenser may find an unlikely ally in Gaston Bachelard, who argues that our knowledge of fire (and its use) begins with sexual knowledge, insofar as “the objective attempt to produce fire by rubbing is suggested by entirely intimate experiences.”⁹⁵ Rather than empirical observation of the flames, Bachelard suggests that it is human recognition of the metaphorical flame of desire that prompts an understanding of fire as *techne*. “It is in this direction,” he contends, “that the circuit between the phenomenon of fire by rubbing and its reproduction [as *techne*, for human use] is the shortest. The love act is the first scientific hypothesis about the objective reproduction of fire.”⁹⁶ In her encounter with the flames, Britomart suggests something similar: the Knight of Chastity knows this fire, in a deeply physical and ontological, and perhaps spiritual, sense. She has been dislocated by it, set “out of place” by its violence. The

⁹⁵ Gaston Bachelard, *The Psychoanalysis of Fire*, trans. Alan C.M. Ross (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), 23.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

meeting of knight and flame begins with the basic knowledge, as perhaps all encounters between human and nonhuman do.

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