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Playing Dead: Staging Corpses, Ghosts, and Statues in Early Modern Drama

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PLAYING DEAD:
STAGING CORPSES, GHOSTS, AND STATUES IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

By

SARAH OUTTERTON-MURPHY

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in English in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Abstract

PLAYING DEAD: STAGING CORPSES, GHOSTS, AND STATUES IN EARLY MODERN DRAMA

by

Sarah Outterson-Murphy

Advisor: Tanya Pollard

Semi-animate corpses, physically powerful ghosts, and natural looking statues serve a powerful metatheatrical purpose in early modern drama. Such liminal bodies, which I define as figures caught between the fictional body and the living actor, model the relation between playgoer, actor, and playwright as they work together to produce theatrical fictions. The dramatized impact of liminal bodies on their onstage spectators draws playgoers' attention to their own experience of the liminally present theatrical world. Such displays of the power and pleasure of artifice paradoxically free theater from the constraining obligation of so-called accurate representation and highlight the pleasure playgoers and actors can find in participating together in imaginative yet embodied theatrical fictions. Ultimately, exploring why and how early modern liminal bodies worked onstage deepens our understanding of how theatrical embodiment shapes playgoer experience.
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I dedicate this dissertation to Bobby and Theoden, with thanks for their patience and joy.
Textual Note

In quoting from early modern English I expand standard abbreviations and regularize the use of i/j and u/v, except within footnotes and bibliography to improve reference searchability. All in-text dates for plays are first performance date, estimated or known, unless otherwise noted.
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Introduction: Defining liminal bodies

In Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (1626), the villainous Caesar tries to terrorize his restless subjects by publicly torturing two senators, Rusticus and Sura. Yet though the “Hangmen torment ‘em,” the stage direction notes, the senators remain “still smiling.”¹ This theme of martyrs’ supernatural strength under torture might not seem particularly noteworthy alone. However, in the context of a play “built around the reactions of its onstage spectators to its plays-within,” the torture scene becomes a theatrical spectacle in two senses.² First, it affects characters watching onstage: Caesar tortures in order to control his spectators with fear, but the senators’ courage provokes pity instead. Then, for playgoers, such a self-consciously theatrical spectacle in turn highlights the senators’ portrayal by actors, whose real bodies Caesar—a mere character—cannot ultimately harm. That is, as Nova Myhill has argued, the senators “respond to what Caesar perceives as real torments as though they were what the theatre audience must recognize them as: stage torments.”³ Full of his prowess as playwright/tyrant but blind to the greater influence of the actor’s unharmed body, Caesar cannot understand how Rusticus and Sura resist his torture; playgoers, however, can. As smiling actor and tortured character emerge from the same performing bodies, the scene creates for playgoers a space between fiction and reality.

Within *The Roman Actor*’s pervasive attention to theatricality, which makes the play almost a retrospective on early modern drama, the torture scene exemplifies a larger trope whose

² Joanne Rochester, *Staging Spectatorship in the Plays of Philip Massinger* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2010), 1.
importance has gone unrecognized. Early modern English drama’s focus on the dissonance between the bodies of actors and characters has hitherto been obvious mainly in cross-dressing plots, as when in William Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* (c. 1599) Rosalind’s disguise as a boy comments ironically on her boy actor’s obvious disguise as “if I were a woman.” In this dissertation I uncover a theatrical pattern, which I call “liminal bodies,” that encompasses both Shakespeare’s cross-dressed Rosalind and Massinger’s tortured yet smiling senators. The word “liminal” suggests a position across a threshold or boundary, “betwixt and between.” I adopt the term here to name theatrical figures whose ambiguous status in the play-world unexpectedly mimics or ironizes the actor’s bodily traits. I demonstrate the contours of this trope by focusing on three particular examples: semi-animate corpses, physically powerful ghosts, and seemingly natural statues. Through their ambiguous status between death and life, ghostliness and embodiment, or artifice and natural flesh, I will show, these theatrical corpses, ghosts, and statues create a tension between actor and character that conspicuously shapes their spectators as well.

The word “liminal” describes both the theatrical body itself and its effect on spectators. First, liminal bodies take on a paradoxical physical status within the play-world, as when Massinger’s senators seem unpained despite torture; such boundary-shattering ambiguity


6 N.M. Imbracsio has used the term “liminal” in a similar way to describe the theatrical corpse as “a liminal entity between life and death, between action and inaction,” in “Corpses Revealed: The Staging of the Theatrical Corpse in Early Modern Drama” (PhD Diss., University of New Hampshire, 2010), 8.
highlights the presence of the actor’s body rather than concealing it behind the theatrical illusion.

Corpses, ghosts, and statues become liminal bodies when plays present them as more alive, powerful, and embodied—in other words, more like the actor who performs them—than we expect. Further, these performing bodies affect others physically and mentally, as their actorly power reverberates through watchers onstage and off. For example, the senators’ unlikely courage in the face of torture, enabled in one sense by their status as actors, invites first watching characters and then playgoers to resist Caesar’s spectacular control in turn. Liminal corpses, ghosts, and statues work the same way. As these theatrical bodies inhabit the space between character and actor, their liminality extends to their spectators, bringing us into a space between reality and fiction as well. Within this liminal space created by conspicuously embodied theatrical figures, playgoers can experience profound bodily and emotional sympathies with fictional characters. My exploration of liminal bodies thus ultimately models an innovative method for investigating early modern audience response. Liminal bodies reveal and orchestrate reciprocal relationships between the bodies of character, actor, and playgoer. Placing contemporary cognitive studies and early modern theories of humoral response in conversation with close readings of early modern drama and its staging practices, I contend that liminal bodies use playgoers’ awareness of the actor’s body to intensify a play’s physical and emotional impact.

Particularly in nine early modern plays first performed from 1585 to 1614, corpses, ghosts, and statues take on the qualities of the living actor who performs them. Some plays ultimately affirm the presence of the actor by coming to life, as when Juliet awakens from her drugged sleep in *Romeo and Juliet*, Falstaff arises from the battlefield in *1 Henry IV*, or the statue of Hermione revives in *The Winter’s Tale*. Others tantalize us with the hope that the actor’s life might be truly present but ultimately reassert a separation between actor and
character, as with Cordelia’s apparent breath in *King Lear* or the powerfully physical ghost of *Hamlet.* As my examples suggest, many of the plays I discuss are by William Shakespeare, who of all early modern playwrights showed the most sustained interest in liminal bodies and their effects. Yet I also examine in great detail the liminal bodies in Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy,* Thomas Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy,* and John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi,* along with corpses, ghosts, and statues in a multitude of more minor plays by other playwrights, performed between 1559 and 1642. It may seem that these narratives of lifelike corpses, embodied ghosts, or natural statues might easily have nothing to do with the body of the actor, deriving not from a playwright but from existing non-theatrical sources. However, as a rule the plays I discuss have actually shaped their plot, characterization, and metaphors to intensify references to the lifelike appearances of corpses, ghosts, and statues. By highlighting the disjunction between these dead figures and their performance by living actors, I argue, playwrights address larger cultural tensions concerning theatrical performance itself.

Liminal bodies intervene in early modern discourse about the effects of theatrical performance in two opposite but complementary ways. First, by drawing attention to the actor’s body, liminal bodies suggest that theatrical fiction is transparent and thus not deceptive or dangerously seductive, as early modern antitheatrical writers feared. Instead, theatrical fiction becomes flatteringly dependent on playgoers’ attentive cooperation to have any power, and playgoers who remain aware of the actor’s presence cannot be deceived into imitating immoral spectacles or into thinking that a play is reality. Liminal bodies thus invite playgoers to resist—and notice their own resistance to—such seductions of theater.

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7 For a list of early modern plays with liminal corpses, ghosts, and statues, see Appendix, 219 below.
At the same time, liminal bodies also draw on the actor’s vivid life and embodied power to enliven the seemingly passive bodies of dead corpses, disembodied ghosts, and inanimate statues onstage. The surprising vitality of corpses, ghosts, and statues and the responses they provoke from onstage spectators within the play suggest, that is, that theatrical fiction itself is more alive, natural, or embodied than expected, shaping its spectators’ bodies and emotions through its physical potency. Liminal bodies emphasize the material impact of the actor’s presence, appealing to playgoers’ own physical experience within the shared space of the playhouse in order to provoke a deeper response through humoral and cognitive mechanisms. Even as they ostensibly attempt to deceive us with their fictions of corpses, ghosts, and statues, therefore, liminal bodies exercise playgoers’ capacity to respond to fictions as bodily reality.

Taking what theater theorist Stanton Garner calls a “phenomenological approach” to theatrical embodiment reveals a paradox: “the actor’s body is eclipsed, denaturalized by the character’s fictional presence,” yet simultaneously “the actor’s body never stops asserting itself in its material, physiological facticity.”8 Whether through the rise and fall of a corpse’s chest after a vigorous fight scene, the audible tramp of a ghost’s approach, or the quiver of a statue’s extended hand, a living actor’s representation of the dead is always imperfect and provisional. Yet instead of seeking to hide such deficiencies, early modern playwrights daringly exploited the paradoxical bodies of theater to distinctive effect. The living corpses, embodied ghosts, and natural statues of early modern plays point ultimately to the theatrical body itself, “jointly claimed by actor and character.”9 Liminal bodies, in their potency both within and without the play-world, ultimately work to extend playgoer investment, engagement, and desire. As Judith

9 Ibid.
Butler writes, “desire is never fulfilled [...] the fulfillment of desire would be its radical self-cancellation.”¹⁰ By balancing a physical sense of the play’s impact with an awareness that the play is not real, liminal bodies whet desire for the fantasy of the thing itself: the miraculously breathing corpse, the corporeal ghost, or the statue melting into flesh, as representatives of the entire imaginative world the play brings to life.

**Staging practices and the functions of embodied metatheatricality**

In exploring why plays so often emphasize the lifelike appearance of a corpse, ghost, or statue, I build on a critical tradition arguing that early modern drama demands a double experience of the actor’s body and the character’s. Bert O. States suggests, for example, that boy companies’ comedies depended on an ironic “double vision” to see both adult character and child actor, as if working, in Michael Shapiro’s phrase, through “the disparity between the actors and their roles.”¹¹ Stephen Booth argues for a similar effect in actors’ doubling of two or more


roles. These arguments illuminate ways in which early modern theater relied on playgoers to, as William Shakespeare puts it, “piece out our imperfections with your thoughts.” Plays make a virtue out of necessity, according to Alan Dessen, by inviting playgoers “to supply imaginatively what cannot be introduced physically onto the open stage” and to develop thereby a “double consciousness” of stage and play-world. My investigation into the theatrical conventions surrounding corpses, ghosts, and statues seeks to develop more cohesive descriptions and explanations of such self-conscious attention to theatrical materiality.

My work extends previous scholarly attention to the staging conventions and visual vocabulary of early modern theater, which has emerged in the last three decades particularly alongside increased interest in “original practices” performance and playhouses. Perhaps because claims to authentically reconstruct early modern theatrical practices and audience response are difficult to defend, some explorations into this “dual consciousness” of bodies


onstage have focused on how it negotiates cultural or psychological issues, as in New Historicist scholarship that analyzes gender anxieties through the cross-dressing ‘female page’ trope. More recent work on the relation between actor and character, however, has demonstrated the ongoing importance of studying the stage directions, playhouse conditions, and theatrical conventions shaping a text, countering text-centered approaches while simultaneously deepening the historicist engagement with material experience. Within the last decade, for example, scholars have considered the self-conscious performativity of disguise plots, the cognitive engagement generated by the visual differences between supposed twins, the semiotic significance of stage dismemberment, and even the problems of staging statues and corpses. Such work remains crucial, since even the rise of interest in performance has not yet shifted broad disciplinary norms; editions of plays continue to obscure stage directions with unmarked editorial changes, or, more subtly, simply fail to number them, thus treating them as uncitable. My work attends to details of text and staging to investigate how early modern corpses, ghosts, and statues highlight the actor’s body. If it is true that, as Jeremy Lopez argues that “the potential for failure of many


of the theatrical devices indigenous to or inherent in early modern drama is an essential part of understanding their success,” what theatrical purpose might such “potential for failure” serve?\textsuperscript{22}

More broadly, in exploring the function of such risky emphasis on the actor’s body, I engage the long critical tradition on early modern drama’s self-conscious reflexivity—what some have called its “metatheatricality.” Unfortunately, this term has been used to identify such a wide range of staging practices, verbal references, and plot developments that it loses much of its descriptive value. I will not attempt to arbitrate or disentangle all previous meanings here; rather, I explore two major strands of argument about the function of self-aware theatrical practices in order to better define my own intervention between them. Essentially, scholars agree that plays remind us of their own theatricality in order to defend against criticism of theater itself, but differ on whether theater’s strength or weakness necessitates the apology. Individually, however, these perspectives miss the inherent power of the actor’s body. I combine these two approaches to show that liminal bodies defend against both potential critiques. In the process, liminal bodies also support a larger project: emphasizing the shared bodily experience that theater allows.

Anne Righter Barton was among the first to suggest that the early modern drama’s violations of dramatic illusion served a dramaturgical function. Focusing on Shakespeare, Barton argues that direct-address conventions, a heritage from medieval religious drama, demonstrate an increasing disillusionment with theater’s attempts at realism, though she valorizes the way plays-within-plays and “the play metaphor” function to “express the depth of the play world” and link it to reality.\textsuperscript{23} Lionel Abel introduces an important term by arguing that Shakespeare’s \textit{Hamlet} initiated an entire genre, “metatheatre,” which comments ironically on the failure of theatrical

\textsuperscript{22} Lopez, \textit{Theatrical Convention and Audience Response}, 2.

tragedy in a world defined by “two basic postulates: (1) the world is a stage and (2) life is a

dream.” Abel argues that such plays work philosophically to transcend the boundaries between

art and life. A decade later, James Calderwood finds a more practical explanation for what he
called “metadrama” in Shakespeare’s earlier plays, arguing that in his effort to develop a robust

teatrical style Shakespeare stages a battle between poetry and plot, language and action, thereby

metaphorically exploring the problems of “dramatic art itself.” Romeo and Juliet, for example,

contrasts Romeo’s love of verbal “style” with Juliet’s desire for “truth, not form.” Barton

explores the development of self-aware theatrical conventions and introduces the idea that such

conventions could have different functions, while Abel and Calderwood offer different

explanations for why Shakespeare comments on his own art.

More recently, scholars have defined the theatrical functions of self-aware conventions

more precisely. Some, such as Harry Berger, have argued that Shakespeare finds drama

problematically constrained by actuality: the ordinariness of the stage and the distractions of

conditions in the theater. Early modern metatheatricality thus acknowledges that “playgoing is an

imaginary activity” and that plays “cannot adequately represent what they are.” Similarly, Judd

Hubert argues that “art has no greater foe than reality” and plays have to “assert themselves

through the manipulation and even the imagined destruction of their overwhelming other,” and

Bridget Escolme concludes, with Abel, that early modern theater “succeeds by failing,” actors


25 James Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama: The Argument of the Play in Titus

Andronicus, Love’s Labour’s Lost, Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream, and Richard

II (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 5.

26 Ibid., 90-91.

27 Harry Berger, Imaginary Audition in Richard II: Shakespeare on Stage and Page

and play portraying their own failure to fulfill an idealized role.28 As Bert O. States suggests, emphasizing the “gulf between sign and thing” only increases playgoers’ sense of a play’s achievement in bridging that gulf.29 Tiffany Stern proposes that attention to the physical realities of playgoing also works paradoxically to let “the spectators off the hook,” relaxing the tension of “having to add imaginative fancy to what they see in order to believe.”30 From this perspective, theatrical self-consciousness compensates apologetically for the inaccuracies and failures of representation on a bare stage. It flatters playgoers with a feeling of perceptiveness and insight into the play-world, accommodating their suspicious reluctance to fully immerse themselves in the play-world and redirecting any anxieties into a shared “effort to create an alternate reality.”31

Others, particularly Andrew Gurr, have argued that metatheatricality serves quite the opposite purpose within a cultural context that increasingly distrusted the powerful deceptions of


29 States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms*, 55.


spectacle. Gurr argues that the “anti-realist” conventions of early modern theater respond to a cultural fear of illusion by emphasizing a play’s fictionality.\textsuperscript{32} Arguing from a religious perspective, Huston Diehl concludes similarly that early modern plays critiqued their own use of spectacle in order to thrive “in an early Protestant culture that was hostile to other forms of human artifice.”\textsuperscript{33} There is plenty of early modern evidence to support this contention. When playwright Thomas Heywood insists that “To see our youths attired in the habit of women, who knowes not what their intents be?” or Philip Sidney acknowledges that the poet “nothing affirmes and therefore never lyeth” (a statement he supports with an example from classical theater), or Oxford professor William Gager defends university performances to an antitheatricalist on the surprising grounds that students’ acting is more “careless” and lacking in “diligence” than the work of professional players, these artists explicitly defend against accusations that theatricality deceives and seduces.\textsuperscript{34} In other words, self-aware conventions invite early modern playgoers to distance themselves from the play-world and to remember that it is only fiction.

How can we reconcile these two functions when considering a play that highlights the physical link between actor and character? Does such an emphasis on the actor apologize for the weakness of a theatrical illusion, or undercut its dangerous strength? Though they may appear to conflict, these functions actually work together powerfully with the actor’s natural body. As

\textsuperscript{32} Gurr, “Metatheater and the Fear of Playing,” 91.


Diehl and Gurr argue, early modern metatheatricality functioned culturally to disavow the play’s artistic impact, a disenchanting effect that worked all too well on critics such as Berger and Hubert in their concern for the failures of bodily performance. However, an awareness of the actor’s potent body actually intensifies the artistic impact of a play by highlighting the interconnected skills of both actor and playgoer. According to Erika T. Lin, the gap between character and actor paradoxically flatters the actor’s skill, showing off the way “theatre could represent what could not literally be presented.” Theater thus boasts of its ability to materially represent the impossible. And as these “manifest fictions,” in Richard McCoy’s words, demand playgoers’ “serious intellectual engagement and active goodwill” to become real, plays self-consciously invite and instruct their playgoers how to approach plays as interpretive collaborators.

My approach thus goes beyond understanding an emphasis on the actor’s body merely as an apology for the failures of performance that is either too real or not real enough. Even as this attention to the actor’s body serves a cultural function of ostensibly disavowing the play-world’s reality, it simultaneously serves an artistic function of increasing the play-world’s impact through demonstrating the infectious material impact of the actor’s skilled body. Particularly within the physical intimacy of the crowded early modern theater, playgoers and actors might even begin to reflect each other in a shared experience, experiencing not just mental but bodily connection as they work together to make an imaginary character real. In analyzing the way

35 Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, 163; see Keir Elam’s idea that although metatheatrical devices appear to break the theatrical frame, “in practice they are licensed means of confirming the frame by pointing out the pure facticity of the representation,” in *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama*, 1980 (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), 81.

playgoers experience the link between actors and characters, therefore, I also examine, as the next section shows, how playgoers respond to that experience.

**Audience, audiences, spectators, playgoers: Studying early modern response**

Understanding exactly how awareness of actors’ bodies shaped early modern playgoer response is difficult because the bodies of both actors and playgoers are long gone. Unlike text-focused literary or historical analysis, performance studies must describe an embodied experience that happens moment by moment, leaving little evidence behind. As a result, there is little agreement on how to approach what evidence remains about plays’ effect and playgoers’ response. Ought we to talk about the play shaping an audience into “a single collective mind,” or about the “differential response” of individuals responding out of various cultural perspectives?37 Do we focus on the powerfully “shattering” emotional and physical effect of plays, or the interpretive agency of the audience “as a vital partner in the production of meaning”?38 Even the terms themselves become the subject of debate: should we emphasize the effects of spectacle by talking about “spectators,” or more linguistic, auditory effects by referring to the “audience” (or even audiences)?39 These problems of evidence, agency, and nomenclature have all profoundly shaped early modern theatrical response studies. My approach to theatrical response works on two levels. First, I demonstrate how the characters within the play both resist and submit to the

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powerful physical and emotional effects of corpses, ghosts, and statues. Then, I argue, these depicted responses in turn shape playgoers’ responses in complex ways that expect not just imitation but also ironic awareness. Combining literary, cultural, and cognitive approaches, I will ultimately argue that early modern playwrights highlight the physical relationship between characters and actors in order to model and orchestrate playgoers’ theatrical response without diminishing interpretive agency.

My approach differs from the earliest approaches to playgoer response, which focus on the demographic composition of audiences. Alfred Harbage argues that Shakespeare was a populist playwright, while Ann Jennalie Cook proposes that his audience was mainly elite.\(^\text{40}\) Andrew Gurr worked to balance these approaches by emphasizing the diversity of theatrical audiences in class, age, and gender, an argument which more recent evidence, such as Bernard Capp’s analysis of playgoing in prison records, has further supported.\(^\text{41}\) Despite the way that this idea of playgoer diversity has helpfully disrupted assumptions about a unified audience perspective, it is also unlikely, as Bruce McConachie argues, “that different social groups had wholly different emotional and cognitive engagements” with an early modern play.\(^\text{42}\) While my work acknowledges that multiple responses are available to members of a theatrical audience, my focus on the plays themselves also assumes that playwrights designed their plays to generate certain types of emotional and intellectual response.


Certainly, drawing conclusions about audience response from play-texts poses hazards. Not only does it risk producing circular arguments, as if our modern interpretations of plays prove that early modern spectators responded in similar ways, but arguing from play-text evidence can also imply that plays automatically have certain predictable effects on their audience, emphasizing the effective agency of plays and playwrights to the exclusion of playgoers’ own interpretive agency.\(^{43}\) McConachie even suggests that we avoid the term “response” altogether for its behavioristic implication that “the theatre is primarily a one-way delivery system of messages or fantasies.”\(^{44}\) Despite these dangers, however, I follow other scholars in examining plays for evidence about playgoer experience. Jeremy Lopez, for example, has argued not only that early modern playwrights “controlled the audience’s relationship to theatrical and linguistic artifice,” but also that “audiences enjoyed being controlled in this way – enjoyed the awareness that they were, or had the capacity to be, paying attention to all the right things.”\(^{45}\) That is, Lopez suggests, the metatheatrical incongruities and sudden shifts of convention in early modern plays imply that early modern playgoers enjoyed the collective experience of shifting responses to a play. Like Lopez, I examine the conventions and attentional shifts of early modern plays, including obscure plays as context for my more famous examples, to speculate about the effects that theatrical practitioners seem to have worked to produce, and I assume that playgoers remain able to choose, to a certain extent, whether or not to submit to these effects.

\(^{43}\) Low and Myhill, *Imagining the Audience*, 10.

\(^{44}\) McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 3.

\(^{45}\) Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response*, 77.
Even more helpfully, other scholars have used plays’ depictions of spectators’ response to spectacles, sensations, and other theatrical or non-theatrical experiences to draw conclusions about playgoers’ response to similar experiences. Joanne Rochester explores how Massinger models playgoers’ response by depicting onstage spectators at literal plays-within-plays. Using similar versions of this technique to explore less literal depictions of spectatorship, Farah Karim-Cooper, Tanya Pollard, Katharine Craik, Allison Hobgood, and Penelope Woods, among others, have illuminated how early modern playwrights and actors might have structured the theatrical experience to produce specific bodily effects on playgoers. These scholars combine attention to the physical bodies of early modern playgoers, particularly in their specific historical context, with analysis of plays that depict certain kinds of emotional and physical response to spectacles. As Woods argues, the “direct encounter” of actor and playgoer in the early modern theater would have foregrounded such embodied response. By attending to how plays depict the relationship between spectacles and their “onstage spectators,” in Joanne Rochester’s term, I illuminate how plays model and encourage response from “the actual audience.” I draw on these scholars’ models to generate speculative yet historically contextualized readings of potential early modern responses to the combined theatrical body of an actor and a character.

Such readings of how play-texts might induce collective effects in playgoers’ vulnerable bodies and emotions do not necessarily limit playgoers’ interpretive agency in responding to

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actors’ bodies; in fact, quite the contrary. By providing the opportunity for collective metatheatrical awarenesses, a play emphasizes what Hobgood calls playgoers’ “conscious, collaborative” work producing the play’s imaginative experience.\(^{49}\) And this spectatorial cooperation requires physical and emotional vulnerability in turn. Ellen MacKay shows, for example, that the most responsive, cooperative spectators in early modern plays-within-the-play tend to be women, whose leaky bodies leave them more vulnerable to a play’s effects than the arrogantly aristocratic spectator whose harsh indifference demoralizes the actors within the play.\(^{50}\) These indecorously responsive female spectators show what Jennifer Low and Nova Myhill call this “moving and compelling” activity of the early modern audience, shaping the play-within-the-play through their appreciative displays.\(^{51}\) To emphasize audience members’ imaginative effort, sensory flexibility, and individual response, I use the term “playgoer” throughout this dissertation to balance my focus on the shaping effects of the plays themselves.\(^{52}\)

In my analysis of how actors’ bodies shape early modern playgoer response, I also rely on contemporary theories of cognitive science to support my readings of plays. I use the findings of cognitive science to better understand early modern response for two reasons. First, as already mentioned, available evidence is scattered and indirect. It is therefore helpful to use an entirely different theoretical method to corroborate the conclusions I draw from plays themselves, records of playgoer experience, and other cultural texts depicting various responses to bodily spectacles. Scientific theories are by no means inherently more reliable for describing art than

\(^{49}\) Hobgood, *Passionate Playgoing*, 6.


\(^{51}\) Low and Myhill, *Imagining the Audience*, 15.

\(^{52}\) I thus use the term “playgoer” precisely for the reason Cynthia Marshall eschews it: to imply the “activity of a motivated, empowered subject.” Marshall, “Bodies in the Audience,” 53.
artistic theories, but they do offer an alternate perspective. Second, while I acknowledge the fact that cultural activities such as playgoing are historically situated and not universal experiences, I also argue that we can draw interesting conclusions from our increasing knowledge in the present day about the biological mental framework that humans share. Involving cognitive approaches allows scientific information to work together with cultural information, providing a more complex picture of playgoer response in the early modern context.

One of the most important insights from cognitive science for understanding playgoer response to bodies onstage is the theory of conceptual blending. According to this idea, which Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner developed through analyzing how the brain deals with metaphors, we create new ideas by mentally blending parts of two or more input spaces; the final blend powerfully draws a network of associations into a compressed meaning.\(^{53}\) In a play, scholars have shown, playgoers’ basic work to blend actor and character can also activate playgoers’ awareness of other complex cognitive blends. For example, Amy Cook has recently shown that *Hamlet* compresses together “cause and effect, agency and intention, seeing and knowing” through a performance that itself explores “the link between action, cause, intention, and agency.”\(^{54}\) Speculating about playgoers’ cognitive responses to *Hamlet*, Cook explores the self-conscious parallels between the play’s topics and methods in ways that closely resonate with my own attention to playgoers’ awareness of bodies onstage. As playgoers blend the living body of the actor with the dead, disembodied, or artificial substance of the corpse, ghost, or statue he


enacts, the play itself invites characteristics of the actor’s living body, impossibly, into playgoers’ mental blend that constitutes that character.

Conceptual blending thus further illuminates the function of what has variously been called “double consciousness,” “double vision,” or even “poetic faith” and “suspension of disbelief,” since playgoers’ metatheatrical awareness links directly to the most fundamental meaning-making activities a play demands. A crucial insight of Fauconnier and Turner’s work is that an awareness of the blend’s artificiality can coexist with immersion in its effects: “the spectator is able to live in the blend, looking directly on its reality.” McConachie argues that “spectators are active agents in the process of combining actors and characters into blended actor/characters,” a cognitive ability that is fundamental to our brains from childhood make-believe. Playgoers’ awareness of the conceptual blend of actor and character invites attention to both the playwright’s skill in imagining this risky blend and playgoers’ skill at empathetically perceiving it.

Cognitive theories also illuminate how an onstage character’s response to a fellow character works to increase playgoer response. Researchers have noted the phenomenon of “gaze tracking,” by which “spectators tend to focus their attention on the same people or objects at which the actors are gazing.” That is, we seek to read the minds of others by following their gaze. One study of gaze tracking showed its importance to human cognition by demonstrating that human infants, but not chimpanzees, can understand a pointing gesture as an attempt to

56 Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 266.
57 McConachie, *Engaging Audiences*, 44.
58 Ibid., 24.
inform them of an item’s location.\(^5\) This cognitive practice, called “shared intentionality,” suggests that the modeling behavior of other characters onstage can be crucial for cuing playgoers’ attention and shaping our response to plays. And indeed, early modern tragedy often ends with “a surrogate audience of survivors on stage who act out the emotion occurring in the auditorium,” a dynamic that appears, slightly modified, in comedy and tragicomedy as well.\(^6\)

My approach to early modern playgoer response combines three lenses—inferring playgoer expectations from theatrical conventions, examining depictions of spectatorship layered within play-texts, and extrapolating from contemporary cognitive science. Each of these lenses emphasizes in different ways the shifting, oscillating, double experience that early modern plays create, and suggests the active effort that plays demand from playgoers to understand, imagine, and co-create the world they depict. Early modern actors and their audiences thus worked together to create an intertwined mental and physical experience. In the next section, early modern descriptions of the playgoing experience intensify this link between actor and playgoer through a concept I call “bodily mirroring,” through which effective plays shape playgoers’ humorally vulnerable bodies and propel them into passionate action.

“Passion, I see, is catching”: Bodily mirroring in the playhouse

In Shakespeare’s Julius Caesar (c. 1599), Antony weeps not at the sight of Caesar’s corpse itself but at the sight of a servant’s tears: “Passion, I see, is catching, for mine eyes, /


\(^6\) States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms, 171; see also Rochester, Staging Spectatorship, 4-5.
Seeing those beads of sorrow stand in thine, / Began to water.”  

Antony describes his body’s reaction to the servant’s tears as if it is involuntary. As his “eyes” take action on their own, watering in automatic response to the sight of weeping, Antony experiences his passion as a bodily response to spectacle, not a mental one. Isolated amidst unsympathetic conspirators, Antony cannot fully experience his grief at first, acting “surprised at the fact that he is not weeping” at the sight of Caesar’s wounds. But when he sees another living body grieving, Antony responds immediately in a way that ultimately mirrors Caesar’s body too: he links tears to drops of blood from Caesar’s wounds, which are “Weeping as fast as they stream forth thy blood” (3.1.201). Antony’s bodily mirroring of the servant’s tears and Caesar’s body demonstrates a model for playgoer response in the theater, by which Antony finds his own tears called forth not just by Caesar’s body but also by the spectacle of another’s weeping. In this section, I explore how early modern playgoers and playwrights considered actors’ skillful visual, auditory, and tactile manipulations to evoke mirroring responses in playgoers’ bodies. The bodily mirroring I describe, especially when reinforced through the responses of onstage spectators, suggests a model for understanding playgoer response to corpses, ghosts, and statues onstage.

In this section, I use literary and historical reports, including antitheatricalist analysis of the dangerous effects of performance, to outline the concept of bodily mirroring as a set of audience expectations and conventions that early modern playwrights and acting companies worked from when developing plays. I support my arguments about how these conventions worked using theories of perception from contemporary cognitive science. Establishing how

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early modern performers and playgoers understood performing bodies provides the foundation for my larger argument about how the theatrical bodies of corpses, ghosts, and statues elicit audience response within individual plays. In this section I analyze playgoers’ direct descriptions of how actors’ bodies shape their experience, so that, in later chapters, I can extrapolate the attitudes of play characters outward to the attitudes of playgoers or complement these conclusions with more indirect evidence about how early modern historians and theologians interpret bodies outside the theater. My metaphor of a mirror to describe the relation between performer and playgoer goes beyond the usual understanding of theatrical performance itself as a mirror, as in Hamlet’s idea that actors “hold as ‘twere / the Mirrour up to Nature,” or another poem’s suggestion that actors are “Mirrors, by their acting Arts, / Wherin men saw their faults.”63 My analysis extends the mirror metaphor to argue that early modern playgoers understood their response to reflect performers’ passion, and judged plays and actors by their ability to evoke that mirroring response.64

Early modern scholar Robert Burton succinctly notes the phenomenon of bodily mirroring, asking in his Anatomy of Melancholy, “How can otherwise blear eyes in one man cause the like affliction in another? Why doth one man’s yawn make another yawn; one


64 Though it applies the mirror metaphor in different ways, Cook’s Shakespearean Neuroplay also approaches early modern playgoer response through the idea of a mirror.
man’s pissing provoke a second many times to do the like?" The early modern worldview, as Mary Floyd-Wilson and Garrett A. Sullivan argue, explained such bodily effects through notions of humoral permeability, as if the body is “embedded in a larger world with which it transacts” both emotionally and physically. Burton, for example, answers his own questions by arguing that “the forcible imagination of the one party moves and alters the spirits of the other,” as if the mind produces “spirits”—what Gail Kern Paster calls humoral “vapors”—that can infect at a distance. And if permeating humors physically shape our emotions, theatrical passions themselves become physical, so that as Cynthia Marshall has suggested, “theater’s emotional effects were felt by bodies in the audience.” Early modern antitheatrical writers particularly lamented such physical impacts of playgoing: theater “infecteth more the spirits, & wrappeth them in passions, then drunkennes it selfe would do.” Another complains of theater’s “infectious poison.” The bodily implications of this link between passions and infectious humoral spirits become even clearer if we remember that plague, too, was humoral: according to one physician, “plague proceedeth from the venomous corruption of the humors and spirits of the

body, infected by the attraction of corrupted aire.” Early modern passions were as physical as the germs we today recognize as the cause of the early modern plague, and the shared space of the early modern theater promoted the transmission of both.

Emotional contagion also took place through sight, which was considered to physically shape both spectator and spectacle. Classical “extramission” theories of sight emphasized the ‘rays’ of sight by which eyes illuminated their objects with visual ‘rays’ and ‘beams’ that had to correspond to the “reciprocating object,” creating what Eric Langley calls “a material thread of connection or contagion between viewer and viewed.” In the sixteenth century this reciprocal idea of material vision increasingly simplified into Keplerian “intromission,” in which objects would “emit their own likenesses” propagating through the air to encounter the eyes. Despite the differences between vision theories that emphasized “a sense of mutual shared identity” and those that imagined sight more as an invasion by the spectacle, however, both theories emphasized the physical effects of spectacles on their spectators: seeing red fabric, for example, could cause one to blush, or as Ovid put it, “eyes that regard the wounds of someone else, are wounded themselves.”

Early modern sight is tactile and even sexual: antitheatricalist John


72 Langley, “Plagued by kindness,” 104; see also Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, “Of Fascination, and the Art thereof,” in Book I of Three books of occult philosophy, 1531, trans. J.F. (London: R.W. for Gregory Moule, 1651), EEBO, Ch. 50; 101. These older theories include intromission concepts; for example, concern over pregnant women’s sight-perceptions shaping their fetuses is a classical idea dating back at least to the Aethiopica.


74 Langley, “Plagued by kindness,” 105, Clark, Vanities of the eye, 45; Ovid (Remedia amoris), quoted in Thijs Weststeijn, “‘Painting’s Enchanting Poison’: Artistic Efficacy and the
Northbrooke, for example, commenting on how women “have their mindes enticed by the windowes of their eyes,” imagines eyes “as orifices through which the spectator’s body might be penetrated as she quite literally ‘takes in’ the show.”

75 Present-day critics’ focus on the ear and its involuntary openness to theatrical language often obscures the significant bodily vulnerability of spectators’ encounter with plays through sight.

These early modern ideas of contagious passions and tactile sight might seem foreign to contemporary scientific understanding. However, in their implications for the embodied materiality of theatrical response, these early modern concepts parallel contemporary scientific theories about how mirror neurons and pheromones can induce shared bodily and emotional states through the senses of sight and smell. Recent research on the cognitive mechanisms of empathy has shown that empathy is far more embodied and automatic—more contagious—than we have previously realized: “you can catch an emotion, just as you can catch a cold, without knowing whom you caught it from.”

77 One mechanism for this “entrainment” is pheromonal, whereby chemical signals expressed by one body affect another through touch and smell, in


76 Gabriel Egan shows that mentions of seeing a play are more than 12 times more common in the early modern dramatic corpus than mentions of hearing a play: “Hearing or Seeing a Play?: Evidence of Early Modern Theatrical Terminology,” *Ben Jonson Journal* 8 (2001).

ways reminiscent of early modern humors.\textsuperscript{78} Perhaps even more interesting, however, are systems of “mirror neurons” in monkeys and humans that suggest a bodily link through sight.

Mirror neurons work by activating both when the subject performs an action such as grasping and when the subject perceives another individual performing the same action.\textsuperscript{79} Seeing an angry face, even subliminally, test subjects are more likely to frown, responding on a physical and subconscious level to imitate the emotions of others.\textsuperscript{80} Even imagining or reenacting emotional experiences produces measurable facial movement.\textsuperscript{81} Further, once we physically embody emotions, we experience them cognitively. For example, smiling speeds up the process of remembering pleasant events and slows down recall of sad events.\textsuperscript{82} Mirror neurons thus orchestrate an “embodied simulation” of what we see, through which we gain “an experiential insight of other minds.”\textsuperscript{83} Such cognitive systems, which are crucial to our mental architecture from birth as infants’ brains develop through imitation and play with caretakers, make emotional contagion a physical phenomenon.\textsuperscript{84} It is thus no mere metaphor to say that we embody the emotions we perceive in others.

\textsuperscript{78} Teresa Brennan, \textit{The Transmission of Affect} (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 68.


\textsuperscript{81} Ibid., 31.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{83} Gallese, “Embodied simulation,” 11.

For theatrical audiences, McConachie argues, empathy does not require a grasp of the plot but rather begins unconsciously as spectators “mirror the actions of those they watch onstage.”85 We respond to other humans’ emotions on an automatic level; the fact that, for example, “laughter by itself can evoke laughter” accounts for the continued appearance of laugh tracks on television sitcoms despite critical distaste.86 More importantly, this evidence confirms that, in an early modern playhouse, spectators’ own responses would have intensified collective response. A playhouse in the round with universal lighting, with spectators highly visible to each other, multiplies the effect of the actors’ own embodiment of emotions.87 Ultimately, as Teresa Brennan suggests, contemporary culture is once again beginning to recognize what early moderns knew: that “transmission of affect” is a “material process” that depends on the bodies of its participants, both performer and spectator.88 This “embodiment view” of emotion does not require that emotions “are rigidly tied to specific bodily states;” rather it simply demonstrates that empathy requires mental simulation, and mental simulation implicates the body.89 Early modern antitheatricalists, playwrights, and playgoers all agree with these cognitive scientists: theater transforms the bodies of its spectators, inducing playgoers to imitate what they see. Such a concept provides a powerful foundation for the way liminal bodies shape fellow characters in their image and thereby, I argue, shape playgoers in turn.

87 McConachie, Engaging Audiences, 97.
Playgoer response arises, according to early modern reports, from imitation. In particular, spectacles of tears, laughter, and sexual desire induce the like effects in spectators through what physician John Bulwer calls “a kind of magneticall virtue.”90 Just as Bulwer’s idea of magnets implies a hidden force of attraction through occult principles of sympathy, early modern playgoers noted a sympathetic response to theatrical performance that they could describe more easily than explain.91 Though antitheatricalists present these contagious passions as a matter of deep concern, their anxiety also implies the “deeply disturbing temptation” theater represents.92 Stephen Gosson, for example, writes that “the beholding of troubles and miserable slaughters that are in Tragedies, drives us to immoderate sorrow, heavines, womanish weeping and mourning […] Comedies so tickle our senses with a pleasanter vaine that they make us lovers of laughter and pleasure, without any meane.”93 Gosson worries about the “immoderate” (and, punningly, “vaine”) emotion that theatrical displays of laughter and tears can elicit, imperiling self-control and containment. Similarly, as John Rainolds writes, spectators experience truly the sexual desire that actors merely perform: “an effeminate stage-player, while hee faineth love, imprinteth wounds of love” on spectators.94 Theater transforms its spectators physically and emotionally through the sight of its bodily passions.


91 Analogously, Mary Floyd-Wilson suggests that the early modern idea of “sympathetic contagion entails the victim’s hidden (and perhaps involuntary) consent, thus suggesting that only certain spectators can be corrupted,” in *Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 49.


Gosson illuminates this concept more vividly by describing in almost greedy detail (of which I include only the finale) the mirroring effect that a classical production of the “tale of Bacchus and Ariadne” had on its spectators:

When Bacchus rose up, tenderly lifting Ariadne from her seat, no small store of curtesie passing betwene them, the beholders rose up, every man stood on tippe toe, and seemed to hover over the praye, when they swarre, the company swarre; when they departed to bedde; the company presently was set on fire; they that were married posted home to their wives; they that were single, vowed very solemnly, to be wedded.95

Gosson links the touches and “curtesie” of the actors to the arousal of the “beholders,” as if in watching they gain a tactile, ‘hold’-ing sensation of the kisses and touches they see. More literally, as Bacchus rises so do the men rise “on tippe toe” in their efforts to see the love scene more clearly and their sexual arousal rises too. In fact, the entire report structures itself around the physical parallels between the players and the spectators turned on by this portrayal of desire. Even Gosson himself seems rapt in the description of the actors’ effect on their spectators, responding involuntarily to the vivid imaginative picture of sexual ‘prey’ he creates. These bodies’ contagion is so powerful that it infects even its antitheatrical opponent.

The same possibilities of bodily mirroring that antitheatricalists lament, playwrights wholeheartedly relish. As Thomas Dekker describes, an admirable playwright is one “whose Brest fill’d by the Muses / With Raptures, Into a second, them infuses; / Can give an actor, Sorrow, Rage, Joy, Passion” – that is, a playwright who can transmit his own emotion to the actor, as a liquid “infuses” across bodily boundaries.96 Then, in turn, the actor “(by selfe-same agitation) / Commands the Hearers, sometimes drawing out Tyears, / Then smiles, and fills them

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95 Gosson, Plays Confuted, G5r.
96 Thomas Dekker, If it be not good, the Divel is in it (London: [Thomas Creede] for I[ohn] T[rundle], 1612), EEBO, sig. A4v.
both with Hopes and Fears.” Such a portrait of passion moving from playwright to play, play to actor, actor to hearer powerfully expands Horace’s suggestion that, in Ben Jonson’s translation, “If thou wouldst have me weep, bee thou first dround / Thy selfe in teares, then me thy harms will wound.” 97 And early modern playgoers understand their experience of plays in the same way. Montaigne, for example, describes how passions move from playwright to actor to audience with a magnetic effect: just as “the Adamant stone drawes not onely a needle, but infuseth some of her facultie in the same to draw others,” so too theatrical passion, having “stirred up” the playwright, “doth also by the Poet strike and enter into the Actor, and consecutively by the Actor, a whole auditorie or multitude.” 98 This chain of hidden similitude works automatically to shape audiences in the likeness of the actors they see. From the early modern actor’s ability to “act on his own body,” according to Joseph Roach, comes his power to “act on the physical space around him” and, through it, “the bodies of the spectators who shared that space with him.” 99

In light of the way that liminal bodies draw attention to their own theatricality, as mentioned in previous sections, it is particularly interesting that early modern notions of bodily mirroring include playgoers’ response to known fictions. In an elegy to John Fletcher published


99 Joseph R. Roach, The Player’s Passion (London and Toronto, Associated University Presses, 1985), 27. See also Bruce Smith, Phenomenal Shakespeare (Chichester, UK: John Wiley and Sons, 2010), 143.
after the closure of the theaters but before their reopening, Thomas Stanley writes that the playwright

  to a Sympathie those soules betrai’d
  Whom Love or Beauty never could perswade;
  And in each mov’d spectatour could beget
  A reall passion by a Counterfeit:
  When first Bellario bled, what Lady there
  Did not for every drop let fall a teare?
  And when Aspasia wept, not any eye
  But seem’d to weare the same sad livery;
  By him inspir’d the feign’d Lucina drew
  More streams of melting sorrow then the true.  

Immediately obvious here is the parallel, once again, between onstage passion and passion in the audience; theatrical “Sympathie” causes playgoers to weep, their tears mirroring both Aspasia’s own and, more obliquely, “every drop” of Bellario’s blood. More importantly, according to Stanley, Fletcher’s “Counterfeit” passions produce “reall” ones in spectators, which Stanley implies is a particularly unexpected and therefore admirable achievement. The word “betrai’d;” for example, suggests a trick or surprise. That is, according to this poem, Fletcher’s art has a physical impact that allows it to twist the expected cause-and-effect logic embedded in the word “perswade.” Shaped by Fletcher’s skillful art, a “feign’d” theatrical passion can produce even more response “then the true” passion could ever do. A similar elegy to Restoration actor Charles Hart lauds how Hart “forc’d a Real Passion from a Feign’d,” as if onstage blood and tears forcefully provoke audiences to weep “by sympathy.”  

  101 Anonymous broadside (1683), Luttrell collection (I, 62); quoted in Richard Levin, “The Relation of External Evidence to the Allegorical and Thematic Interpretation of Shakespeare,” Shakespeare Studies 13 (1980): 21. See also Thomas May’s description in The Heire (performed 1622) of the effect of Hieronimo’s grief in The Spanish Tragedy: “for false/And acted passions he has drawn true tears”: I discuss this passage in the conclusion to Chapter
the sight of theatrical performance; neither poem mourns this fakery, however, but rather celebrates its power. As if “beget[ting]” the new life of a child, in Stanley’s metaphor, characters’ passions generate an authentic, passionate liveliness in spectators.

Such ideas directly address what Anthony Dawson has called “the age-old question of acting: how can the represented body” provoke “passions akin to but even stronger than those conjured by the real?” In particular, early modern commentary on the qualities of skillful actors demonstrates a central paradox for bodily mirroring, a tension that reflects the same dual awareness of actor and character so important for liminal bodies. That is, an actor’s body creates its theatrical effect simultaneously through its potent physical authenticity and through its prowess in altering that physical form to create new representations.

On one hand, as the basic notion of bodily mirroring implies, the authenticity, animation, and materiality of a play (or, for antitheatricalists, its bodily power) arises from the physical life of an actor’s body, as the actor’s living passion generates living passion in playgoers. Commentary on acting drives this point home; for example, playwright Thomas Randolph praises his star actor since “I writ this Comedie, but 'twas made by thee,” and Richard Flecknoe compliments Richard Burbage for giving “Life unto a Play,” which was dead “Till he by’s Action animated it.” The actor’s living body brings the play literally to embodied life.

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Similarly, an anonymous funeral elegy for Richard Burbage uses the term “indeed” to focus attention on the bodily act of performance, the real “deed” that Burbage enacts. The elegist notes that his acting was “so lively, that spectators, and the rest / Of his sad crew, whilst he but seem’d to bleed, / Amazed, thought even then he dyed in deed.”\textsuperscript{104} Burbage’s real “deed” of “lively” acting, paradoxically, gives energy and authenticity to the fictional “deed” of the character’s death, even as the poem ironically fulfills its tension between performance and reality by commemorating Burbage’s actual death. Though this resonant word “indeed” emphasizes the gap between real and theatrical worlds, the elegist uses it here to suggest both the skill of the actor in overcoming this gap and a physical authenticity to the performer’s action, a living embodiment that spectators share.\textsuperscript{105} When liminal bodies acknowledge the actor’s body, therefore, they draw from the potent authenticity of that living body to intensify their theatrical effects.

On the other hand, as writers’ emphasis on passions as “feign’d” suggests, the very conspicuousness of actors’ counterfeiting becomes worthy of admiration as well, thereby giving the player an opposite kind of power. In order to affect the bodies of playgoers, an early modern actor needed to skillfully alter his own body first, shaping it away from its authentic self. One important term used to describe the actor Richard Burbage, “Proteus,” specifically lauds the self-

\textsuperscript{104} Anonymous funeral elegy (1619), quoted in Gurr, \textit{Playgoing in Shakespeare’s London}, 279.

\textsuperscript{105} An earlier poem, by contrast, contrasts the speaker who out of true love “Griefe (indeed) did beare in brest” to others who each like an “Actor plaid in cunning wise his part… yet all was fained, ’twas not from the hart”: Robert Tofer, “The Months Minde of a Melancholy Lover” (1598), in Ingleby et al., \textit{The Shakspeare Allusion-book}, 1:50. Whitney argues concerning this poem that the playgoer uses the play’s theatricality to appropriate its romantic emotion for himself, casting himself as a replacement star of this romantic drama, in \textit{Early Responses}, 142.
“transform[ing]” changeability of the actor’s body. This reference to the myth of a shape-shifting god uses the idea of a shifting physical shape to communicate the actor’s ability to represent different characters. Similarly, Thomas Randolph, in the poem about how his star actor “made” his comedy, also praises the actor for his ability to become “a Proteus, that can take / What shape he please, and in an instant make / Himself to any thing.” The process of making the play depends on the actor’s self-making bodily alterations. An earlier comment praising Edward Alleyn as “Proteus for shapes, and Roscius for a tonge” also juxtaposed the term “shape” with “tonge,” a metonym for Alleyn’s vocal skills. Such an early modern focus on alterations of the actor’s “shape” suggests that whether through posture, gesture, or facial expression, the early modern actor affected playgoers by changing his own body. The more apparent these rapid changes are, the more visible the actor’s skill becomes. In a sense, therefore, seeing through an actor’s representations only highlights their theatrical power further.

In early modern reports of theatrical experience, therefore, actors exist in a tension between authentic embodiment and virtuosic representation, two opposing sources of theatrical power. Performance, as Amy Cook argues, becomes “less a category of deceit or ‘show’ than it is a vehicle or transformative agent,” as multiple meanings emerge out of a single body and demand integration by playgoers. In turn, this transformative tension is crucial to the way actors shape playgoers as playgoers become, in early modern metaphors, performers themselves.

107 Randolph, “To his deare friend,” lines 3-5.
109 Cook, Shakespearean Neuroplay, 142.
If acting is the representation of passion, then to experience that passion is to become an actor oneself.

In George Chapman’s play *The Widow’s Tears* (c. 1605), for example, discussions of spectator response hint that as they mirror actors’ passions, spectators become performers too. The character Lycus reports that, seeing Cynthia’s grief at her husband’s murder, “I was so transported with the spectacle, that… I was forc’t to turne woman, and beare a part with her. Humanitie broke loose from my heart, and stream’d through mine eies.”\(^{110}\) Cynthia’s weeping affects Lycus physically so that not only does he begin to weep, but he imagines himself as transforming into a woman to “beare a part with her.” By bearing some of Cynthia’s grief and thereby mimicking the spectacle he sees, Lycus becomes like an actor himself as he enacts an involuntary “part” as a woman.” First an audience to Cynthia, Lycus then begins to act with her. Even more importantly, his friend Tharsalio links this emotional response to the blatant falsity of theater itself: “In prose, thou weptst. So have I seen many a moist Auditor doe at a play; when the storie was but a mere fiction.”\(^{111}\) Tharsalio undercuts the emotion of Lycus’s description by mocking it as an excessively poetic and theatrical response to “but a mere fiction,” befitting only a foolishly overreacting playgoer. At the same time, Tharsalio’s analogy unknowingly emphasizes the conversation’s larger metatheatrical significance within a play, as if reinforcing the hint that bodily mirroring functions within and even through self-conscious theatrical performance. Here, bodily mirroring extends beyond a portrayed emotion to a more self-conscious mirroring of performativity itself.


\(^{111}\) Ibid., 4.1.50-51.
As embodied response wondrously transforms playgoers into actors too, therefore, the special power of theatrical response becomes almost a wordless pun, built on the link between the embodiment of actors and playgoers’ active response. Anthony Munday argues, for example, that not only do theatrical spectacles turn citizens’ wives’ “minds from chast cogitation,” but they also actively recruit those minds into participation with the actions they depict, as if “in that representation of whoredome, al the people in mind plaie the whores.”¹¹² In their aroused response to the “representation of whoredome,” playgoers mirror what they see; more particularly, Munday’s word choice suggests, that playgoers take on a theatrical role which they “plaie” in response to this “representation.” By linking acting to action, Munday thus emphasizes the physicality of playgoer response. Playgoers act out what they see, Munday complains, as a bodily performance, as if watching a play means taking on the actor’s role in a double sense.

This active quality of playgoer response produces intriguing contrasts with the usual assumption that playgoers remain passive. Munday, for example, goes on to suggest that even in their stillness playgoers become as guilty of vice as the characters they watch, “for while they saie nought, but gladlie looke on, they al by sight and assent be actors” as well.¹¹³ Munday contrasts the passive audience and the lasciviously performing actors only to heighten the surprise of connecting that passivity to an emotional participation. Fans of the theater notice the same paradoxical “acting” activity in their seemingly passive role as playgoers, but find it pleasurable. For example, another ode to Fletcher, this one by Francis Palmer, remembers how Fletcher’s “Tragicke Muse” would “call Tribute from our Eyes,” so that “Who only came to see,

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turn’d Actors too.”¹¹⁴ That is, by mirroring what we can assume to be weeping characters onstage, passive playgoers become actors. Edmund Gayton similarly writes that early modern playgoers, deeply “transported” with plays’ “representation of strong passions,” had become “as able Actors as themselves.”¹¹⁵ Playgoers’ attention and investment not only brings plays to life, but also energizes playgoers.

Even descriptions of how readers respond to unperformed plays reinforce this idea that plays turn their audiences into actors. Some descriptions take to an extreme the trope of contrasting the passive spectators with the actors they become in imaginative engagement, as when S. Hall declares that even a play’s readers “act[] in teares thy Tragedy” and indeed become “more then actours,” rather “mourners,” based on how much they weep.¹¹⁶ It might seem that Hall short-circuits the mirroring trope by imagining readers weeping just like playgoers. However, Hall also imagines the even greater power “had wee seene / It acted,” in which case “sure thy Tragedy t’had bin.”¹¹⁷ A written play turns the reader into an actor; playgoing does too, but in another sense also makes the tragedy real. Margaret Cavendish considers a similar scenario as she describes a tragedy so powerful that its reading “Forces Tears through their Eyes, and almost Perswades them, they are Really Actors, or at least Present at those Tragedies.”¹¹⁸ If

¹¹⁴ Francis Palmer, “Master John Fletcher his dramaticall Workes now at last printed,” in Comedies and Tragedies Written by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1647), LION.


¹¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

words alone can “almost” stimulate readers to feel like “Actors” themselves, “or at least” playgoers, then how much more, these accounts imply, would actual shared bodily presence “at those Tragedies” provoke response?

As plays make spectators into actors, in these early modern descriptions, the transformation works particularly through pre-existing or imagined physical similarities between the two groups. Thomas Heywood, for example, famously argues that powerful performances of heroic exploits can elicit courage and nationalistic fervor in spectators—specifically, through bodily similarities. In this, Heywood builds on Thomas Nashe’s earlier description of how, in Shakespeare’s *1 Henry VI*, the heroic Talbot could “triumph againe on the Stage, and have his bones new embalmed with the teares of ten thousand spectators … who, in the tragedian that represents his person, imagine they behold him fresh bleeding.” The blood pouring from the body of the blended actor/character, in a theatrical triumph of passionate effect, draws tears from playgoers that “act as a chain, making the spectators into a collective.” By provoking this collective response, Nashe implies, the play joins together English hearts in a shared desire to mirror “brave Talbot (the terror of the French)” and revive the national dominance he represents.

In the same way, Heywood shows, spectacle shapes spectators to be like what they see: describing the violent spectacle available on the stage, he exclaims, “Oh, these were sights to make an Alexander!” Heywood further unpacks the meaning of this tribute to “our

120 Steggle, *Laughing and Weeping*, 86.
121 Nashe, *Pierce Penilesse*, F3r.
122 Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, B4r.
domesticke hystories” as he asks, “what English blood seeing the person of any bold English
man presented and doth not hugge his fame, and hunnye at his valor”?\(^\text{123}\) Heywood links
audience appreciation of the performance to the similarity between the spectator’s “English
blood” and the “English” character presented in the bodily “person” of an English actor. In other
words, spectators respond collectively to a play through the national “blood” that they share with
actor and character. Ultimately, the moral and physical mirroring “that made spectacle
potentially problematic could also render it socially and theatrically beneficial, reinforcing group
identity and producing an engaged audience deeply invested in the show.”\(^\text{124}\) Without the “bold
English man presented” and the actor who performs him, the narrative would not be able to
arouse the “English blood” of the spectators to action.

Furthermore, as that shared bodily identity allows performers to shape spectators into
performers, in the process Heywood also redefines the idea of performance itself. According to
Heywood, the spectator “offers to him [the character/actor] in his hart all prosperous
performance, as if the Personater were the man Personated, so bewitching a thing is lively and
well spirited action, that it hath power to new mold the harts of the spectators and fashion them
to the shape of any noble and notable attempt.”\(^\text{125}\) As the actor’s “bewitching… action”
metaphorically affects spectators’ physical bodies, through those bodies it “shape[s]” the
spectators to become courageous and “noble” in action themselves. Just as “the Personater”
becomes “the man Personated,” so too does the spectator himself become an actor as he responds
with his own “prosperous performance.” Through this metaphor of theatrical response as an

\(^{123}\) Ibid.

\(^{124}\) Lin, *Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance*, 131. See also Barish, *The
Antitheatrical Prejudice*, 58 for more on crowd psychology in audience response.

\(^{125}\) Heywood, *Apology for Actors*, B4r.
embodied, courageous performance of nationalist heroism, Heywood reverses the usual connotation of “performance” as something false or unreal to locate “performance” instead in powerful physical action, the epitome of the real. In valorizing the response of spectators, therefore, Heywood also emphasizes theater’s foundation in real embodiment, as if to demonstrate that its illusions are neither shamefully weak nor dangerously deceptive.

The ultimate answer to the strange liveliness of the early modern theatrical character’s body—more real, more effective than the natural body that performs it—thus lies in the relationship between the body of the spectator and the body of the actor, which liminal bodies make particularly visible through their ironic focus on the character’s unexpected actorly embodiment. As Leanore Lieblein argues, theater involves “a physical process” in which “the person personated, the personating actor, and the perceiving spectator participated in a process of mutual transformation.”126 The theatrical tension that actors embody between the appearance of change and the reality of shared physical substance affects spectators more strongly than life’s real passions can ever do. The complexity of performance shapes how we playgoers, as Amy Cook argues, “see a depth to ourselves created in the blending of actor/character, backstage/onstage, and house-space/stage-space.”127 The concept of bodily mirroring thus suggests that an emphasis on the liminal state of theatrical figures, caught between actor and character, also reflects the situation of playgoers’ own bodies, both passively influenced by the play-world and responsively present within the playhouse. Bodily mirroring functions, most directly, as a powerful description of how plays affect playgoers despite their counterfeit

127 Cook, Shakespearean Neuroplay, 93.
fictionality. Simultaneously, through the idea of playgoers becoming actors, bodily mirroring also allows early modern theater practitioners to imply that plays do not seduce playgoers but rather encourage their active agency. The complex ideas of bodily mirroring guide my interpretation of how early modern plays use corpses, ghosts, and statues to shape playgoer response.

**Corpses, ghosts, statues**

Early modern theatrical bodies generate two interconnected types of audience response, both shaping playgoers’ passions and drawing us out of the fiction to consciously reflect on its artistry. Julia Walker argues that theater is “an art form devoted to just this kind of oscillation, offering us a glimpse of the world as it can be imagined from an objective analytical viewpoint and an experience of the world as registered within our body’s viscera.”\(^{128}\) The liminal bodies of corpses, ghosts, and statues in various early modern plays intensify both effects by creating oscillating awarenesses of the character’s dead, insubstantial, or artificial body and the living actor who enacts it. In each of the following chapters, I deal with the effect of a different type of liminal body, approaching it in two complementary ways. First, I trace the social, religious, and theatrical context, exploring how early modern playgoers might have perceived the trope of the corpse, ghost, or statue onstage. Particularly as my argument deepens in the chapters on ghosts and statues, I compare theatrical conventions revealed in stage directions and plot points from minor plays with the habits of bodily spectatorship implied in cultural and religious texts. I use

these materials to imaginatively reconstruct the expectations surrounding early modern playgoers’ experience of that trope.

Second, I examine in more detail the most complex plays for each trope, showing how they use onstage spectators’ responses to liminal bodies to strengthen the effect on playgoers. The watching characters, I argue, serve as proxies for playgoers by reporting on their own experience as spectators of the liminal figures I discuss. As these figures affect their spectators within the play, their confusingly lifelike appearance uses the presence of the actor to model and intensify the effect on playgoers of these theatrical bodies. Examining the embodied response of other characters onstage illuminates the surprisingly powerful effects of liminal bodies on playgoers.

My chapters follow a rough chronology to demonstrate how these tropes respond to each other over time. In my first chapter, “Containing the comedy of stage corpses from The Spanish Tragedy to King Lear,” I explore the potentially comic contrast between the living body of the actor and the dead body of a stage corpse. Several plays use this contrast to heighten the tragic effect of their theatrical corpses and defend their own theatrical projects as believably real. First, I show that Thomas Kyd’s The Spanish Tragedy (c. 1585-89) uses the presence of the actor to suggest the real impact of even theatrical deaths, implicitly correcting indifferent or mocking onstage spectators who do not recognize the stakes of performance, as we see too in the more comic mode of Bottom’s theatrical death in Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (c. 1595). Shakespeare intensifies this theatrical project in Romeo and Juliet (c. 1595). Here, the visible presence of Juliet’s actor playing dead adds to playgoers’ sense of superiority over Romeo as he believes her dead; his willful misreading of her body imposes real tragedy on what may at first appear comic and heightens the effect of the two actual corpses appearing together at
the end of the play. Shakespeare applies similar techniques to the nationalist project of a history play in 1 Henry IV (1597), using Falstaff’s apparent corpse and revival to examine, apologize for, and ultimately justify Prince Hal’s theatrical power. In these early plays, Kyd and Shakespeare establish the power of the ambiguously alive corpse for increasing suspense and irony, not only acknowledging the difficulty of producing realistic spectacles of death but transforming that difficulty to challenge playgoers to greater imaginative effort and participation. I conclude by looking forward to Shakespeare’s King Lear (c. 1606). Here, the presence of the actor playing Cordelia deepens our sympathetic identification with Lear as he seems to think her alive, reinforcing the confusion, frustration, and despair of misinterpreting reality. By this time, as the next chapter will explore further, plays have begun to use the responses of onstage spectators to model how liminal bodies shape playgoers physically.

In “Embodied ghosts as actors in Hamlet & The Lady’s Tragedy,” I argue that plays explore the relation between liminal bodies and actors more directly by portraying stage ghosts as effective, physically potent performers that evoke unexpectedly powerful sympathies from their audiences. I start with a broad historical overview of stage ghosts’ increasing physicality and theatrical agency. Over the last decades of the 16th century, stage ghosts—emotionally powerful despite their ontological ambiguity—become models for the inherent paradoxes of theatricality. Stage ghosts transform from impotent spectators to dramatic performers, I argue, in order to manage and compensate for the insistently material body of the actor. For similar reasons, staging practices increasingly acknowledge stage ghosts’ visual similarity to solid corpses and living bodies, rather than attempting to make them look insubstantial. Two particular plays extend this link between ghosts and the actors who play them. In Shakespeare’s Hamlet (c. 1600-1), the body of the Ghost, animated by the ghostly presence of a living actor, generates
powerful physical effects on its onstage spectators, even as they question its reality. Hamlet even begins to consider himself an actor as if in imitation of the Ghost, transforming from spectator to performer in ways that suggest the participatory work of playgoers themselves. Extending the idea of the ghost as performer, *The Lady’s Tragedy*, also known as *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* (1611) and attributed to Thomas Middleton, uses its portrayal of the Lady’s ghost and her corpse to model the embodied actor’s value to the ghostly character he plays. By bringing ghost and corpse onstage together in the final scene, presenting an impossibly divided Lady and actor, the play heightens our metatheatrical awareness of the character’s theatricality. I resolve the staging crux in this scene by arguing that the play uses the Lady’s actor to play the corpse and introduces a different actor for the ghost, unexpectedly prioritizing the corpse as the true self of the Lady. With such a staging, the play fulfills its theme of the ghost’s ongoing concern for her dead body, and acknowledges the inescapable significance of the actor’s body to the theatrical character. As I close, I demonstrate the influence of the ghost-as-actor trope by showing how later comedies develop it into a cliché. Ultimately, the way that the physical bodies of various stage ghosts shape the bodies and perceptions of onstage audiences in these plays models the way that early modern plays—those evanescent, insubstantial fictions—use the intrusive bodies of actors to provoke their playgoers to sympathy.

Finally, in “Statues and sympathetic faith in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*” I turn to the rarest and latest-appearing type of liminal body in early modern drama, the statue that seems natural flesh. Like corpses, stage statues highlight their embodiment by actors, and like ghosts, they have bodily effects on their spectators. Even more than previous liminal bodies, however, the artificial statues performed by natural bodies in these plays dramatize theater itself as living artifice, which affects spectators more deeply than either plain nature or extravagant
artistry alone. I introduce this paradox by tracing it in two related concepts that shape later plays: the automaton as miracle and the statue as living performer. In each case, a figure often considered merely an artificial, inanimate object gains unexpected power by making its artifice transparent, thus troubling the categories of artificial or natural, animate subject or inanimate object, idolatrously dead or spiritually alive. The liminal statues in Shakespeare’s *The Winter's Tale* and John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* use these cultural and religious tensions for a metatheatrical purpose by appearing to onstage spectators alternately as artificial creations and as natural flesh. In *The Winter’s Tale* (1611), Hermione’s statue, enacted by a living actor, at first seems only deceptively alive, but as the play surprisingly affirms playgoers’ original perception of the actor’s body, onstage spectators experience a sympathetic bodily softening that, I argue, extends to bring playgoers to life as well. My exploration of early modern liminal bodies culminates with *The Duchess of Malfi* (1614). Here, the wax figures of the Duchess’ family, which make her believe her family is dead, deceive playgoers once again into believing them to be real human bodies. While Ferdinand’s deceptive displays attack both the Duchess and playgoers, paining our flesh with their waxy magic and freezing us with these apparent corpses’ deadly stillness, the living presence of the actors that we recognize, I argue, simultaneously allows the Duchess to resist Ferdinand’s theatrical control as she gains a spiritual awareness of life-in-death. Both plays emphasize their own theatricality through the exact contrast between artificial figure and living actor that artistic realism might demand they conceal; more importantly, they use that theatricality to invite playgoers into greater sympathy with the characters they portray. In the end, the naturally embodied statues in these early modern plays train playgoers in the same sympathetic experiences of belief, doubt, and physical response that the artificial yet living art of theater itself requires.
In each of these chapters, I demonstrate how playwrights develop new techniques for generating playgoer sympathy with fictional characters through the special shared experience of embodied theater. Accustomed to the famous plots of these plays, we may not now realize how startling and self-consciously playful such portrayals of lifelike corpses, physically potent ghosts, and enfleshed statues likely seemed to early modern playgoers. Bert O. States put it well when he wrote that “conventions occur first as anticonventions”: a convention is an “efficient and invisible chip in the informational circuitry,” but it can only get “into the circuit” through revising what has come before, by finding a way “to pester the circuit with nuance, to wound it with the resistance of its presence.”

The convention of the liminal body appears because the actor’s body necessarily serves this pestering, resistant function in portraying a corpse, ghost, or statue. That is, the disjunction between character and actor leads English drama to develop powerful metatheatrical functions for corpses, ghosts, and statues that draw on the fundamental power of bodily mirroring. Certainly there are other types of liminal bodies currently of interest to scholars, from tortured or dismembered bodies, to supernatural or animal characters in costume, to the painted faces of black, angelic, or divine characters.

For now, the three examples I explore in these chapters offer a clearer understanding of how liminal bodies can transform potential theatrical defects into virtuosic celebrations of the participatory work of playwright, actor and playgoer.

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129 States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms, 12.

Chapter One: Containing the comedy of stage corpses from The Spanish Tragedy to King Lear

A corpse onstage is a living body that must pretend to be an inert lump of flesh. Especially to a reader, the strange materiality of the stage corpse, both alive and dead, can remain curiously invisible against the sensational murder, suicide, accident, or execution that produces it. Yet for spectators of the stage corpse, the threat of unintentional comedy is always present, as one early modern anecdote demonstrates. Reminiscing about entertainments of the past, characters in the post-Restoration play Knavery in All Trades (c. 1663) joke about how in a play decades earlier a “great Captain and mighty Warriour,” played by Richard Fowler of Prince Charles’s Men, “laid so heavily about him, that some Mutes who stood for Souldiers, fell down as they were dead e’re he had toucht their trembling Targets.” These amateur hired men—”Mutes”—are so afraid of the real violence the energetic Fowler unleashes that they anticipate his blows, destroying the illusion by overexerting themselves to fulfill it too soon. The comedy of these deaths arises from the way in which the hired men’s real bodies—animated preemptively by instinctive response to the performed threat of actual violence—interfere with the theatrical effect.

Worse, these actors’ excessive attention to the sensations and abilities of their real bodies leads them to make the even more comical mistake of forgetting that they, as stage corpses, can no longer move. Perhaps distracted by the unexpected effect of his blows, Fowler forgets to bring off his dead men; which they perceiving, crauld into the Tyreing house, at which, Fowler grew angry, and told ‘em, Dogs you should have laine there until

131 John Tatham, Knavery in all trades, or, The coffee-house (London: J.B. for W. Gilbertson and H. Marsh, 1664), EEBO, E1r.
you had been fetcht off; and so they crauld out again, which gave the People such an occasion of Laughter, they cry’d that again, that again, that again.\footnote{Ibid.}

Mistakes spiral as these crawling corpses infuriate their theatrical boss; he not only loses control of his backstage whisper’s volume but also accidentally terrifies his men into reappearing onstage in a panic. The theatrical illusion seems utterly destroyed, a violation that becomes exactly the grounds of spectators’ comedic pleasure as they call for “that again, that again.” The disruptive body of the actor transforms the theatrical fiction into comedy.

Such comic awareness of the actor’s living flesh potentially affects spectators’ response to any stage corpse. Leslie Fiedler has described the living appearance of the stage corpse as one of theater’s basic illusionary problems: “The corpses which fall to the stage, stabbed or poisoned or asp-bitten, will rise to acknowledge the audience’s applause. Even before they are carried off, the closest of the ‘understanders’ in the pit will have seen the eyelid’s betraying flutter, the heaving of the chest.”\footnote{Leslie Fiedler, \textit{NO! In Thunder: Essays on Myth and Literature} (Boston: Beacon, 1960), 49.} Playgoers normally manage to ignore the distracting life of the actor, but if they cannot, the results can be frustratingly comic. According to one contemporary American actor, a drunken playgoer at a 2011 \textit{Hamlet} even called out, “in an exaggerated whisper that reverberated throughout the house and stage, ‘La-er-tes! La-er-tes! I see you breathin’. You ain’t dead. I see you breathin’!’”\footnote{Paige Martin Reynolds, “Performing Death and Desire in Othello,” \textit{The Hare}, 2014.} Is a playwright powerless to forestall such attacks on the theatrical illusion of death as a carnivalesque “laughing matter”?\footnote{Michael Bristol, \textit{Carnival and Theater: Plebeian Culture and the Structure of Authority in Renaissance England} (London and New York: Methuen, 1985), 179.}
The presence of the breathing actor could have been even more theatrically problematic for early modern spectators than for us today. With the Reformation, death and burial were supposed to mark a “sharper point of separation” between the living and the dead than before.\footnote{Clare Gittings, \textit{Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England} (London: Routledge, 1988), 20.} Protestant reformers, disturbed by the idolatry and indeterminacy of Catholic ideas of transfiguration, attempted to “reformulate materiality as definitively ‘dead’.”\footnote{Susan Zimmerman, \textit{The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre} (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), 8.} In this social environment, “positioned between a dying theology of the body and an emerging scientific empiricism,” the resonant life of the actor playing dead might have seemed particularly threatening to a theatrical illusion of death.\footnote{Imbracsio, “Corpses Revealed,” 3. While my argument supports Imbracsio’s contention that early modern stage corpses are “potentially transformative, active, and disruptive agents of influence,” I emphasize in particular the sympathetic effects their presence generates in playgoers (10).}

Further, early modern people would have been far more accustomed than present-day playgoers to the sight of actual dead bodies, whether from natural causes or public executions. The early modern historian Holinshed even imagines executions as plays, making “repeated appeals to theatrical analogies in which the execution is identified as a ‘tragedie’ attended by ‘thousands of people with earnest eie...purposing to tarrie out the verie last act’.”\footnote{Margaret Owens, \textit{Stages of Dismemberment: The Fragmented Body in Late Medieval and Early Modern Drama} (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2005), 123.} How much would a stage death have looked like these dramatic executions? Bloody special effects were certainly available. The passion plays and martyr dramas of the medieval theater set a precedent with their onstage flayings, decapitations, crucifixions, amputations of arms, and
dismemberments, techniques that reappeared in many early modern plays.\textsuperscript{140} Though early modern public English drama does not usually specify such bloody effects as we see in Robert Yarington’s \textit{Two Lamentable Tragedies} (c. 1594-98), for example, plays may have used more graphic effects than stage directions reveal.\textsuperscript{141} But no matter how sophisticated early modern theatrical spectacles of stage death and corpses became, they could never have competed for accuracy with public displays of the dead and mutilated bodies of state criminals.

The plays I discuss in this chapter develop an audacious solution to this theatrical problem. Instead of trying to make their stage corpses look more and more dead, they use the opposite strategy: acknowledging that they look alive. The fake deaths and living corpses in these plays draw attention to the body of the stage corpse as a blend of actor and character by presenting corpses as semi-animate, prone to unexpected resurrections. Further, the questions these seeming corpses highlight for fellow characters are the same that face playgoers. Is the corpse truly dead, or only sleeping; is this death a performance or reality? As liminal bodies that shift between appearances of death and of life, these stage corpses embody a space between the violated bodies a public execution fearsomely displayed and the violated theatrical illusion that Fowler’s spectators found so hilarious. Plays control playgoers’ potential subversive mockery of


\textsuperscript{141} Robert Yarington, \textit{Two Lamentable Tragedies} (London: Mathew Lawe, 1601), \textit{EEBO}, sig B4r: “Merry strickes him in the head fifteene times” and “wiped his face from blood.” Further, the stage-plot of George Peele’s \textit{The battell of Alcazar} (1591) records blood and sheep entrails (a “sheep’s gather”) as props for deaths by stabbing, though the printed version of the play does not specify this apparent onstage disembowelling. See J.O. Halliwell-Phillips, ed., \textit{The Theatre Plats of Three Old English Dramas} (London: Ashbee and Dangerfield, 1860) and Bradley, \textit{From Text to Performance}, 122; for more on stage blood, see Farah Karim-Cooper and Ryan Nelson, “Stage Blood: A Roundtable,” \textit{Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre History Seminar Proceedings}, July 13, 2006.
the stage corpse by redirecting awareness of the actor into sympathetic responses more appropriate to the tragic and historical genres in which corpses appear. The liminal corpses of these plays invite playgoers to experience reality breaking through the theatrical illusion and, in the process, deepening that illusion’s affective impact.

Thomas Kyd sets the precedent for the metatheatrical use of corpses in *The Spanish Tragedy*, in which play-deaths trouble the boundary between reality and fiction by becoming actual murders. Developing Kyd’s innovative use of the theatrical corpse into new forms, William Shakespeare explores in *Midsummer Night’s Dream, Romeo and Juliet*, and *1 Henry IV* how the fake deaths of Bottom, Juliet, and Falstaff complicate the boundary between actor and character. As these living characters pretend to look dead, the fact that they still look alive generates a sympathetic link between characters onstage and playgoers, as both try to reconcile the living appearance of this body with its apparent death. In these plays, Shakespeare employs the fake corpse device in three different genres to demonstrate the high stakes of theatrical performance. I conclude with a discussion of how these tropes subtly shape the real, though lifelike, corpse of Cordelia in Shakespeare’s *King Lear*. By acknowledging the actor’s living body, *King Lear* builds on the techniques developed in previous plays to intensify the tragic impact of Cordelia’s death.

**Theatrical death, real effect: The Spanish Tragedy and A Midsummer Night’s Dream**

In the earliest Elizabethan play to highlight the theatricality of stage corpses, Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1585-89), Hieronimo stages real death under the guise of theater by presenting a play-within-the-play, *Solyman and Perseda*, in which he and Bel-Imperia kill
their enemies. Since Hieronimo does not reveal his plan in advance, at first this display of theatrical death seems qualitatively different from the previous onstage deaths of other characters such as Horatio, Pedringano, and Isabella; we expect to see not a real death like Horatio’s but a mere performance. However, the acted deaths of Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia turn out to be real. The resulting bodies invite playgoers to experience, with the onstage spectators, a dual perspective that encompasses both actor and character without conflating them. As Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1595) will also show, onstage spectators of stage corpses in a play-within-the play offer powerful models for the playgoing experience. The bodies of characters in *The Spanish Tragedy* seem to be stage corpses of the inset play but are actually dead as well, while Bottom in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* pretends to be the dead Pyramus but is actually (and obviously) merely a stage corpse. Each of these plays explores the boundary between stage corpse and real death from a different side in order to explore the power of theater’s own liminal tension between performance and reality. Ultimately, for Kyd, as for Shakespeare, stage corpses in an inset-play demonstrate the real power of even a fake death onstage.

*The Spanish Tragedy* first hints at the link between actor and character through the similarity between the plot of the play-within-the-play, *Solyman and Perseda*, and the plot of Kyd’s play itself. Bel-Imperia finds herself pursued by Balthazar, who has killed both her previous lover Andrea and her new love, Horatio. When Bel-Imperia’s character Perseda, in the play-within-the-play, revenges herself on Balthazar’s character Solyman, who has murdered Perseda’s lover, there is a clear parallel to Bel-Imperia’s revenge against Balthazar. Indeed, one

142 Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (London: Edward Allde for Edward White, 1592), LION.
character watching this play responds to this link between actor and character even before he realizes that the deaths are real. As Bel-Imperia stabs first Balthazar and then herself, the Viceroy, Balthazar’s father, comments uncomfortably, “were this in earnest Bel-Imperia, / You would be better to my Sonne then so” (4:336-37). The Viceroy, who seems to have some misgivings about the intended moral of the play, may attempt a joking tone as he emphasizes his expectation that Bel-Imperia should not be “in earnest” in her violent display of rejecting his son. Whether the character recognizes it or not, however, his words allude to the disturbing potential parallel between Bel-Imperia and the character she plays.

Yet the dangers of this parallel are, for the moment at least, easy to dismiss for onstage character-spectators as well as playgoers. The King, for example, comfortably conflates actor and character as he asks, “But now what followes for Hieronimo?” (4:338). As Sarah Monette has pointed out, the King “means, What happens to the murderous bashaw?”143 Even in this casual turn of phrase, the King refers to Hieronimo’s character by the name of the actor who plays him. By offhandedly acknowledging the presence of the actor playing the character, the King and Viceroy express their superiority to what they believe to be mere theatrical fiction. These responses demonstrate that this onstage audience, watching the play, thinks the bodies they see are only Lorenzo, Balthasar, and Bel-Imperia pretending to be dead, just as playgoers in turn perceive the living bodies of the actors. The play, for both sets of spectators, seems to be merely illusion, nothing more.

These assumptions deepen the surprise of Hieronimo’s revelation that the supposed play-deaths are actually real. In what amounts to an epilogue to his inset play, Hieronimo startles his

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143 Sarah Monette, “Revenge in London: Kyd’s Spanish Tragedy,” “It Harrows Me with Fear and Wonder”: Horror and Haunting in Early Modern Revenge Tragedy (PhD Diss., University of Wisconsin, Madison, 2004, 82.)
spectators (both onstage and off) by reversing the usual epilogue pattern. Instead of excusing his play’s faults by reminding spectators of its fictionality, Hieronimo announces that it is real, contradicting their expectations that the play is “fabulously counterfeit” (4:343). By calling such an idea “bootless,” Hieronimo suggests that his spectators’ easy separation of play-world and real world is not only inaccurate but also useless and dangerous, leaving spectators vulnerable to the powerful truth Hieronimo is about to unveil (4:342). James Shapiro has linked this moment with the previous onstage death of Pedringano, in which an execution Pedringano believes will be only for show turns out to be real: in theater, Shapiro argues, “neither the actor to be executed nor the spectators who witness the execution can be entirely sure that the violence is not real.”144 The dramatic irony of Pedringano’s death, since playgoers know his performed plight is real, deepens the shock to playgoers as we discover with onstage spectators that the theatrical deaths of Lorenzo, Balthazar, and Bel-Imperia have taken deadly effect.

Such a danger of theater’s intrusion into reality lurks beneath any theatrical representation, as one theatrical legend about a deadly performance of Macbeth demonstrates. Thomas Isham reported in 1673 that “Harris performed the part of Macduff, and ought to have slain his fellow-actor, Macbeth; but during the fence it happened that Macduff pierced Macbeth in the eye, by which thrust he fell lifeless, and could not bring out the last words of his part.”145 The stage death accidentally becomes real. Even when the entire point of this anecdote is to point out the unexpectedness and danger of such overlap between actor and character, Isham’s language maintains the sense that the fiction bleeds into reality. Note particularly the mixing of


actor and character in Isham’s language: Isham uses the term “Macbeth” to name Harris’s fellow-actor and, further, suggests that Harris “ought to have slain” Macbeth, as if Harris is the deadly Macduff himself. Such oscillation, though normal for commentary on theater, gains disturbing resonance in this case, when it is precisely Harris’s actorly incompetence that paradoxically gives his performance greater reality.¹⁴⁶

Just as Isham describes Macbeth becoming a truly dead body onstage, Solyman and Perseda’s theatrical corpses become real bodies lying before their onstage spectators. Huston Diehl has shown that Hieronimo’s “play blatantly violates the distinction between visible sign and the thing it signifies, turning the analogous into the identical, the symbolic into the literal, the represented into the real.”¹⁴⁷ Simply through Hieronimo’s words, the meaning of this visual spectacle shifts radically. No longer are these bodies playing dead; now they really are dead, though nothing has changed except the spectators’ information. By highlighting this violent perceptual shift that Hieronimo’s onstage spectators experience, Kyd intensifies his own playgoers’ investment in and response to the other stage corpse visible before us, that of Horatio, theatrically framed in the discovery space just as his body was earlier framed hanging in the bower.¹⁴⁸ The stage corpses of The Spanish Tragedy might seem to work differently from the

¹⁴⁶ Theatrical legends in late medieval France function similarly, as Jody Enders has shown: her story of the condemned criminal who played the role of Holofernes in Judith (performed 1549 in Tournai, France) shows the mixed response such intrusion into reality provokes. As “the so-called Judith” beheads Holofernes, “who was pretending to be sleeping, … frenetic applause and cries of indignation rose up from amid the spectators” as playgoers experience both appreciation for the special effect and horror at the violation of the theatrical contract. Jody Enders, Death by Drama and Other Medieval Urban Legends (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 183.

¹⁴⁷ Diehl, Staging Reform, Reforming the Stage, 114. Pace Diehl, I argue that The Spanish Tragedy does not merely critique “carnal spectacle” but rather uses its depiction of spectatorial pleasure to explore playgoers’ awareness of the bodies of actors (117).

¹⁴⁸ Imbracsio, “Corpses Revealed,” 55.
unexpectedly real bodies that Isham’s *Macbeth* and Hieronimo’s *Solyman and Perseda* have produced. For Kyd’s playgoers, these stage corpses remain, in some sense, exactly what the King and Viceroy temporarily perceive them to be: living actors who only pretend to be dead. But by demonstrating how Hieronimo’s play inflicts perceptual violence on the King and Viceroy in altering their perception of stage corpses, Kyd implicates playgoers too in the violence of his tragedy. If there is really so little visual difference between a stage corpse and a real one as Hieronimo’s revelation suggests, might the stage corpses in the actual play we are watching be real too? Have we supported and sympathized with murder?

Hieronimo’s language adds to the effect by generating dizzying layers of ironies. Hieronimo imagines an actor who, after dying onstage, will a moment later “revive to please to morrowes audience” (4:348). Though he uses this image to characterize his onstage spectators’ false assumptions, it applies most vividly and directly to the actual situation of all the actors playing corpses onstage at this moment, who are (within the play-world) actors who have truly died, and (in the real world) actors who will soon revive. Even as he outlines the faulty perceptions of the King and Viceroy, Hieronimo’s words also implicitly illuminate the real situation for playgoers.

Hieronimo’s descriptions continue to oscillate between the perspective of the play-world, in which the character truly dies “the death of Aiax, or some Romaine peere,” to the perspective of reality, in which the actor is “in a minute starting up againe” (4:346-47). The heroism of these imagined deaths emphasizes the blatant contrast with their mundane enactment onstage, a contrast that Hieronimo’s own play has just erased. Yet while Hieronimo ostensibly distinguishes such normal playgoing from the violation of theatrical boundaries he has just enacted, his language only heightens playgoers’ awareness of the liminal status of all theater. Through the
concept that the actor/character can “revive” in this way, Kyd invites playgoers to contemplate a
movement from death to life that neither the character nor the actor can logically perform, since
the character truly remains dead and the actor has never stopped living at all. We can make sense
of Hieronimo’s words only through understanding actor and character in a new way. Through
this paradoxical image of the reviving stage corpse, the play invites us to imagine not the actor or
the character but a liminal figure moving across the threshold between the two.149

Though such reminders of the thin line between real and stage corpses may provoke
anxiety, therefore, they also deepen playgoers’ sense of both a play’s potential impact and,
paradoxically, its fictionality. Kyd reinforces this dual perspective on the stage corpse by framing
the play-world itself with the ghost of Andrea, whose role as ghostly spectator and judge forms a
powerful analogue to playgoers’ own role.150 Barry Adams was the first to point out that
Revenge positions himself and Andrea as onstage “analogues” of playgoers: “Heere sit we
downe to see the misterie, / And serue for Chorus in this tragedie” (1:90-91).151 Andrea and
Revenge remain characters within the play, certainly, but with this allusion the play positions
them, like a classical Chorus, as onstage proxy for a responsive, questioning, invested audience.

149 Shakespeare will later employ a similar effect in Hamlet when Polonius remembers
how “I did enact Julius Caesar: I was killed i’th’ Capitol; Brutus killed me” (TLN 1958-59,
3.2.103-4). The line foreshadows his death at Hamlet’s hands and resonates with the previous
King’s Men production of Julius Caesar, in which Richard Burbage, playing Brutus/Hamlet, had
already play-killed John Heminges, playing Caesar/Polonius, as if “the single body takes the
blow and it is felt by both occupant characters”: Jenn Stephenson, “Singular Impressions:
Metatheatre on Renaissance celebrities and corpses,” Studies in Theatre and Performance 27.2

150 Gregory M. Colón Semenza, “The Spanish Tragedy and metatheatre,” in The
Cambridge Companion to English Renaissance Tragedy, ed. Emma Smith and Garrett A.

151 Barry Adams, “The Audiences of The Spanish Tragedy,” Journal of English and
As they chat between the acts, they likely occupy some of the most visible seats in the playhouse either onstage or in the gallery, with little distinguishing them from actual playgoers. Further, Andrea’s interest in the play gains aesthetic and theatrical meanings beyond the personal or religious. For example, in a list of “spectacles to please my soule” in his final speech about the fulfillment of his “hopes” and “desires,” Andrea includes not only the deaths of the villains of the play but also those of his friends, Horatio, Isabella, Bel-Imperia, and Hieronimo (4:494, 483-84). Andrea's satisfaction suggests that of a playgoer gleefully recounting in chronological order the visual high points from the gruesome tragedy just concluded, from the unknown prop or visual technique used to stage Horatio’s hanging “in his Fathers bower” to the “quaint device” of Pedringano’s own hanging (4: 485, 487). Though Andrea’s ghostly presence and story of wrongful death ostensibly offers hope that divine justice will be served, that is, his focus on the torments he will inflict and bliss he will bestow ultimately seems driven less by justice than by pleasure in spectacle (4:512).

The play’s emphasis on Andrea as a spectator ultimately increases the oscillating effect of Hieronimo’s speech after Solyman and Perseda. The play invites us to vicariously experience the danger of spectatorship and, simultaneously, appreciate our safety from outside the spectatorial frame. Andrea’s metatheatrical frame paradoxically heightens the impact of Hieronimo’s stage corpses by illuminating the theatricality of their supposed deaths. Playgoers see more than both the naïve and powerless onstage spectators of Hieronimo’s murderous play and the frame spectator, Andrea himself, who thinks, unaware of his own status as a fiction, that he experiences the play through the “gates of Hor[n]” that signify a true dream rather than a false (1:82). In the King and Viceroy’s spectatorial frame, theatrical reality becomes deadly; in Andrea’s frame, death becomes merely a spectator sport. By layering these two perspectives, Kyd models for
playgoers the centrality of their own desires, perceptions, and experiences in producing stage corpses, encouraging the spectatorial enthusiasm and investment that would propel commercial early modern drama.

A decade later, Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (c. 1595) reinforces Kyd’s dramaturgical insight by once again using an inset play to promote playgoers’ dual response to stage corpses. The deaths in *Pyramus and Thisbe* at first seem entirely different from the deaths in *Solyman and Perseda*. Rather than exploring the unexpected reality of stage deaths, Shakespeare instead mocks them as excessively dramatic and unrealistic. But although Shakespeare reworks the idea of metatheatrical stage deaths to serve a more comedic purpose, Nick Bottom’s hilariously incompetent portrayal of Pyramus’s death functions similarly to heighten playgoers’ appreciation of stage deaths even in their fictionality. Kyd’s innovative idea that theatrical deaths have real impact on their theatrical spectators resonates, as the rest of this section will show, in the way Shakespeare depicts onstage spectators responding to Bottom’s acting.

By making a joke out of the irrepressible life of the supposedly dying Pyramus, Shakespeare emphasizes the presence of the actor bursting through the character of the stage.

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153 Horace H. Furness points out that “the method of Bottom and his company is precisely the opposite, as Gervinus has observed, of Shakespeare’s own method. They are determined to leave nothing to be supplied by the imagination. Wall must be plastered; Moonshine must carry lanthorn and bush… Shakespeare as much as says, ‘If you do not approve my dramatic method of presenting fairy-land and the heroic world, here is a specimen of the rival method. You think my fairy-world might be amended. Well, amend it with your own imagination. I can do no more…” In other words, Shakespeare mocks the effort to disguise a fiction’s theatricality, in order to justify his own method of embracing its materiality. Horace H. Furness, ed., *A new variorum edition: A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, by William Shakespeare, 4th ed. (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1895), 223, note to 5.1.225.
corpse. Bottom’s performance as Pyramus includes no fewer than fourteen announcements that he is dead, including six repetitions of the word “die” (5.1.300-6). These emphatic declarations, patently untrue in the very fact that Pyramus is able to speak them, comically underscore the ongoing life of this supposed corpse. Pyramus does not merely declare, impossibly, that “My soul is in the sky;” he reinforces the contradiction by describing that death as a loss of speech: “Tongue, lose thy light” (5.1.303-4). Further, the onstage spectators watching this display note the illusion’s failure. Demetrius plays on the idea of a numbered “die” to joke that Pyramus is uniquely “but one” man to die so many deaths, and Theseus comments on the lingering appearance of life in Pyramus by declaring that “with the help of a surgeon he might yet recover” (5.1.307-11). The joke, which these sarcastic comments reinforce, is that Bottom (along with his playwright, Peter Quince) has misunderstood an actor’s implicit contract with the audience by which he ought to represent the dying dramatic character rather than his living self. Bottom’s failure to sustain the dramatic illusion comes to its comedic climax when, after Thisbe’s death, the corpse of Pyramus suddenly revives and speaks once more. Still violating the boundary between fiction and reality, Bottom speaks of the play as both an ongoing situation (“the wall is down that parted their fathers”) and a completed entertainment (“will it please you see the epilogue”) (5.1.351-54).

Though Bottom utterly fails to maintain the illusion of real death, as the mockery of Theseus, Lysander, and Demetrius emphasizes, he still provokes a certain sympathy, as the quieter spectatorship of the women models. Ellen Mackay notes that, in contrast to the unruly

154 I count four declarations of his own death in line 300 and one in each of the five succeeding lines (since if we assume that Bottom has mixed up his lines in 304-05, he means to say “Moon, lose thy light; / Tongue, take thy flight” as if he loses both sight and speech through death); he then repeats “die” five more times in line 306.
interruptions that Theseus, Lysander, and Demetrius perpetrate, Helena and Hermia “abstain from the discourtesy of the court,” their silence paradoxically allowing them deeper investment and participation in the play than their husbands’ sarcastic commentary can.\textsuperscript{155} While she does not intentionally refer to the theatrical performance she is about to see, Hermia’s final comment on her forest adventures, “I see these things with parted eye, / When everything seems double,” suggests a dual perspective for her playgoing, as James Calderwood has noted; not separating her experience into dream or waking reality, Hermia has invited us to see the dual nature of theater as well (4.1.188-89).\textsuperscript{156} More explicitly, Hippolyta comments on Bottom/Pyramus’s passionate displays with “I pity the man,” as if conflating Bottom’s acting failure with Pyramus’s loss and grief (5.1.290).

The women’s sympathetic responses, acknowledging the duality of actor and character, demonstrate far more imaginative capacity than the mechanicals expect from their spectators, as in Snug’s preemptive warning that he is not a Lion (5.1.219-26). Even Puck implies, in his epilogue, that “keeping 'we Gentles' unoffended requires the wholesale repudiation of its performed event,” as if it is precisely the most sophisticated playgoers who cannot cope with a little intrusion of actorly reality into their theatrical fiction (5.1.429).\textsuperscript{157} Victorian critics such as William Hazlitt and C. A. Brown, in expressing concern for the “offense,” “unmanageab[ility],” and “inapplicability for the stage” of \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, thus entirely missed the function of \textit{Pyramus and Thisbe} to gently mock such worries.\textsuperscript{158} Though the mechanicals see

\textsuperscript{155} Mackay, “Indecorum,” 325.
\textsuperscript{156} Calderwood, \textit{Shakespearean Metadrama}, 145.
\textsuperscript{157} Mackay, “Indecorum,” 314.
\textsuperscript{158} William Hazlitt (1817); C.A. Brown (1838); quoted in Furness, \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}, 299-300 and 302.
theatrical fictions as too far a leap for imagination to make without abundant props and explanations, forcing reality upon the fiction to compensate, the noblemen (and critics) make the same error in another way by dismissing theatrical portrayals as too bare, too simple, too imperfect compared to their imagined worlds—and therefore insignificant. Through this unflattering portrait of playgoers’ inability to sympathize with actors, Shakespeare encourages instead “the audience’s creative role in the collaborative enterprise of drama.”\textsuperscript{159} The male spectators’ uncharitable response to Bottom’s death, like Puck’s epilogue, subtly prods playgoers to disavow such models and appreciate even the most transparent and imperfect theatrical fiction.

Despite a tendency toward patronizing skepticism, Theseus’s final evaluation of the play implicitly acknowledges that awareness of the actor can deepen playgoer response to even the least effective of theatrical illusions. His backhanded compliment, “When the players are all dead, there need none to be blamed,” suggests not simply a critical condemnation of a failed stage illusion but also a sympathy for the players themselves, prompted by the obvious effort that they have put into that illusion (5.1.356-57). As if invoking compassion for the faults of the dead, who cannot defend themselves, Theseus implies that these dead “players” should receive the same courteous forbearance. The effect is partially sarcastic, of course, since the players are not dead and indeed are all-too-ready to explain and justify themselves. Yet at the same time, his words also encourage the players by linking sympathy for the tragic deaths of the characters they have just performed to sympathy for them as actors, as if they too have suffered with the characters they play. Ultimately, Shakespeare invites playgoers to have sympathy for the actors themselves through the comic portrayals of these their proxies.

For Bottom, a stage death is all too truly a death, of his acting persona if nothing else.

\textsuperscript{159} Calderwood, \textit{Shakespearean Metadrama}, 136.
Clearly he exults in the experience of acting, of drawing all eyes, of feeding off the attention of the spectators whether negative or positive. He even wishes to play all the characters. It is easy to understand Bottom’s reluctance, when he comes to the end of his role, to relinquish that power and acquiesce in the silent stillness of a mere corpse lying on the stage. The actor, too, likely feels the loss as the play—and the chance to ham it up mercilessly—draws to a close.

Shakespeare invites playgoers to recognize the evident theatrical and emotional effort that the players have put into their work, even though the clumsiness of that effort threatens to undermine the dramatic illusion. In other words, the players' unintentional exposure of the artificiality of their play is, paradoxically, exactly what enables their onstage audience to encourage them. By emphasizing the instability of stage death, Bottom’s performance as a corpse implicitly reminds playgoers of their acquiescence in theatrical fiction in general, and encourages their ongoing participation in the players’ good-natured effort.

Though the two plays-within-plays discussed here have very different effects on their spectators, both consider the relation between the real and the performed corpse in explicitly metatheatrical plays-within-the play, laying the foundation for the more subtle types of liminal corpses in later plays. And in each of these plays, corpses provoke unexpected responses from fellow characters that model similar responses from playgoers. In *The Spanish Tragedy*, the King and Viceroy foolishly underreact to their sons’ actual deaths before them; meanwhile, this surprising reality of stage deaths justifies the intensity of Hieronimo’s response to another stage corpse, the body of Horatio. *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* also demonstrates the unexpected affective impact of even a fake death onstage, though in a different way. Though the Athenian spectators mostly mock the play they see, the reality of the actor’s living body intruding on the fiction also provokes sympathy and shared pleasure in the actors’ efforts, both from fellow
characters and from playgoers. In the end, Hippolyta’s sympathy for the hapless yet lovably hilarious Bottom, like Hieronimo’s intense grief over Horatio, models a more appropriate response for playgoers than Theseus’s mockery and what Ellen Mackay calls the “cultivated indifference of the elite spectator,” which Kyd himself critiques through the “obliviousness” of the King and Viceroy to their son’s death.\textsuperscript{160} By dramatizing the potential for even the most obviously fake stage deaths to provoke spectatorial sympathy, Shakespeare builds in \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream} on Kyd’s work in \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} to show the powerful effects of theatrical spectacle on both actors and spectators.

\textbf{“Why art thou yet so fair?”: tragedy as bodily misreading in \textit{Romeo and Juliet}}

As one of the most remembered and referenced plays of the sixteenth century, \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} opened the way for powerful new experiments with onstage spectators’ response to corpses.\textsuperscript{161} Subsequent playwrights do not, however, depict stage death becoming real exactly as Kyd does, at least not until decades later.\textsuperscript{162} Instead, plays’ exploration of how spectators understand stage corpses shifts to a related trope; rather than contemplating the unexpectedly deadly power of theater, we see death itself become a performance. This new trope of the fake corpse is less obviously metatheatrical than the stage deaths in the plays within \textit{The Spanish Tragedy} and \textit{A Midsummer Night’s Dream}. However, fake corpses and onstage

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{160} Mackay, “Indecorum,” 316.
\item \textsuperscript{161} Over 60 different early modern works reference \textit{The Spanish Tragedy}; see Emma Smith, “Hieronimo’s Afterlives,” in \textit{The Spanish Tragedie with the First Part of Jeronimo}, ed. Emma Smith (London: Penguin, 1998).
\item \textsuperscript{162} Several plays offer variations on the trope of real death in the midst of an inset play/masque, but lack one or both of Kyd’s key components: an onstage audience and a seeming death. Middleton’s \textit{The Lady’s Tragedy} has a gulling scene that comes close to Kyd’s scenario, but it is technically not a theatrical performance. See Appendix: Theatrical deaths, 219 below.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
spectators’ response to those corpses work like these previous stage corpses to explore appropriate theatrical spectatorship. In particular, as we will also see with the fake corpse of Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* in the next section, the fake corpse trope invites playgoers to grapple with the tension between a stage corpse’s potential comedy and the larger purposes of the genre.

In Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (c. 1595), onstage spectators’ responses to the fake corpse of Juliet work to model and ironize the responses of playgoers, managing the tension between the potential comedy of stage corpses and the tragic effect.\(^{163}\) Dryden writes in 1668 of the potentially comic nature of stage tragedy: “I have observ'd that in all our Tragedies, the Audience cannot forbear laughing when the Actors are to die; 'tis the most Comick part of the whole Play.”\(^{164}\) Through characters’ misreadings of Juliet’s fake corpse, Shakespeare addresses this problem head-on, daringly extending playgoers’ comic sympathy for Bottom’s performance of death into the genre of tragedy. By inviting playgoers to acknowledge the actor’s body once again, Shakespeare now uses the stage corpse’s potential for comedy to intensify its tragic impact, developing a technique that will later reverberate particularly in *Othello* and *King Lear*.

Juliet’s fake death in *Romeo and Juliet* is not original to Shakespeare, in the sense that neither the story of purported death leading to lovers’ suicides nor the particular plot device of the potion for deathlike sleep is original. Not only does a “slepy mixture” appear in Shakespeare’s direct source, Arthur Brooke’s *Tragical Historye of Romeus and Julliet* (1562), but it had even been brought onstage at least a few years previously in Christopher Marlowe’s *Jew of Malta* (c. 1589-90), in which the villainous Barabas credits a “sleepy drinke” for his

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escape from prison by pretending to be dead. The combination of a false death and a subsequent suicide dates back at least to Salernitano’s version of the story in 1476 and perhaps even to Ovid, though Thisbe’s false death is only in Pyramus’s imagination. However, one part of Shakespeare’s play is entirely original: Romeo’s commentary on the lifelike appearance of Juliet’s supposed corpse. In his final scene with Juliet, Romeo describes her body as looking surprisingly alive. He comments on how death “hath had no power yet upon thy beauty,” leaving her lips and cheeks “crimson,” since “death’s pale flag is not advanced there” (5.3.93-96). He asks, “Why art thou yet so fair?” (5.3.102). Romeo’s insistence on the living appearance of Juliet’s dead body reminds playgoers again and again that she is in fact alive and should revive soon. The scene’s tension and pathos thus creates a new dramatic irony out of Romeo’s impatient ignorance in misreading a living body as a lifelike corpse.

Shakespeare innovatively combines two source traditions to startling effect. In one tradition, Romeo reads Juliet’s living body as only a dead corpse. For example, in Arthur Brooke’s novella, Romeus, weeping, checks Juliet for “signes of lyfe”: “His fearfull handes he layd upon her stomacke colde, / And them on divers parts besyde, the wofull wight did hold.” Finding no life in her body, Romeus pulls out his poison and makes his farewell speech. Conversely, another of Shakespeare’s sources imagines a dead body as startlingly alive. Since Malone and Steevens, editors have linked Romeo’s description of a corpse as lifelike in this scene to Samuel Daniel’s *The Complaint of Rosamond* (1592), which also imagines death as a

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military conqueror with an “ensign.” In this poem, Rosamond’s lover, observing her corpse, imagines death as a “dallying” paramour, and justifies the metaphor by arguing that “ougly death sits faire within her face, / Sweet remnants resting of vermilion red, / That death it selfe, doubts whether she be dead.” Her beauty returns after death in a blushing red that paradoxically both signals the seductive power of her new lover, Death, and contradicts Death’s seeming triumph through its lifelike color. As John Kleiner argues in an important article, “Brooke’s Juliet is a living girl who looks dead; Daniel’s Rosamond is a dead girl who looks alive.” By combining these two paradoxes, Shakespeare makes Romeo’s tragedy not so much one of a lack of knowledge, as in Brooke’s tale, but a deliberate ignoring of the evidence of his senses, a “self-deception.” Romeo reads Juliet’s imitation-death as real, like a cooperative playgoer does at every tragic stage death; both explain away all-too-telling signs of life as merely part of death itself, perhaps exploiting theological notions of death as a temporary sleep for the immortal spirit. In convincing himself that Juliet is truly dead, Romeo models, justifies, and ironizes playgoers’ own response to the fundamental theatrical device of tragic actors playing dead.

I will return momentarily to the effects of this modeling action. For now, I want to point out the comic effect of the Capulets’ previous responses to Juliet as dead, which bear no hint of Romeo’s perception of her corpse as lifelike. To her father, mother, Nurse, and Paris, Juliet

170 Ibid., 5.
171 Imbracsio, “Corpses Revealed,” 82-102.
seems entirely dead. Her father describes her as “cold, / Her blood is settled, and her joints are stiff; / Life and these lips have long been separated.” (4.5.25-27). This choral polyphony of mourning pours forth in ironic contrast with the knowledgeable suspense playgoers likely feel. The Nurse’s lines in particular, with her comic recombinations of “woe” and “day,” have reminded critics of Bottom’s speeches from the “most lamentable comedy of Pyramus and Thisby” in A Midsummer Night’s Dream.\textsuperscript{172} Coleridge was likely not the first to notice the potential for “laughter” in this scene.\textsuperscript{173} The very inappropriateness of such melodrama and its ineffectiveness for producing real pathos on the stage suggests the possibility that the lamentation scene may in fact be deliberately comic. The Capulets, consumed with noisy expressions of loss, forget to note the life of the body they purport to cherish. Mourning so excessively Juliet’s living body, irritating playgoers and critics with their repetitive wails, and tiresomely delaying the tragic catastrophe, the Capulets become ridiculous. This melodramatic grief works comically because its excess is unexpectedly silly, and yet that silliness is also tonally and structurally appropriate, at least for the moment, since Juliet is in fact alive and seeking, in a classic comic plot, to rejoin her lover.

In its comedy, the Capulets’ grief at Juliet’s death also hearkens back to Bottom’s passion over Thisbe in A Midsummer Night’s Dream—or forward, as my point does not depend on the much-debated question of which play came first.\textsuperscript{174} Though the plays work in different genres

\textsuperscript{172} Shakespeare, Romeo and Juliet 4.5.49-54 and Midsummer Night’s Dream 1.2.11-12; Thomas Moisan, “Rhetoric and the Rehearsal of Death: The ‘Lamentations’ Scene in Romeo and Juliet,” Shakespeare Quarterly 34.4 (1983): 396.


\textsuperscript{174} See Thomas P. Harrison, “Romeo and Juliet, A Midsummer Night’s Dream: Companion Plays,” Texas Studies in Literature and Language 13.2 (1971): 209: on the question of which was written first, “there is no unanimity of opinion,” but Harrison judges Romeo and
and the stakes for Juliet’s performance of death are much higher than for Thisbe’s, nevertheless Martha Tuck Rozett points out that Romeo’s misunderstanding of Juliet’s corpse culminates what in another play might seem a grotesque “series of comic errors.” Students often hear the formula that Romeo and Juliet remains a comedy only until Mercutio’s death, which “thoroughly alters the tone of the play.” However, comedy and tragedy mingle throughout the play, and even the Capulets’ suffering is hardly incompatible with comedy, as the scapegoat figures of Shakespeare’s darker comedies demonstrate in the next decade. Indeed, in the seventeenth century one impresario produced Romeo and Juliet “alternately, tragical one day and tragicomical another, for several days together.” In the tragicomical version, Juliet awakes in time to save Romeo for a happy ending.

Further, as Kleiner argues, another such “alternative comic ending is already proposed within Romeo and Juliet itself” when in 5.1 Romeo proleptically dreams that Juliet finds him dead and kisses him to life. In this dream the play tantalizes us with a potentially comic ending, as if Juliet’s kiss might magically cure the poison Romeo will take, or Romeo’s lips

Juliet the better play. For a reading of Midsummer as a parody of (and thus response to) Romeo and Juliet, see Samuel B. Hemingway, “The Relation of A Midsummer Night’s Dream to Romeo and Juliet,” Modern Language Notes 26.3 (1911).


See, for example, The Merchant of Venice (c. 1596-98), Twelfth Night (c. 1601-2), and Measure for Measure (c. 1603-4).

John Downes, Roscius Anglicanus (1708); quoted in Weis, Romeo and Juliet, 58.

might awaken Juliet from her sleep.\textsuperscript{180} Even Balthasar, in trying to ease his sad news to Romeo, unknowingly emphasizes the possibility of Juliet’s revival in saying that Juliet’s “body sleeps in Capel’s monument” (5.1.18). As Balthasar’s words remind us, Juliet is in fact only sleeping, waiting only for Romeo to respond to the prompting of his dream to awaken her. The Capulets’ comically excessive grief thus points to the potential for a happy ending inherent to the play itself, a tension that only deepens as Romeo responds to Juliet’s lifelike appearance. When he arrives at Juliet’s tomb, therefore, Romeo’s perspective shapes that of playgoers in a double way.

Most obviously, the scene’s dramatic irony gives playgoers a sense of superiority to Romeo’s tragic misreading. Though we know differently, Romeo thinks Juliet is truly dead, and even his startled observation that “Death… hath had no power yet upon thy beauty” does not convince him that she is still alive (5.3.92-93). Indeed, he rationalizes this living appearance in the idea that “death is amorous / And … keeps / Thee here in dark to be his paramour” (5.3.103-5). Kleiner argues that “As an actual explanation of Juliet’s blush, Romeo’s theory that Death is ‘keeping’ her fresh to prey upon her body is beyond outlandish. It is a crazy idea—monstrous and perverse.”\textsuperscript{181} This metaphorical conceit even forms the logic of Romeo’s final motive for suicide: “For fear of that, I still will stay with thee” (5.3.106). In a sense, Romeo’s misinterpretation of Juliet’s body extends his characteristic preference for style over substance and tendency to, in Calderwood’s phrase, “crank[] up his rhetorical engines in preparation for Petrarchan flights.”\textsuperscript{182} For playgoers, even as Romeo expresses his grief poetically, the solution

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\textsuperscript{180} See Weis, \textit{Romeo and Juliet}, note to 5.1.1-2.
\textsuperscript{182} Calderwood, \textit{Shakespearean Metadrama}, 90.
\end{flushleft}
to his tragedy is disturbingly apparent: all he has to do is recognize, as we do, that the apparent corpse before him is in fact a living body.

But at the same time, the play also challenges our superiority to Romeo’s spectatorship by placing us in the same position. As Juliet’s actor plays dead for Romeo’s benefit, the actor performing the freshly killed corpse of Paris nearby onstage plays dead for ours. The more that Juliet’s actor looks alive (as in fact he is), the more frustratingly obstinate Romeo’s misinterpretation of actor/Juliet’s living, breathing body with its pulsing heartbeat becomes; yet this willful blindness parallels the deliberate interpretation required for playgoers to accept any stage corpse. Stage corpses represent death in silence and stillness, performing what Juliet called the “dismal scene I needs must act alone” (4.3.19). In his choice to ignore the plain evidence of his senses for his imaginative construct instead, Romeo becomes like “every tragic spectator… imposing tragedy on a situation where, visibly, it doesn’t belong.”

Romeo’s failure to see through Juliet’s sleeping performance turns back on playgoers all the more as the two lovers actually kill themselves. Even as we playgoers have mocked Romeo’s overreaction to the idea of Juliet’s death, we now find ourselves forced into Romeo’s spectatorial approach of willful blindness ourselves. For example, as Juliet recognizes with horror how recently Romeo has died, grieving that “Thy lips are warm,” her words simultaneously remind us that Romeo’s actor is no more cold or dead than was Juliet’s (5.3.167). Similarly, Romeo’s final pun is, at least for his actor, literally true: “Thy drugs are quick,” that is, alive (5.3.120). The apothecary’s drugs do not merely bring Romeo to the life-in-death with Juliet that he craves, but also, in their innocuous status as a prop, leave the actor “quick” onstage despite his dead

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184 Weis, Romeo and Juliet, note to 5.3.120.
appearance. Romeo and Juliet, playing dead, remain alive in the persons of their actors, looking exactly the same as Juliet did in when she presented merely the appearance of death. Playgoers, like Romeo, thus grieve over a mere illusion, as comically inadequate as Pyramus’s death in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. As Kleiner argues, Romeo’s response to Juliet’s fake corpse exposes the “disproportion” of tragic spectacle and its “inevitable… reduction to comedy, which can, at best, be briefly and inadequately disguised.” Romeo’s misreading of Juliet’s body ultimately draws attention to the deliberate misreading of bodies that tragedy itself requires.

Such an idea of tragic spectacle’s inevitable and fundamental comedy sounds like a defeat, as if true theatrical tragedy is impossible. However, according to Stephen Booth, comedy and tragedy function as mirrors of each other, each working in a tension between surprise and inevitability: “Comedy operates from—and demonstrates—the proposition that there is a way things are and fools forget what it is… Tragedy operates from—and demonstrates—the proposition that there is a way things are and that fools assume it is knowable and known.” Comedy and tragedy both point us back to “the way things are,” but tragedy problematizes its basic knowability. Thus the hints of comedy in Romeo’s tragic misinterpretation of Juliet’s body, as in the Capulets’ grief—and in playgoers’ replication of these misreadings as both Romeo and Juliet die for real—point to Shakespeare’s larger purpose. The play turns the tensions between tragedy and comedy to a deeper emotional impact as our humorous, even arrogant pleasure at our ironic awareness of Juliet’s life increases our sense of loss at the lovers’ actual death. Shakespeare first gives us the superiority of knowing Juliet to be alive and reinforces that superiority through our privileged perception of the actor’s life, only to undercut both with

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186 Booth, King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy, 78.
Juliet’s real suicide. The tragedy here is, for playgoers, at least partially the loss of interpretive superiority, a feeling of vertigo at no longer being able to trust the sensory knowledge of Juliet’s living body with which the play has flattered us for nearly two acts. We have, like the fools of Booth’s phrase, tragically assumed that theatrical reality is “knowable and known.”

Thus, while I have built throughout on Kleiner’s point that Juliet’s fake corpse develops playgoers’ awareness of the actor’s living body, and that ultimately belief in stage corpses relies on playgoers’ “act of will, a decision to look and to look past,” I take issue with his formulation that Romeo and Juliet simply exposes “the limits of the [tragic] form.” Rather, the play uses the natural limit of a performing body—which can never look completely dead—to turn its comic theatrical irony back on the spectator itself. Shakespeare uses Juliet’s fake corpse to justify the fakeness of actual stage death, intensifying its tragedy all the more through the same potential for comedy that later plays would emphasize. In Thomas Heywood’s comedy How a Man may Choose a Good Wife from a Bad (c. 1601-2), for example, a fake death potion gives a woman’s apparent corpse a living appearance, comically fooling a besotted visitor to her tomb. Similarly, John Fletcher and John Shirley’s comedy The Night-Walker (1611) riffs on the idea of a woman’s false death the night before her wedding. Yet in Shakespeare’s play, the tragedy of Juliet’s actual death remains intact through the play’s emphasis on how spectators

187 Ibid., 13, 17.

188 Thomas Heywood, How a Man may Chuse a Good Wife from a Bad (London: Mathew Lawe, 1602), LION: “her lips are warme, and I am much deceivd, / If that she stirre not” (1850-51). Fake death potions also appear in John Marston’s tragicomedy Antonio and Mellida (c. 1599-1600) and in Francis Beaumont’s comedy The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1607), in each of which a man uses his apparent death to further a match with a beloved, as well as in Shakespeare’s tragicomedies Cymbeline (1611) and the collaborative Fletcher, Massinger, and Field tragicomedy Knight of Malta (c. 1616-19). For a brief analysis of the metatheatrical significance of the fake corpse in Antonio and Mellida, see Marguerite Tassi, The Scandal of Images: Iconoclasm, Eroticism, and Painting in Early Modern English Drama (Selinsgrove, PA: Susquehanna UP, 2005), 113.
perceive her liminal body shifting between life and death. In its paradoxical presence, the slipperiness of Juliet’s fake death tricks us too into a tragically arrogant certainty about our perceptions.

Shakespeare would later use a similar technique to intensify the death of Desdemona in *Othello* (c. 1603-4), during which Desdemona seems alive (“I think she stirs again”) and even temporarily revives (“O falsely, falsely murder’d!”) before finally dying (5.2.95, 117).\(^{189}\) Martin Mueller has argued that Shakespeare shows a “habitual and deliberate” tendency in plays such as *Othello* and *Cymbeline* (1611) to blur the boundary between the life and death of apparent stage corpses (whom he calls “sleeping beauties”), and that this tendency arises out of the story of Hero’s ‘death’ and revival in *Much Ado About Nothing* (c. 1598).\(^{190}\) However, several years before *Much Ado*, *Romeo and Juliet* uses the same trope to heighten the tragedy of Juliet’s actual death.\(^{191}\) As if foreshadowing the necrophilic episodes that would emerge in later Jacobean theater, as in Thomas Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy* (1611) and Philip Massinger’s *The Duke of Milan* (c. 1621-23), *Othello* works, like *Romeo and Juliet*, to highlight the disjunction between

\(^{189}\) Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice*, in Evans and Tobin.

\(^{190}\) Martin Mueller, “Shakespeare’s Sleeping Beauties: The Sources of “Much Ado about Nothing” and the Play of their Repetitions,” *Modern Philology* 91.3 (1994). See also David Roberts, “Sleeping Beauties: Shakespeare, Sleep and the Stage,” *The Cambridge Quarterly* 35.3 (2006). *Cymbeline* is particularly interesting for its multiple examples of dramatic irony over a corpse onstage: in addition to Imogen’s fake death, we also see her confusion of the headless body of her enemy Cloten for the body of her lover Posthumus, as if mocking the interchangeability of a headless prop body onstage in a “deliberately ironic literary [and, I believe, theatrical] strategy,” according to Tanya Pollard, “Romancing the Greeks: Cymbeline’s Genres and Models,” in *How to Do Things with Shakespeare*, ed. Laurie Maguire (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2008), 42.

the living, painted body of the boy actor and the body of the dead woman he personates, but does so only in order to deepen the effect on playgoers.192

As in Romeo and Juliet, in Othello Shakespeare alters the source tale to give the female body unexpected signs of life. Unlike Cinthio’s Desdemona, who dies under a series of blows and does not recover, Desdemona suddenly revives after several long minutes of apparent death onstage, even speaking three times before ultimately falling silent.193 This revival has seemed funny to some, such as seventeenth-century spectator Thomas Rymer, who dismisses Othello as merely a burlesque on the theme that “a Woman never loses her Tongue, even tho’ after she is stifl’d.”194 Yet here as in Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare’s alteration has the powerful effect of raising and then shattering playgoers’ hopes for not only a happy ending but also a clear congruence between bodily perception and narrative meaning. Playgoers may try to retroactively rationalize the corpse’s lifelike appearance as a sign that Desdemona was, like Juliet, not fully dead. However, the temporary signs of life that Desdemona and Juliet display ultimately only deepen the final disjunction between living actor and dead character, which, like tragedy itself, cannot be altered or rationalized. In Desdemona’s actual and final death, what Stanley Cavell calls the “transcendental and the empirical” intersect irreversibly as the actor plays dead again.195

192 My next chapter will explore in detail the relationship between the Lady’s corpse and ghost in Middleton’s play, 141-154 below.


194 Thomas Rymer, A Short View of Tragedy (London: Richard Baldwin, 1693), LION, 140.

Though we have no record of contemporary audience response to Juliet’s dead body onstage, Henry Jackson’s vivid account of seeing Desdemona in 1610 survives. Jackson’s description powerfully demonstrates the effect of such an ambiguously alive stage corpse on spectators: “Desdemona, killed in front of us by her husband, although she acted her part excellently throughout, in her death moved us especially when, as she lay in her bed, with her face alone she implored the pity of the audience.”\textsuperscript{196} As Anthony Dawson shows in his reading of this account, Jackson imagines Desdemona explicitly as a woman, not a boy actor, since “it is she who moves the audience,” even using feminine forms for the Latin verbs.\textsuperscript{197} Yet at the same time, Jackson also implicitly considers the actor’s skill as he “moved us especially” and “implored the pity of the audience,” describing actions that require the boy actor’s awareness of the audience. The feminine Desdemona who is ostensibly the subject of these verbs cannot direct such appeals to the playgoers surrounding her, especially since she is now dead. An untranslatable Latin pun confirms Jackson’s attempt to balance an understanding of Desdemona as both a woman and as a boy actor: though Dessen’s translation emphasizes how the boy actor “acted her part excellently throughout,” an alternate translation of the Latin words “optime semper causam egit” could be that Desdemona herself “always pled her case excellently” in her death scene with Othello.\textsuperscript{198} That is, Jackson puns on the intricate connection between the Desdemona’s pleading dialogue and the actor’s passionate body. And as Paige Martin Reynolds argues, Henry Jackson’s description of Desdemona’s body “reflects Othello’s fears and fantasies

\textsuperscript{196} Translation by Dawson, “Performance and Participation,” 35.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid., 35, 41.
when he asks, “Not dead? Not yet quite dead?” (5.2.86). As the bodies of actor and character blend, this liminally living/dead and male/female body pleads for mercy even more effectively than words alone could do.

The tension between the supposed death and the apparent life of the boy actor that Jackson describes for Desdemona must have had a similar impact in *Romeo and Juliet*. As if to heighten the tragic effect of the breathing, imploring, performing actor playing dead in a playhouse crammed with spectators on all sides to catch any sign of life, the corpses of Romeo and Juliet remain on the stage through the end of the play in an extended tableau around which other characters circulate. As if to emphasize the power of these living/dead bodies, Shakespeare alters Brooke’s idea of a public tomb for the lovers into a public display of their actual physical forms, as Montague and Capulet promise to build golden statues in their honor. Even in this idea, however, the lifelike bodies of the actors gain a final ironic resonance through the contrast with the idea of being fixed in sculpture. Actual statues—to which Shakespeare will return in *The Winter’s Tale*—would be poor substitutes for the living bodies playing dead before us.

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199 Reynolds, “Performing Death and Desire in Othello,” n.pag.

200 Romeo lies dead onstage for 50 lines before Juliet dies, and then both remain onstage for 140 more lines. At over 3000 lines to a play named in the Prologue as two hours long, that would be a very rapid 8 minutes; at a slower rate of 1000 lines per hour, a rate possible for a 2.5-hour production with about 15% of its lines cut, the display becomes about 12 minutes long.

201 Brooke writes, “The bodies dead removed from vaulte where they did dye, / In stately tombe, on pillers great, of marble rayse they hye,” *Tragicall Historye*, 263, lines 3013-14.
“If a lie may do thee grace”: The lying bodies of history in *1 Henry IV*

First performed only about two years after *Romeo and Juliet, 1 Henry IV* (c. 1597) adapts a similar fake corpse trope to the affective demands of a different genre.202 Falstaff’s fake death works to manage the inherent transparency and instability of stage corpses, paradoxically increasing their authenticity to support the play’s nationalist, historicizing agenda. Just as *Romeo and Juliet* uses comic tropes to deepen its tragic irony, *1 Henry IV* uses Falstaff’s vitalizing resistance to the narrative to ultimately intensify Prince Hal’s mystique as nationalist hero. I build here on Stephen Greenblatt’s argument that political power in the play increases through its containment of “its own radical subversion,” particularly as expressed in the self-conscious theatricality of Falstaff’s performance as a corpse.203 Falstaff’s subversive performance as fake corpse comically acknowledges the instability of the historical narrative Shakespeare constructs surrounding Prince Hal. Yet at the same time, Hal’s generous acceptance of Falstaff’s revival story, despite his temporary mockery of what seems to be his actual corpse, models a similarly generous response for playgoers to the play’s other stage corpses. Falstaff’s performance as corpse reinforces the sense of Hal’s position above theatricality, as if he, like Hamlet, has “that within which passes show.”204 Hal’s killing of Percy, his heroic status, and the play’s whole narrative thus gain authenticity through the play’s acknowledgement, through Falstaff’s fake death, of theater’s potential falsity.205 Yet my argument differs from Greenblatt’s political focus


204 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, TLN 266, 1.2.85.

205 I call Hotspur “Percy” in deference to the latter name’s prevalence in the dialogue I analyze.
in its emphasis on how Shakespeare stages theatrical bodies for theatrical goals. Ultimately, as the Chorus of Hal’s later play, *Henry V*, will exhort playgoers, “tis your thoughts that now must deck our kings.”²⁰⁶ In using Falstaff’s fake corpse to glorify Prince Hal’s authentic power, *I Henry IV* demonstrates its own theatrical power to shape our perceptions.²⁰⁷

Falstaff’s fake death occurs unremarkably in the midst of an early modern theatrical battle like any other, with soldiers coming onstage to rally each other and exiting to return to the fight. Tension climbs as battles take place between first Douglas and King Henry and then Prince Hal and Percy. As Hal and Percy fight, Falstaff enters, full of encouragement: “Well said, Hal! to it Hal! Nay, you shall find no boy's play here, I can tell you” (5.4.75-76). As Calderwood suggests, Falstaff’s comment “raises what might otherwise have been an unconsidered possibility. For a disconcerting moment or two we may realize that ‘boy's play’ is precisely what we shall find, *are* finding” in the midst of rehearsed swordplay and bloody special effects.²⁰⁸ Yet even as Falstaff lauds Hal’s manliness in these strangely theatrical and spectatorial terms, referencing contemporary boys’ companies such as Children of the Chapel and Children of Paul’s, he demonstrates in miniature what I am arguing is the project of the entire scene. Falstaff distinguishes Hal by contrasting him with the theatrical performers with whom, paradoxically, he is strongly associated.


²⁰⁷ In making this argument I do not hold, with David Scott Kastan among others, that Falstaff’s festive theatricality ultimately subverts the narrative of Hal’s political triumph; rather, Shakespeare truly elevates Prince Hal, but in so doing, immodestly draws our attention to the theatrical techniques he uses to do so. See David Scott Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 129-48.

²⁰⁸ Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, 69.
Falstaff’s fake death immediately follows. Unlike Juliet’s deathlike sleep, however, for which playgoers definitely know the whole story and Romeo definitely does not, the precise information that the staging of Falstaff’s fake death communicates to playgoers is difficult to determine. The 1598 Quarto gives the stage direction “Enter Douglas he fighteth with Falstaffe, he fals down as if he were dead, the Prince killeth Percy.” Though the quarto distinguishes between Falstaff’s ‘falling’ and Percy’s actual death, it is possible that no difference is apparent onstage. After Percy’s dying speech, Prince Hal addresses the apparently dead Falstaff; then, as Hal exits, the stage direction indicates that Falstaff “riseth up” to declare himself alive.

Three different ways to stage this section have appeared in recent productions. First, neither Hal nor playgoers could recognize that Falstaff is alive until he arises as Hal exits. Second, Hal may still not see that Falstaff is alive but playgoers would see Falstaff reacting to his insults, comically mugging for the audience. Third, Prince Hal could see that Falstaff is alive (as would playgoers) and speak deliberately to needle him. At first, it might seem that the first and simplest option, by which neither playgoers nor Hal realize Falstaff is alive until he stands up,

210 Ibid.
213 Orson Welles stages this option in the movie *Chimes at Midnight* (1966), a conflation of the two parts of *Henry IV*, in which Falstaff’s visible breath prompts Hal’s teasing: Atkin, “Performance History,” 44-45.
cannot adequately account for the teasing effect of Hal’s speech over Falstaff’s dead body, as the second and third options do. Dramaturgically, Hal’s comments on his “heavy” loss of “so fat a deer” might seem to have little purpose unless Falstaff can react with indignation for playgoers’ amusement, as recent movie versions of the play have depicted (5.4.105-7). However, because Falstaff’s silent reaction to Hal’s mockery—a visual ‘aside’—could not have worked on an early modern stage, as I will argue, Hal’s commentary must function in a different way even as Falstaff’s death remains real for playgoers until he arises.

The problem with staging any reaction from Falstaff in this scene as written is simple: lying on the stage and pretending to be dead, the actor playing Falstaff would have found it quite difficult to communicate comic indignation to the whole playhouse through facial expressions alone, without moving so much as to confuse playgoers about why Hal does not recognize him as obviously alive. Calling forth laughter from only a small section of the theater would be anticlimactic, and enough movement to convey the humor of Falstaff’s response to more playgoers would also send mixed messages about Hal’s knowledge. If Shakespeare desired such an effect, in fact, a much easier option would have been the convention of a spoken aside, as a very similar fake death in the anonymous play Locrine (c. 1590-94) demonstrates.

In this play, appearing only a few years before 1 Henry IV, the clownish Strumbo “fall[s] down” and pretends to be dead amidst a battle between contenders for the throne of Britain. In the midst of the princely Albanact’s dying speech, Strumbo ironizes the effect of his ‘death’ by suddenly speaking aside to playgoers, though none of the nobles onstage seem to hear or observe

214 See the previous two notes for examples, as well as David Scott Kastan, 1 Henry IV, by William Shakespeare (London: Thompson Learning, 2002), 331, note to 5.4.104-9.

215 Locrine, attributed to W.S. (London: P.C., 1664), LION, 2.6.27 s.d.
him.\textsuperscript{216} Then Strumbo’s servant, Trompart, enters and notices Strumbo lying on the ground, and addresses him earnestly. Angered at having his disguise seen through, Strumbo berates Trompart: “Let me alone, I tell thee, for I am dead… I will not speak, for I am dead I tell thee.”\textsuperscript{217} Strumbo communicates to playgoers that he is alive through first a sarcastic aside and then through an indignant response to the servant destroying his pretense; most importantly, he does not cue spectators through facial expressions alone.

\textit{Locrine’s} precedent of the surprising revival of a stage corpse makes it even more likely that Shakespeare deliberately worked to maintain surprise in Falstaff’s revival. Shakespeare’s playgoers, if they knew \textit{Locrine}, might well have expected Falstaff, like Strumbo, to rise from the dead, or Hal, like Trompart, to earnestly recognize his faking friend as alive. Given that expectation, I argue that Shakespeare maintains the scene’s tension by diminishing the information playgoers receive in his version. After Percy’s dying speech playgoers hear no direct confirmation of Falstaff’s life like Strumbo gives during Albanact’s similar speech. Rather, they hear only the hinting mockery of Hal’s commentary on Falstaff, deeply inappropriate for an actual death. Through this comedic mockery so clearly directed at the ears of its dead subject, Falstaff, and through the precedent of \textit{Locrine}, Shakespeare builds subconscious anticipation for the sudden and highly visible spectacle of Falstaff himself rising up in indignation, while maintaining the surprise itself.

By fooling playgoers, Falstaff’s revival generates comic energy that works powerfully in this otherwise somber scene of battle and death, like the fake death of Frederick in Beaumont and Fletcher’s later comedy \textit{The Captain} (c. 1609-12) in which, as Jeremy Lopez argues, “the

\textsuperscript{216} “Lord have mercy upon us, Masters, I think this is a holy-day, every man lies sleeping in the fields, but God knowes full sore against their wills”: \textit{Locrine} 2.6.72.

\textsuperscript{217} \textit{Locrine} 2.6.95, 97.
It would have been easy enough for Shakespeare to give the ‘dead’ Falstaff a verbal aside to break the illusion earlier, as Strumbo has, but no line exists for Falstaff to speak. And if Falstaff does not demonstrate his life to playgoers until he rises up, then Hal’s punning cannot mean that he sees through Falstaff’s disguise either, at least not in any explicit sense. Instead, in its ambiguity Hal’s teasing speech over Falstaff’s body builds playgoers’ perception of his royal power in two ways at once as it models our own spectatorship of Falstaff’s corpse.

On one hand, Hal’s address to Falstaff’s seeming corpse leaves the Prince innocent of guile, removed from the theatricality Falstaff embodies. As Kastan points out, when Hal reenters with John of Lancaster to find Falstaff alive, Lancaster asks in confusion, “Did you not tell me this fat man was dead?” (5.4.131). It is unlikely that Hal would, at this late point in the play, lie to support Falstaff’s charade himself; the line makes the most sense simply as a confirmation for playgoers that Hal really did think Falstaff was dead. Such innocence on Hal’s part reinforces playgoers’ growing sense of his princely separation from Falstaff’s clownish world of theatrical deception. Hal is no servile Trompart, pathetically cajoling Strumbo to get up.

Lopez, *Theatrical Convention and Audience Response*, 177. Sudden fake deaths by violence also appear in John Marston’s *The Malcontent* (c. 1602-4) in which Malevole seemingly takes poison his enemy offers, Thomas Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy* (1611) in which Govianus faints in apparent death rather than slay his beloved, John Webster’s *The White Devil* (c. 1612-13), in which Flamineo’s fake death highlights his actual death by contrast, and Thomas Heywood’s *The Iron Age, part II* (c. 1612-13), which imitates *Locrine* and *1 Henry IV*. See the Appendix: Fake corpses, 220 below.

It certainly remains possible that Falstaff’s actor, as a clown, might have taken liberties with the script by speaking an impromptu aside or gesturing, which would diminish both the surprise of Falstaff’s arising and the contrast with *Locrine*, but might nevertheless allow Hal to maintain the dual knowing/unknowing quality I describe here.

On the other hand, seen retroactively, the speech also implies for Hal an uncanny knowingness of Falstaff’s attempt to disguise himself as a corpse, an intuition going even beyond what he admits to believing. If apparently delivered only to a stageful of corpses, Hal’s speech works all the more powerfully on playgoers to activate our own awareness of Falstaff’s bodily life and suggest that he, like us, recognizes in some sense that Falstaff’s actor is playing dead. As he comments on how “all this flesh” could not “keep in a little life,” Hal draws attention to playgoers’ perception of this actor’s physical body as still alive (5.4.102-3). Here I argue against Kastan’s idea that Falstaff’s revival destroys the “principle of order” and “reassuring dialectic… that would insist upon Hal’s triumph.”

Instead, even as Falstaff’s reanimation shatters the temporary stage illusion of his death, it also flatteringly confirms playgoers’ (and Hal’s) subconscious perceptions of the vitality of his performing body. Hal thus exerts omniscient princely dominance over both Falstaff and playgoers even in his apparent innocence, a dominance lost in movie versions that depict Falstaff silently, comically protesting Hal’s teasing.

Hal continues to highlight Falstaff’s position as a theatrical character by declaring that “Embowell’d will I see thee by and by,” ostensibly promising to honor Falstaff through embalming him (5.4.109). On a deeper level, however, Shakespeare gives Hal the power to threaten both Falstaff’s living belly and his actor’s belly that “contains not guts but cotton or wool.”

Hal’s comment that Falstaff will “by noble Percy lie” functions similarly, since Falstaff is perpetuating a lie by lying down (5.4.110). Using puns delivered for (but not directly to) an audience of playgoers, Hal’s speech maintains this ambiguity about how conscious Hal actually

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221 Kastan, Introduction, 1 Henry IV, 73.


223 Calderwood, Shakespearean Metadrama, 84.
is of Falstaff’s deception. The play creates a nationalistic narrative of Hal’s greatness by managing to suggest both his awareness and his innocence in the face of theatrical deception.

Following the same tension, Falstaff’s revival ostensibly opposes the political narrative of the play by emphasizing the lies inherent to theatricality. Because Percy’s real death and Falstaff’s fake death demand the same level of audience belief, Falstaff’s revival implicitly challenges the authenticity of stage death more generally, particularly the deaths in battle that are so central to the portrayal of Hal’s military victory over Percy and his claim to suitability for the throne. If Falstaff’s death can be “counterfeit,” so can any other person’s: “I am afraid of this gunpowder Percy, though he be dead: how, if he should counterfeit too and rise?” (5.4.113, 121-23). Falstaff’s fear of Percy’s revival thus justifies his pretense that Percy did revive to be killed again: “Why may he not rise as well as I?” (5.4.126). Ultimately, Falstaff threatens to turn all the magnificent victories of kingship into, like his own performing body, mere stageplay: “not only may Hotspur [Percy] rise but he will—as soon as the scene is ended and his body has been lugged off the stage.”

As Falstaff breaks apart Hal’s tidy command for him to “by noble Percy lie,” ‘lying’ comes to mean both playing dead and telling a false story (5.4.110). And in fact, Falstaff’s lie about Percy coming back to life is exactly what will happen at the end of the play when actors arise. Falstaff swears “upon my death” that he wounded Percy in the thigh, a blow he did deliver, yet in another sense the death of the actor playing Falstaff is exactly as real as the wound given the actor playing Percy, in that neither have occurred at all outside the play-world (5.4.151).

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225 Kastan, *1 Henry IV*, note to 5.4.141.
Falstaff’s comical killing of Percy’s dead body thus threatens to expose not only Hal but the play itself as a lie.\(^{226}\) And indeed, as Brian Walsh suggests, the play dramatizes the instability and “disputed details” of its own historical knowledge.\(^{227}\) One historian of the actual Henry IV points out that “No one knows who wielded the blow which stopped Hotspur.”\(^{228}\) Powerfully dramatizing theater’s “potential for falsification of the past,” Falstaff’s speech reminds us that Prince Hal’s claim to glory is a lie on two levels, both the historical and the theatrical.\(^{229}\) Further, as he challenges the play’s political narrative, Falstaff also undermines the idea of kingly chivalry and honor that sustains it. In his ability to ‘counterfeit,’ Falstaff becomes almost a parody of Henry IV, whose nobles “marching in his coats” have helped him survive the battle so far (5.3.25).\(^{230}\) During Falstaff’s death and revival speech, the stage even holds an image of the king’s “grinning honor” in the corpse of Sir James Blunt, a counterfeit dressed in the same costume as Henry IV himself (5.3.59).\(^{231}\) Kastan argues that “representation thus at once constructs and subverts authority, at once enables it and exposes its limitation.”\(^{232}\) Falstaff challenges the political meaning of Percy’s defeated body by demonstrating both how easy it is to rewrite historical narratives and how ambiguous the line is between canny strategy and blatant

\(^{226}\) Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, 77.

\(^{227}\) Brian Walsh, “‘By Shrewsbury Clock’: The Time of Day and the Death of Hotspur in *1 Henry IV*,” in Longstaffe, *1 Henry IV: A critical guide*, 142.


\(^{229}\) Walsh, “‘By Shrewsbury Clock’,” 153.


\(^{231}\) The note for Falstaff to exit with Blunt’s body at the end of 5.3 (and indeed the scene division itself) is an unnecessary editorial interpolation, according to Alan Dessen, *Recovering Shakespeare’s Theatrical Vocabulary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 83.

\(^{232}\) Kastan, *Shakespeare After Theory*, 141.
cowardice. Such a challenge toys with the sympathies of playgoers, threatening to redirect our loyalties away from patriotic respect for kingship.

Yet at the same time, the play tidily manages Falstaff’s threat to theatrical and historical fictions, fulfilling Marjorie Garber’s assertion that “the real figure who ‘rises up’ at the end of this play is Prince Hal.”\(^{233}\) As in *Romeo and Juliet*, a fake death highlights the inherent life of stage corpses; however, where Juliet’s fake death works to tragically undercut playgoers’ confidence in our own judgment, Falstaff’s encourages it. Falstaff even calls our attention to playgoers’ status as final judges when he declares “Nothing confutes me but eyes, and nobody sees me” (5.4.126-27). Indeed we have seen him counterfeit, and so Falstaff’s lack of awareness of the audience, by limiting his power to lie to us, returns us once again to a theatrical world which invites us to trust what we see as real. Theatricality becomes not a counterfeit but, as Falstaff said earlier of his own false death, “the true and perfect image of life indeed,” as if a history play ultimately thwarts death itself by providing trustworthy historical narratives (5.4.119). Falstaff’s lies thus affirm our perception of Hal’s narrative as accurate and authentic in two different ways: through privileging our insight into the contrast between Hal’s truth and Falstaff’s lies, and through helping us contain our dangerous awareness of actors’ ‘lying’ bodies playing dead. Compared with Falstaff, who did not sustain the illusion for long when left alone onstage, Percy, or rather his actor, indeed becomes “the better counterfeit” of stage death (5.4.124). As Calderwood argues, “by refusing to stop counterfeiting, despite Falstaff's chiding, Percy remains true to his species of reality.”\(^ {234}\) The play’s historical narrative thus gains authenticity through contrast with Falstaff’s lies.


\(^{234}\) Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama*, 74 (italics in original).
Ultimately, Falstaff’s fake death unleashes playgoers’ awareness of actors’ living bodies in order to exorcise and contain the dangers that theatricality itself poses. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Romeo’s misreading spectatorship of Juliet’s fake corpse had shaped playgoers’ later response to the lovers’ actual corpses, as his tragedy becomes our own. In the same way, Shakespeare uses Hal’s response to Falstaff’s fake corpse to model our own theatrical spectatorship of Hal’s role in history, both recognizing and rising above the necessary lies of history for a collective purpose. Mediating between Percy’s earnestness and Falstaff’s subversions, Hal proves himself, in Calderwood’s phrase, the “queller of rebellions” in a theatrical sense as well as a political one.235 Theatricality does not construct only political authority by being contained, as Greenblatt and Kastan would argue in their opposite ways; rather, the combination of theatricality and its containment, as embodied in Falstaff’s corpse, also generate theatrical authority. Shakespeare’s control over his playgoers rests on the tenuous, implicit contract of the stage, that players will act—but not too much, for that would be trickery—and spectators will believe—but not too much, for that would be deception. History plays in particular depend on this tension between historical fact and theatrical representation, explored in the previous chapter, as when Thomas Nashe’s Talbot returns to “triumph againe on the stage” after “two hundred yeare in his tomb” or Thomas Heywood’s playgoers enthusiastically respond to “the person of any bold English man presented” in “our domesticke hystories.”236 In the end, the political stakes for a history play’s believability are less important, on a practical level, than its theatrical success, the *sine qua non*. In this way, at least in this first part of *Henry IV*, Hal’s triumph supports Shakespeare’s own. Hal’s final response to Falstaff models a generous approach to theatrical spectatorship as

235 Ibid., 88.
much as political leadership. When Hal reenters to find Falstaff alive, at first he is amazed, telling Falstaff, “thou are not what thou seem’st” and protesting when Falstaff first relates his improbable story of fighting Percy: “Why, Percy I killed myself and saw thee dead” (5.4.137, 144-45). Yet even in his disbelief, Hal accepts the role of a willing theatrical spectator: “For my part, if a lie may do thee grace, / I'll gild it with the happiest terms I have” (5.4.157-58). Such a promise binds Falstaff and Hal, performer and audience together in a mutual lie, gilding it with financial reward for the performer and emotional reward for the audience. Playgoers who are flattered by the parallels between themselves and Hal, or who appreciate his generosity toward the foibles of the audience favorite, Falstaff, may believe all the more in Hal’s essential greatness. Hal’s words invite playgoers in turn to accept the play’s theatrical fictions out of a noble affection for those telling them. Shakespeare continually reinvestigates the tension between theater and reality: Hal’s rejection of Falstaff in 2 Henry IV will complicate the attitude of willing acceptance I describe by suggesting that authentic performative power might ultimately seek to shatter all such illusions entirely. But for now, through the fake corpse of the more theatrically effective 1 Henry IV, Shakespeare asks us to recognize both the counterfeit nature of performed narrative and, simultaneously, the meaning that emerges through collective belief, whether in the theatrical vision of the playhouse or the patriotism of the nation.

“Or image of that horror”: embodying the lifelike corpse in King Lear

In The Spanish Tragedy Kyd uses theatrical corpses to model, as A Midsummer Night’s Dream would later do more comically, how theatrical illusions affect their spectators in unexpected ways. Then, in Romeo and Juliet and 1 Henry IV, Shakespeare extends his use of fake corpses to defend his theatrical project even further, exploiting the comic tension of self-
consciously false corpses for serious affective purposes within tragedy and history. Now, in *King Lear* (c. 1606), Shakespeare puts these techniques for redeeming the artificiality of stage corpses to a more subtle use as Lear’s perception of Cordelia’s lifelike appearance intensifies the shock of the tragedy. Extending Shakespeare’s tragic method from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, Lear’s notion that Cordelia might be alive activates a similar, though temporary hope for playgoers that the breathing body of the actor indicates life in the character. More innovatively, this play introduces a new focus on spectators’ own bodily mirroring of corpses. By depicting how Cordelia’s potential life physically affects her onstage spectators, *King Lear* gives theatrical corpses a physical effect on playgoers too. The earliest full theatrical development of this mirroring effect comes in the staging of the Ghost in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (1600-1), to be discussed in the next chapter. Even though not nearly as explicit about a stage corpse’s inherent theatricality as some previous plays, *King Lear* nevertheless exploits the boundary between the stage corpse and the actor to powerful effect. The play’s final scene brings together Cordelia’s actor, the corpse’s onstage spectators, and playgoers themselves in a shared bodily experience of deathlike stillness as we, like the acting bodies we watch, hold our breaths in horror.

Well before Lear first announces that “this feather stirs; she lives!” *King Lear* sets up its spectators to believe that Cordelia might be alive (5.3.266). In ultimately killing Cordelia, that is, Shakespeare alters his source even more than usual. He does not simply change the style of Cordelia’s death from the original source while leaving the ultimate ending the same, as he did with Desdemona and Juliet. Instead, Cordelia’s death entirely reverses the ending of both the

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237 Leslie Fiedler argues that Shakespeare uses the Player King’s death for the same purpose in *Hamlet* (c. 1600-1), situating it as “a remove of pretend from which we return to find the death of the actor who plays Claudius ‘true’”: *NO! In Thunder*, 50.

existing play called *The True Chronicle History of King Leir* (c. 1594) and the larger oral and written tradition of Lear stories.\(^{239}\) The final scene in *King Leir*, for example, emphasizing reconciliation and triumph, depicts “Leir” apologizing to “Cordella” for doubting her faith as they exit together for France.\(^{240}\) Shakespeare’s play, after a similar reconciliation in 4.7, maintains the possibility that Cordelia may survive even as new and unexpected threats appear. Although in 5.3 Edmund sends Lear and Cordelia to prison and orders their death, he later repents and sends word to cancel the hanging. Thus, by the time Lear enters with Cordelia, calling her “dead,” the play has worked to make her death a shocking surprise (5.3.261). As many have pointed out, the play gestures strongly toward the miraculous consummation of a tragicomedy, as Nahum Tate’s 1681 adaptation sensed, but does so only to take that last hope away.\(^{241}\) Almost as if voicing the thoughts of playgoers themselves, Kent asks, “Is this the promised end?” (5.3.264).

Yet even after the appearance of Cordelia’s corpse the play continues its ambiguity about whether Cordelia is truly dead or not. Just before Lear’s entrance with Cordelia’s body, Edmund has confessed his order to “hang Cordelia” in the prison, an execution disguised as a suicide (5.3.254). C.F. Williamson has argued that Edmund’s choice of execution method, hanging, increases playgoers’ hope and suspense, since stories of interrupted hangings that resulted in

\(^{239}\) See Alan R. Young, “The Written and Oral Sources of King Lear and the Problem of Justice in the Play,” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15.2 (1975).


unexpected revivals already circulated in early modern culture.\textsuperscript{242} For example, in 1650 Ann Green, “hanged in Oxfordshire, seems to have revived in her coffin despite her friends having tried to insure her quick death by tugging on her suspended body”; she went on to live a normal lifespan.\textsuperscript{243} Though Lear asserts that “I know when one is dead, and when one lives,” this old man with his history of psychosis might easily be wrong in his perceptions (5.3.261).\textsuperscript{244} Like Desdemona, reviving briefly after a partial strangling, a hanged Cordelia might yet reawaken.

These ongoing hints that Cordelia might be alive intensify playgoers’ perception of the living actor. When Lear calls for a mirror to check if Cordelia is alive, since “if that her breath will mist or stain the stone, / Why then, she lives,” his attention to Cordelia’s breathing calls attention to the fact that her actor is himself breathing onstage (5.3.263-64). As Greenblatt writes, “the actor’s breath would have misted the stone, and the feather held to Cordelia’s mouth must have stirred.”\textsuperscript{245} The play invites playgoers, like Lear, to experience Cordelia’s ‘death’ as merely a temporary swoon, as if Cordelia’s apparent death is only a trick like Juliet’s or Falstaff’s. Further, the presence of the actor’s living body helps the play’s verbal and structural hints toward Cordelia’s revival retain their effect, however briefly, even for repeat playgoers who know that Cordelia does not in fact revive. As Stephen Booth points out in a chapter called “On the Persistence of First Impressions,” “noncrucial literary mysteries and surprises” can work


\textsuperscript{244} Carol Chillington Rutter links this scene also to the story of a premature burial of a young woman at Stratford: \textit{Enter the Body: Women and Representation on Shakespeare’s Stage} (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 14.

\textsuperscript{245} Greenblatt, \textit{Shakespearean Negotiations}, 124.
like puns to retain their tension and electricity even “in audiences already well acquainted with
the works in which they appear.” Lear’s attention to the actor’s breathing body strengthens
that tension by implying that playgoers’ expectations may be correct after all.

Edgar’s comment on Cordelia’s body supports this reading of Cordelia’s corpse as a self-
consciously theatrical representation. In response to Kent’s question “Is this the promis’d end?” Edgar adds, “Or image of that horror?” (5.3.264-65). Most commentators have noted the
apocalyptic significance of this line, arguing that Edgar links the sight of Lear carrying Cordelia
to the end of the world. But the line could also be read, especially in light of Lear’s request for
a “looking-glass,” as a comment on how Cordelia’s body works as a mirror and representation,
an enacted performance that will itself “mist or stain the stone” with its living breath (5.3.262-
63). In other words, Edgar asks whether Cordelia merely looks dead, trying to read her body as
the image of death rather than death itself. Christie Carson has recently argued that “The
audience is told by Edgar that what it sees is not real and yet is asked to believe in it at the same
time.” If the actor is an image, shadow, or mirror of his character, then Edgar’s words are
literally true: Cordelia’s actor is the image of the horror of Cordelia’s death, which playgoers can
see through. Although Cordelia the character may be dead, the “image of that horror,” or rather
the actor who plays Cordelia, is still alive and breathing, as Lear alone onstage notices.

Other words in the scene also resonate with Lear’s attention to Cordelia’s breathing.
Though at first Lear invokes the word “stone” to suggest lifelessness and apathy when he
accuses the onlookers of being “men of stones,” Shakespeare also uses it to describe the mirror

246 Booth, *King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy*, 123.
“on which Lear hopes to register signs of life” (5.3.258, 263). Similarly, the intrusion of the actor’s physical body into the imaginary play-world reverses standard theological associations of the body with earth and death and of the spirit with eternal life, as invoked by Lear’s phrase “dead as earth” (5.3.262). Cordelia, whom Lear earlier declared “a soul in bliss” and “a spirit,” is now flesh only (4.7.45-48). Yet in another sense, the imaginary figure, the spirit, dies, while the physical, earthly body of the actor breathes. Such word choices emphasize the liminality of Cordelia’s living/dead body as it exists between real world and play-world.

Yet even as the play thus links playgoers’ perceptions to Lear’s, it also implies that Lear is merely deluding himself to think that Cordelia is still alive. The tension between playgoers’ perceptions and the reality of the play-world increases as the other spectators of Cordelia’s corpse seem blind to the breathing body Lear sees. Even as Lear rejoices that “this feather stirs; she lives!”, the other characters onstage do not rush to help resuscitate Cordelia, and in fact “no one seems in the least encouraged by Lear’s claim to detect signs of life” (5.3.266) Instead, they only pity Lear’s delusions: Kent, for example, kneels to tell him, “‘Tis noble Kent, your friend” (5.3.269). Even as Lear asks playgoers to notice Cordelia’s life, the scene also emphasizes his confusion as he switches between asking for a mirror to test for breath and declaring the results with a feather.

Although most productions provide Lear a feather to report Cordelia’s life, a more complex possibility increases the contrast between Lear’s perceptions and our own even more.

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251 Foakes, *King Lear*, 386, note to 5.3.259.
If Lear can obtain a hand mirror from the costume of the vain Goneril, whose corpse has been brought onstage earlier in the scene, then as he holds the mirror to Cordelia’s lips, Lear’s excitement raises the hopes of the other characters and playgoers as well—might Cordelia’s breath actually mist the mirror? But then, as John C. Meagher argues, “crushing this last hope as abruptly as he had stimulated it, Lear speaks the line that proves that he had really seen nothing after all, shows him so mad as to be unable to distinguish which of the standard tests for breath he is actually employing: holding up the mirror, he tells us ‘This feather stirs.’”252 If this staging possibility is used, then at the very moment Lear rejoices that Cordelia is alive, his confusion confirms that his perceptions of Cordelia’s body cannot be trusted, even as the physical evidence he seeks—the mist of breath upon a mirror—is truly present. Working both practically and symbolically, the presence of the mirror would visually confirm the breath of a living actor whose representations, in mirroring life, constitute theater itself. Even without using this resonant staging possibility, however, *King Lear* manipulates and estranges playgoers’ perceptions so that our awareness of the actor’s living body only increases the delusionary hope that we share in this moment with Lear.

As Lear’s mirror represents how the play manipulates spectators’ perceptions, it also suggests how the play elicits spectators’ mirroring bodily response. Most vividly, Lear’s mistaken perceptions of Cordelia’s body have a dangerous and in fact deadly mirroring effect on his own body. Though after his initial doubts Lear seems to recognize that Cordelia is dead, his final words, at least in the Folio, note once again the hope of her breath: “Do you see this? Look

252 Meagher, “Vanity, Lear’s Feather, and the Pathology,” 256.
on her! Look her lips, / Look there, look there!” (5.3.311-12). Either this final hope itself, or
the experience of losing it, kills Lear. In its combination of death and life at once, Cordelia’s
body brings Lear’s body into the same ambiguity. Lear himself is, for a moment at least,
ambiguous in his death, as Edgar first thinks “He faints” before realizing that he is dead
(5.3.313). As Lear becomes an ambiguous stage corpse to match the one he sees, his death—
particularly in response to Cordelia’s liminal body—resonates powerfully with antitheatricalist
fears of theater’s deadening effects on spectators.

Lear’s transformation, with his death, into a mirror image of Cordelia continues a theme
of mirroring response begun earlier in the scene through the word “stone.” As he first enters with
Cordelia’s corpse, Lear describes the other onstage spectators as “men of stones” (5.3.258). In
his accusation of hardheartedness, Lear reminds us that now, as in the opening scene, he sees all
three daughters before him, though now all three are corpses, and once again “hears nothing”
from Cordelia. As Carol Chillington Rutter has argued, Cordelia’s corpse, in its
incomprehensible and monstrous deadness, now has a “hard heart” like her sisters, giving it the
power in turn to harden her spectators into horrified men of stones (3.6.78). Thus, even before
stone itself becomes a mirror to test for breath, Lear imagines Cordelia’s hardened body as
physically transforming its spectators in a mirroring way. As the performing body of Cordelia’s

253 Thomas Clayton, “Is this the promise’d end?’: Revision in the Role of the King,” in
The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare’s Two Versions of King Lear, ed. Gary Taylor and
Michael Warren (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 133. Clayton argues that the Folio text is
Shakespeare’s revision of the Quarto (138).

254 Booth, King Lear, Macbeth, Indefinition, and Tragedy, 23.

255 Ibid., 24. Foakes notes that “It is unusual for bodies to be brought on stage (produced);
the concern more commonly is to get them off,” a point that suggests the significance of Regan
and Goneril’s physical presence in this scene: King Lear, 382, note to 5.3.229 s.d.

256 Rutter, Enter the Body, 15-17.
actor takes on these qualities of stone, corpse, and mirror, the spectacle, in turn, affects the emotions and, metaphorically, the bodies of onstage spectators.

By representing how Cordelia’s corpse affects its onstage spectators in dangerous and deadly ways, the play suggests even more explicitly than previous plays how stage corpses—neither fully dead nor fully alive, neither fully actor nor fully character—might powerfully affect playgoers’ own bodies. As Rutter says, “No body in the theatre is exempt—least of all, the spectator’s.”257 As Lear’s attention to Cordelia’s lack of breath brings him to death, the two actors join in a performed stillness, holding their breath together as they play dead. The visible life of the actors only intensifies the tension, since the actor’s body “has most to play when it has least to act.”258 And as playgoers participate in Lear’s and Edgar’s spectatorship of breathing/non-breathing corpses, an attentive and horrified silence descends over playgoers as well as we strain to see and even hear the breaths that have been so much in dispute. We, too, participate in this “collective act of not breathing too loudly” as the play’s “final moment seamlessly orchestrates physical, emotional, and imaginative solidarity in the audience.”259

Shakespeare thus uses the imperfection of theatrical illusion—the breathing body playing dead—to enhance the collective bodily experience of playgoers in ways that support the work the scene does as a whole. The play’s delicate management of playgoers’ theatrical consciousness paradoxically gives Cordelia a greater “dramatic presence” and brings us into a deeper consciousness of the ways in which Lear’s reality challenges our own.260 More specifically,

257 Ibid., xii.
258 Ibid., 2.
260 Kent Cartwright, Shakespearean Tragedy and Its Double: The Rhythms of Audience Response (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 6; see also
Lear’s awareness of Cordelia’s breath, “whether or not it is expressive of delusion,” nevertheless “shows sight well directed.”\(^\text{261}\) The final scene thus shows, in its very staging, the power of embracing “the shame of exposure, the threat of self-revelation” that Lear feared so intensely at the beginning of the play.\(^\text{262}\) That courageous self-revelation, as both Cordelia and her actor model in different ways, is the only way forward for both authentic relationships and effective theater. Lear’s new ability to see the truth of Cordelia’s loving life has also brought him to share in playgoers’ perception of the actor’s own life. The breath of Cordelia’s corpse thus helps us experience both the tragedy of Lear’s self-thwarted insight, and, in the collective stillness, the triumph of the actors’ liminally embodied art.

**Conclusion**

The liminal corpses in these plays create powerful paradoxical effects on their playgoers, shaping our perceptions of the actor/character blend so as to increase the ironic intensity of tragic, comic, and historical narratives. Whether real stage deaths flaunt their own theatricality, as in *The Spanish Tragedy* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, or fake deaths intensify the tragic or nationalist effect of real deaths, as in *Romeo and Juliet* and *1 Henry IV*, the lifelike bodies of these apparent corpses confound their observers onstage. As the stage corpse moves back and forth between reality and fiction within the play-world, characters’ responses to this liminal

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Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 127: “The force of King Lear is to make us love the theater, to seek out its satisfactions, to serve its interests, to confer on it a place of its own.”

\(^\text{261}\) Stanley Wells, “*The Taming of the Shrew* and *King Lear*: A Structural Comparison,” *Shakespeare Survey* 33 (1980).

tension shape playgoers as well in ways that eventually become, in King Lear, explicitly physical. These plays thus establish the convention that playgoers’ awareness of the actor can increase the theatrical power of the stage corpse. The next two chapters on stage ghosts and stage statues will show how later plays develop this convention for different types of liminal bodies, showing how they affect onstage spectators in even more explicitly physical ways than we see in King Lear. For now, I end with a final proposal that early modern playgoers responded physically to theatrical corpses through bodily mirroring even before plays themselves began to comment upon this physical response. An early modern description of the earliest liminal corpse play, The Spanish Tragedy, suggests that the tension between real and theatrical bodies worked to connect actors, characters, and playgoers in a shared bodily experience from the start.

Stage death in The Spanish Tragedy had a physically violent impact not only on its actors, as Hieronimo’s play suggests, but also on its playgoers. Decades after Kyd’s play, Thomas May’s The Heir (1622) remembers how “for false / And acted passion [Hieronimo had] drawne true teares / From the spectators eyes … As he had truely bin the new man he seemd.”

In grieving theatrically over Horatio’s body, Hieronimo generated embodied passions from playgoers by bringing forth his own. Such language suggests, as Allison Hobgood points out, that at least some early modern playgoers considered themselves to “embody, share, and perpetuate” Hieronimo’s passion, responding to his grief with their own tears in order to help the play “perform resistance to the inevitability of death” and “provide a salve for mortality.”

Such a concept of spectator response coincides, oddly enough, with Bottom’s: “That will ask some tears in the true performing of it. If I do it, let the audience look to their eyes” (1.2.25-26).

264 Hobgood, Passionate Playgoing, 82-83, 90.
Just as Bottom believes that “tears on stage will provoke tears in the audience,” May reports that Hieronimo’s theatrical display of grief transmits emotion into his spectators, not only the Viceroy and King but also playgoers themselves.265

Furthermore, May’s report suggests that passionate response to The Spanish Tragedy did not solely depend on the reality of theatrical violence, as Hieronimo assumes, or on the vehemence of Hieronimo’s grief, as Hobgood argues. Rather, May’s playgoers responded in and even through the awareness that Hieronimo, like the stage corpse of Horatio that he laments, was not in fact “the new man he seemd.” The passage juxtaposes the passionately contagious ‘true’ effects of theatergoing, as the sight of stage corpses invades playgoers’ bodies with responsive grief, with the dispassionate reality of the actor who ‘falsely’ enacts that passion. May, likely reporting from his own experience of attending a performance of The Spanish Tragedy, combines both awarenesses seamlessly. Even knowing Hieronimo’s grief is not real only increases playgoers’ pleasure and appreciation of its masterful effect. As Hieronimo’s theatrical fiction wounds its spectators through killing its actors, Kyd’s play in turn affects playgoers in a bodily way.

May’s account of playgoers’ tearful response to The Spanish Tragedy suggests that this and other stage corpse plays worked, at least for some early modern viewers, to redirect playgoers’ threatening attention to the embodied stage corpse into mirroring bodily response. May’s report confirms that playgoers responded more deeply to characters even through their awareness of the performing actor. By portraying onstage spectators’ emotional response to liminal corpses, plays complicated and deepened playgoers’ physical response to stage corpses’ inherent liminality. Playgoers’ dangerous awareness of the theatrical artificiality of an all-too-

265 Steggle, Laughing and Weeping, 127.
alive stage corpse transforms, through these plays’ deliberate attention, into an opportunity for playgoers to participate in the embodied playfulness of performance itself.
Chapter Two: Embodied ghosts as actors in Hamlet & The Lady’s Tragedy

Like stage corpses, stage ghosts embody a theatrical paradox. The liminal body of a stage ghost is visible to playgoers and yet often invisible to fellow characters, never fully the disembodied spirit it represents nor merely the ordinary body of an actor. Unlike corpses, which despite any difficulties of staging are at least ordinary sights in real life, ghosts are imaginary supernatural beings whose existence early modern Protestant doctrine officially rejected. Contemporary Reformed theology held that ghosts were merely the product of perceptual confusion, human deception, or demonic illusion. It is thus notable that actual ghosts— ghosts not explained as one of these categories—abound on the early modern stage, appearing in at least 50 extant plays. Stranger still is the way many plays, including William Shakespeare’s Hamlet and Thomas Middleton’s The Lady’s Tragedy, depict these unorthodox spirits. Ghosts, understood as souls detached from the body, are inherently immaterial, as early modern skeptic Reginald Scot asserts when he argues that “spirits and bodies are by antithesis opposed one to another.” Yet Hamlet and The Lady’s Tragedy depict ghosts that physically affect their onstage spectators and even suggest that these ghosts have physical bodies of their own. In their

266 Lewes Lavaterus, Of ghostes and spirites walking by nyght, trans. R.H. (London: Henry Benneyman for Richard Watkins, 1572), EEBO, 9: “Melancholike persons, and mad men, imagine things which in verie deed are not.”

267 Ibid., 23: “Preestes and Monckes fained themselves to be Spirites.”

268 Ibid., 202: “If at this time spirites appeare, and doe utter any thing repugnant to the Doctrine of the Apostles and Prophets, they are to be rejected.”

269 See Appendix: Frame ghosts and Real ghosts, 222-226 below. This figure does not include plays that refer to ghosts or depict people pretending to be ghosts, but only plays in which ghosts physically appear onstage.

embodied presence and effects, these ghosts add theological and philosophical paradoxes to the paradox of staging ghosts with solid actors.

We cannot account for such depictions of ghosts simply through Catholic nostalgia or secret unorthodoxy on the part of so many playwrights. Rather, as this chapter will show, early modern plays exploit religious tensions around ghostly embodiment to heighten the theatrical tensions of stage ghostliness, in the process depicting ghosts as metaphorical actors. Through their physical potency, performative effectiveness, and metatheatrical self-consciousness, actorly ghosts not only acknowledge their own obvious physicality but, more importantly, become valuable ways for early modern playwrights to examine the complex workings of theater itself. Ghosts have served many recent scholars as a productive metaphor for how theatrical performances carry meaning from the past into the present, from Marvin Carlson’s exploration of theatre as a haunted “site of memory,” to Diana Taylor’s idea that performance, ghostlike, “disappears only to hover,” to Thomas Page Anderson’s description of how traumatic history “insists on returning to exact revenge.” While I follow these scholars in arguing that ghosts illuminate theater itself, I attend particularly to how ghost plays use that link between ghosts and actors to shape the interactive physical experience of playgoing.


I examine the development of the ghost-as-actor trope in three stages. First, I trace its origins in the remarkably spectatorial ghosts of Senecan tragedy and show how early ghost plays, particularly Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, move to imagining ghosts as performers. Aided by staging practices that increasingly acknowledge stage ghosts’ physical embodiment rather than trying to conceal it, early modern ghost plays transform the shadowy spectator ghost of Senecan drama into a new kind of embodied “shadow;” that is, an actor.

Next, the actorly body of the stage ghost gains increasingly physical power over its spectators in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. The Ghost’s physical effects on characters, particularly Hamlet himself, add to the play’s famously metatheatrical attention to plays and the effects of spectatorship. In a culture in which humors and spirits had emotional effects and theater could mold the spectator’s physical body, Hamlet’s complex response to the Ghost models the vulnerability and responsibility of theatrical spectatorship itself, and invites playgoers to respond in turn to the shaping effects of ghostly performance.

Finally, a decade later, Middleton’s *The Lady’s Tragedy* highlights the challenges spectators face in interpreting the ghostly embodiment of the actor. The play presents a ghost whose connection to its own corpse (played by the same actor) is so strong that it culminates in the theatrically improbable sight of both ghost and corpse onstage together. In a theater where the play-world’s evanescent fictions depend on the irreducible bodies of actors, where theatrical practitioners make the unreal visible and ghosts take physical form, the ghost of *The Lady’s Tragedy* provokes playgoers to reflect in new ways on the imaginative impossibilities inherent to spectatorial response.

Commenting recently on Sebastian’s reappearance in Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, Erika T. Lin writes that Viola’s pun on his body as a garment for a ‘spirit’ “foregrounds the semiotics
of the actor’s body,” since “embodying spirits is what actors do.” Early modern stage ghosts make such puns literal through their attention to the material effects of the actor’s body onstage. These embodied stage ghosts emerge in a culture in which antitheatrical assumptions about the dangerous effects of the seductively embodied yet illusory theater abound. Stage ghosts, like other liminal bodies, invoke those assumptions to both increase the emotional and physical impact of plays on playgoers and reduce their danger through the same mechanism: encouraging playgoers to imaginatively participate in the ghost’s embodiment on stage. The lasting power of the early modern ghost depends on its engagement with a stage ghost’s paradoxical physical embodiment, animating spectators through the ghostly presence of the living actor.

“Then will I add bodies to the shadows”: Early ghosts from spectators to actors

In early modern use, the word “shadow” applies to both ghosts and actors; the OED definition imagines both types of “shadows” as illusory figures lacking real power. Even “the best in this kind” of actors are “but shadows” representing reality, according to Shakespeare’s A Midsummer Night’s Dream (c. 1595), and ideas of ghosts’ weakness shape both a 1590 book’s description of starved soldiers as “pitiful ghosts or rather shadowes of men” and John Marston’s metaphor in Antonio and Mellida (c. 1599-1600) that lovesickness has “murdrded me, made me a shadowe.” Most vividly, however, the linguistic link between the shadowy plays that actors


274 “shadow, n.,” OED Online, Oxford University Press, September 2014. Sense 6f includes references to ghosts as powerless; sense 6b, which appears only between 1580 and 1679, includes both representation and representer: “applied rhetorically to a portrait as contrasted with the original; also to an actor or a play in contrast with the reality represented.”

perform and the insubstantial ghosts that haunt them appears in the Prologue to an anonymous Queen’s Men play, *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third* (c. 1588-94). After the ghost of Clarence begins the play with a brief call for revenge, the allegorical figure of Truth asks, “What makes thou upon a stage?” and Poetry answers, “Shadowes;” in turn, Truth declares, “Then will I adde bodies to the shadowes.” With this symbolic opening, the play claims a historical truth for its story that dignifies the evanescent beauty of its poetry, as if basing this play on real historical persons—such as the ghost who has just appeared—gives its images of the past bodily weight and authenticity. The word “shadowes” emphasizes how the play will make shadowy histories real through what Brian Walsh calls “the materiality of theatrical playing.” And juxtaposing the ghostly Clarence’s appearance with such talk of shadows draws our attention to the way ghostly characters manifest as actors’ bodies. Here stage ghostliness functions as a synecdoche for the work of theatrical representation itself, combining shadows and bodies into theatrical experience.

The complex and generative idea of the shadowy ghost as shadowy actor in later plays such as *Hamlet* and *The Lady’s Tragedy* arises, as this section will show, from such explorations of ghostliness as theatricality. The effect of the tropes and practices discussed in this section is cumulative, as conventions for playgoer interpretation build from multiple plays. The position of early ghosts such as Clarence in narrative frames that reflect on the play as a play, along with the practical exigencies of staging disembodied ghosts with a embodied actor, together lead to the


emergence, notably in Shakespeare’s *Richard III*, of an influential new way of understanding the stage ghost: as a self-consciously embodied performer forcefully affecting its audience.

The earliest ghosts on the English stage appear in Senecan drama, performed both in Latin and English translation in private homes and universities. These ghosts act as spectators in a narrative frame, watching the play in eager expectation of the bloody tragedy that will ensue. As these ghosts observe and comment on the dramatic action, they mirror and stimulate audience desires for bloody revenge. In John Studley’s translation of *Agamemnon* (1566), for example, the ghost Thyestes opens the play with a speech relating his spectatorial excitement at how, now that Agamemnon has returned, “Butchers slaughter doth approche, and murther draweth neare.”

The ghost’s expectant attitude of appetite for the visual spectacle of revenge goes far beyond outlining the basic plot to incite and mirror playgoers’ own investment in the play. Studley’s early modern translation intensifies Seneca’s emphasis on the ghost’s spectatorial emotion as the ghost gleefully describes how “the glytering Swerd, the hewing Axe […] shall make the floore to flow” with blood, and how the king’s “beaten braynes are pasht abroade, his cracked Skull is reven” (1:59-60, 62). To the imaginative immediacy of the Senecan future and present tenses, which vividly preview the coming action, Studley’s translation adds visceral descriptions of the

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278 Jessica Winston, “Seneca in Early Elizabethan England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.1 (2006): 48. See APGRD (Archive of Performances of Greek and Roman Drama) records of performances of *Agamemnon* (1566), *Octavia* (?) (1588) and *Octavia* (1590-91). *Thyestes* is not attested in England before 1680, but, like the other plays, may certainly have appeared earlier. More speculative is a ghost in *Troas*, which had performances at Trinity College in 1551-52 and 1560-61, according to REED (*Records of Early English Drama*); university statutes required performances in Latin, and the original text does not stage any ghost, but Jasper Heywood’s English adaptation (published 1559) alters the play to stage the ghost of Achilles.

weapons and of “beaten braynes” to the original Latin, as if reminding us that our own hunger for violent spectacle will be fulfilled through the play to come.\(^{280}\)

On the public stage, the major force in popularizing this spectatorial function for ghosts was Thomas Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* (c. 1585-89). Andrea’s role as a spectator in this play follows Seneca’s metatheatrical tradition, distinguishing him from previous English ghosts that either remain silent (as in the earliest English revenge tragedy, *Gorboduc*) or tell their own stories in classical Virgilian style.\(^{281}\) As Howard Baker admits even in the course of an argument against Senecan influence on *The Spanish Tragedy*, out of all English authors of literary ghosts “Kyd seems to be the first writer to stress the ghost’s wonderment at what he sees.”\(^{282}\) And, as the previous chapter demonstrated, this emphasis on the ghost’s spectatorial “wonderment” builds on the Senecan model to explore more thoroughly the unexpected potency of spectatorship. Most importantly, judging from the abundance of allusions to *The Spanish Tragedy*’s ghostly frame narrative, Kyd’s use of the Senecan observer-ghost powerfully influenced early modern dramatists.\(^{283}\) For example, in George Chapman’s *The revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* (c. 1610-11) the ghost of Bussy suggests that his living brother “must auchthor this


\(^{283}\) Smith, “Hieronimo’s Afterlives.” Andrea’s opening speech about “the eternal substance of my soul” is one of the most quoted, supporting my argument below that the “substance” of a stage ghost becomes particularly interesting for early modern dramatists.
just Tragedie,” alluding to Revenge’s metatheatrical perspective on the action of the play as itself an “endless Tragedie.”

This strong influence makes it particularly surprising that, by 1593, new plays of public drama no longer include Senecan frame ghosts; ghosts exist only within the play-world. Ghosts gain greater physical reality within the play as they begin to interact with fellow characters. The radical shift between spectating Senecan ghosts and their interactive Elizabethan counterparts is a more profound structural change than it might seem, as Jessica Winston and Eric Dodson-Robinson recently agree in emphasizing early modern drama’s movement away from the corporeal, fateful ghosts of Stoic materialism. Yet at the same time, although early modern playwrights radically alter their Senecan models, the shift from the ghost-as-spectator to the ghost-as-actor fundamentally preserves the metatheatrical potency inherent to Senecan frame ghosts. The major sign of the shift to this new trope is that, rather than appearing in a frame, ghosts begin to take part in the main action of the play, though at first only through the perception of a single character. The anonymous Locrine (1594), for example, depicts a ghost who communicates only with the traitor Humber; its other speeches are asides to playgoers,


285 With the exception of Ben Jonson’s Catiline his conspiracy, performed by the King’s Men in 1611, portrayals of ghosts as watchers—either of inset-plays, or of the play itself from a Prologue or Epilogue—linger only in the classical private drama of universities, Inns of Court, and private houses.

unnoticed by any character. By presenting ghosts as subjective experiences of a single individual, these plays ultimately draw attention to each ghost’s particular effect on that individual as the ghost’s onstage spectator. Increasingly perceptible within the play-world and demanding a response, ghosts begin to shape the experience of their onstage spectators just as actors themselves do.

Out of the early modern playwrights writing ghost plays after The Spanish Tragedy, Shakespeare is the first to explore the theatricality of ghosts’ effects on fellow characters. In Richard III (c. 1591-92), his first ghost play, Shakespeare explores how ghosts’ power over Richard and Richmond parallels actors’ impact on playgoers in turn. These ghosts are “characters from the past [who] materialize to tell their own stories,” just as plays embody forth history itself. The structured repetition of the ghosts’ speeches to the two men evokes a theatrical masque, while Richard’s guilty response to the ghosts’ messages points forward to the important theatrical notion in Hamlet that “guilty creatures sitting at a play / Have by the very cunning of the scene, / Beene strooke so to the soule, that presently / They have proclaim’d their malefactions.” These ghosts’ performance strikes Richard to the soul in the same way. The

287 Locrine, 3.3, 3.5, and 4.5, though in 4.3 the ghost strikes Strumbo to prevent him from feeding Humber. See also the anonymous Richard II, part I (c. 1591-95) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1929), LION, Act 5, in which two ghosts warn the sleeping Thomas of Woodstock of Richard’s designs on his life.

288 In Shakespeare’s The Second Part of Henry the Sixth (1591), in Evans and Tobin, The Riverside Shakespeare, 3.3, the dying Beaufort seems to see the ghost of Humphrey, whom he has betrayed, but there is no evidence that the ghost appears onstage.

289 Walsh, Shakespeare, the Queen’s Men, and the Elizabethan Performance of History, 154.

290 William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Richard the Third, in Evans and Tobin, The Riverside Shakespeare, 5.3.79-176; Shakespeare, Hamlet, TLN 1629-32; 2.2.589-92. All citations from Hamlet in this chapter use F1 as the copytext unless otherwise stated. For another early modern example, see Heywood, An Apology for Actors, G1v-G2r.
idea that ghosts of past victims cause Richard guilt and despair is not original to Shakespeare, of course; an emotionally powerful dream ghost and a vulnerable dreamer appear both in Edward Hall’s chronicle (1548) of the Battle of Bosworth Field and in the Queen’s Men’s *True Tragedy of Richard the Third* already mentioned. Shakespeare, however, innovatively uses the actors’ presence within his stage ghosts to heighten the ghosts’ power in two ways.

First, the actual spectacle of ‘specters’ on stage gives the ghosts a physical presence that highlights their reality and agency, especially by contrast with the angry yet absent and unreal ghosts described previously in the play. Anne, for example, merely “invoke[s]” the absent ghost of Henry VI, The Prince of York foolishly fears “my uncle Clarence’s angry ghost” in the Tower, and the Duchess describes the furious yet impotent Margaret as a “poor mortal living ghost.” Even the ghosts in Clarence’s narrated dream are, as Stephen Greenblatt puts it, “horribly vivid but distinctly unreal.” These ghosts, however, gain power both from this contrast and from their reality not within a frame narrative but in the actual play-world.

Even more importantly, Richard’s response explicitly contrasts the unexpected power of the ghosts’ appearance with their supposed impotence as dreams or unreal apparitions. Descriptions of the ghosts as “shadows,” like the reference in the earlier Queen’s Men version of Richard’s story, suggest similarities between ghosts and the actorly “shadows” performing in the play itself. Ratcliff, for example, tells Richard to “be not afraid of shadows,” but Richard protests, arguing that these “shadows” have “struck more terror to the soul of Richard / Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers” (5.3.215-18). Richard asserts that the ghosts’ shadowy

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292 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard the Third*, 1.2.8; 3.1.144; 4.4.26.

theatricality is more terrifying than substantial bodies could possibly be. Ghosts become all the more spiritually powerful over Richard precisely through their insubstantial form. Greenblatt reads the ghosts in *Richard III* as a metaphor for theater, which involves “the making of dreams into realities.” That is, dream ghosts demonstrate the paradoxical way in which shadows and fictions—perhaps in their shifting, liminal mystery—can be more emotionally effective than stark, definitive reality. *Richard III* links ghosts to actors as if to suggest that plays have power to move playgoers even and especially through fictional representations that might seem impotently ghostlike.

In *Richard III*, Shakespeare transforms the stage ghost of Senecan tragedy into an actor reveling in its own power, even as that metatheatrical self-awareness simultaneously reminds playgoers that a ghost play is mere theater. No longer framing figures standing chorus-like outside the fiction, these new stage ghosts face higher theatrical stakes than before as they supernaturally enter the play-world, even if only as dreams, yet remain enacted by mere actors. Parallel to the development of this dramaturgical trope of the ghost as actor, therefore, come new challenges—and possibilities—for ghostly staging.

While evidence about early modern staging practices for ghosts is of course fragmentary, I propose that early modern theater practitioners developed a few different strategies to cope with the fundamental problem of ghostly staging: that is, playgoers’ awareness of the actor’s stubbornly lifelike body. Some evidence suggests that theater practitioners worked to minimize such awareness. The cryptic record from Philip Henslowe of costumes including a “gostes sewt [suit],” a “gostes bodeyes [bodice],” and a “gostes crown,” for example, may indicate an attempt

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294 Ibid., 173.
to use a particular material or color to emphasize supernatural transparency. Yet this strategy is risky. The anonymous *A Warning for Fair Women* (1599), for example, mockingly implies that many ghost plays tried and failed to create a sense of ghosts’ supernatural difference, whether through high-pitched and plaintive ghostly voices or through flashes of light or smoke. Such unintentional comedy, created by a stage ghost’s palpably physical performance, would be an embarrassing result.

However, other evidence suggests that an alternate strategy was possible, one that more closely parallels Shakespeare’s technique in *Richard III* for putting playgoers’ awareness of the actor to theatrical use. Instead of attempting to hide the embodied actor behind special effects, that is, staging practices could create a more ordinary appearance and appeal entirely to playgoers’ imagination to generate the ghost’s otherworldliness. Two main methods existed for this alternate approach to stage ghostliness: staging ghosts as animate corpses in winding sheets, and staging them to look just as they were when alive.

The conventional white sheet is easily misunderstood as a sign of immateriality: medieval ghosts sometimes appeared in white to signify their spiritual purity, and post-Restoration theatrical representations of ghosts have often used flowing white “spirit drapery” to evoke a spirit-like insubstantiality and unearthly airiness. However, on the early modern stage, ghosts’

295 Philip Henslowe, “March 10, 1598,” Henslowe’s Diary, ed. R.A. Foakes and R.T. Rickert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 318-21. Alternatively, however, Henslowe might be identifying these ghost’s items by the “character” who will use them, rather than by their appearance; one reference to “Will. Sommers sewtte” (Henslowe 318) may even indicate the clothes of the ghost in Thomas Nashe’s *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1592).


sheets do not signify an insubstantial white mist but rather the material winding-sheet in which the naked corpse was wrapped for burial. The frontispiece of William Sampson’s *The Vow-breaker* (1625-26) depicts the play’s ghost as naked but for a cloth, like a corpse, while two other plays actually describe their ghosts as “naked.” And Thomas Randolph’s *The Drinking Academy* (c. 1626-31) includes a character who looks so deathlike that he even “without your winding sheat [sic] may passe for a ghost.” The stage ghost, according to this and other comedies, looks like nothing other than an eerily animate, zombie-like corpse in its shroud, with no need for mystical transparency. A visual convention that stage ghosts looked like corpses thus manages the potential disruption caused by the body of the actor, even as it complicates the theological idea that ghosts ought to be insubstantial and invisible.

Alternately, some plays even suggest that a ghost did not necessarily look any different from an ordinary living character. George Peele’s *The Old Wives’ Tale* (1595), for example, includes a real ghost whom no one recognizes as such until he hops into his grave. And characters sometimes think other living characters (believed to be dead) are ghosts, as when Besse in Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West part I* (c. 1597-1604), seeing her supposedly dead beloved, contemplates plans for revenge on his killer, and Castabella in Cyril

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300 See Appendix: Fake ghosts, 226 below.

Tourneur’s *The Atheist’s Tragedy* (c. 1607-1611), seeing hers, faints in fear at what she calls his lack of “substance.” These examples, further, suggest that the clothing worn by ghosts in plays such as *Hamlet* signifies nothing more or less than that the ghost looks just like the dead person did when alive. Together, this evidence implies that early modern spectators may not have always considered it necessary for a stage ghost to look corporeal, much less transparent or disembodied.

Notions of actorly ghosts and playgoers’ ghostly awareness of actors reinforce each other. On the one hand, exploring ghosts’ actorly functions necessarily draws attention to the actor’s body. On the other, acknowledging the actor’s illusion-breaking physical presence aids playgoers in what Greenblatt calls the “peculiar spirit of theatrical disavowal” characteristic of stage ghosts. Ultimately, incorporating actors’ real bodies into playgoers’ cognitive experience of ghosts paradoxically strengthens the ghost itself, as if, once more in the words of *The True Tragedy of Richard the Third*, giving actors’ “bodies” to these ghostly “shadows.” And indeed, soon after Shakespeare’s *Richard III* early modern staged ghosts gain new physical power over


their onstage spectators, a power like the bodily mirroring of theater itself as in my Introduction. In Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar* (c. 1598-99), Brutus reports that the ghost of Caesar “mak’st my blood cold, and my hair to stare,” suggesting that his hair stands on end in a fixed stare as if to substitute for the fearful “weakness of mine eyes.”

Increasingly, then, early modern drama explores the idea that “the haunts of ghosts inevitably have a theatrical quality,” as Samuel Weber theorizes. Ghosts’ theatricality appears both in the notion of ghost as metaphorical actor developed through the Senecan tradition, and in self-aware staging practices that highlight the actor’s body. These theatrically embodied shadows prepare the way for the even more potent ghosts of Hamlet and The Lady’s Tragedy.

**“Remember me”: The Ghost and its spectators in *Hamlet***

The portrayal of the actorly ghost gains a new embodied dimension in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* (c. 1600-01). While frame ghosts remain aloof from the world of the play, and dream ghosts represent a private, internal encounter, this Ghost interacts with multiple characters, thereby fully entering the play-world as a character all its own. In *Hamlet* Shakespeare develops the stage ghost’s double nature—supernaturally present to characters, yet also an actor-embodied fiction—by exploring how its double nature affects fellow characters. Much recent criticism has highlighted how early modern tragedy works “to alter audiences’ minds and bodies,” often through inviting playgoers to imitate physically and emotionally what they see on stage. By

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305 Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*, 4.3.280, 276. The Latin ‘sto, stare, steti, status’ means ‘to stand;’ the Germanic root “starren” means ‘fixed.’


representing an intensely physical mimetic relationship between the Ghost and its spectators, *Hamlet* extends those effects to playgoers. The play’s pervasive metatheatricality also gives its depiction of ghostliness a larger significance. A theatrical scene is like the Ghost itself in that it brings together spirit and flesh, illusion and reality. Like the ghost, *Hamlet* implies, theater can dispel skepticism by reaching outward to color the bodies and shape the beliefs of its spectators; at the same time, self-conscious metatheatricality places such “affective contagion” under playgoers’ control.308 Shakespeare increasingly uses the parallels between Ghost and actor—both shaping the bodies of spectators through their liminal position between two worlds—to demonstrate theater’s value and defend it against charges that it, like a ghost, is both dangerously powerful and mere illusion.

From the first scene, watchers onstage describe the Ghost as a spectacle teetering between reality and representation. In 1.1, the Ghost’s visibility to multiple onstage spectators definitively establishes its sensory reality within the play-world, though those spectators nevertheless remain doubtful of its reality. The Ghost strikes its spectators with its intensely lifelike physicality; as Kent Cartwright points out, the soldiers marvel not at the Ghost’s “otherworldliness” but at its “human resemblance to the king that’s dead.”309 Both Barnardo and Marcellus connect the Ghost to the real man they remember, repeatedly noting, through rhetorical questions, how very “like the King” it looks (TLN 53, 55, 74; 1.1.41-58). For Horatio in particular, the sight of the Ghost suggests not just the King’s appearance but also his living activity and movement. He comments that the old King “did sometimes march” in the same “fair


and warlike forme” that the Ghost now wears, and the Ghost’s appearance—his “Armor,” his “frown[]”—reminds Horatio of the King’s past martial power as he physically “combated” and “smot[e]” his opponents (TLN 62, 60, 76-79; 1.1.47-63). Later, describing the Ghost to Hamlet, Horatio says, “I knew your father; these hands are not more like” (TLN 403; 1.2.212). Horatio’s turn of phrase, using the metaphor of two identical parts of his own body, emphasizes the visual and physical symmetry between the Ghost and the dead King. Such comments on the Ghost’s lifelike appearance acknowledge and exploit the actor’s solidity and life.

At the same time, the language of the scene also alludes to the possibility that the Ghost is a representation and not the thing itself. Barnardo does not say the Ghost is actually the dead king, but rather something “in the same figure like” him (TLN 53; 1.1.41). Such phrasing implies that the Ghost may be a mere representation, a demonic (or theatrical) illusion rather than a true substance. Similarly, in response to Marcellus’s question of whether the Ghost is like the king, Horatio’s implicit assent, “As thou art to thy selfe,” seems to confirm the stable reality of the Ghost (TLN 75; 1.1.59). Yet at the same time, the relationship of a fictional character such as Marcellus to his “self” is not as stable as Horatio assumes. This apparently simple response produces an unexpected moment of metatheatrical vertigo for playgoers, since Horatio’s analogy may well unintentionally remind us that the character of Marcellus is itself as much an illusion, a theatrical one, as the Ghost itself. Such language emphasizes the Ghost’s status as not only potentially a demonic trick but also, inevitably, a theatrical representation. The more lifelike the Ghost looks, the more it seems both real, in the sense of supernaturally embodying the dead king, and illusory, in the sense of revealing its theatrical embodiment by an actor. The Ghost thus becomes, like theater itself, a paradoxically realistic representation, with even its embodied entrance interrupting and superseding Barnardo’s descriptive story of its previous appearance.
(TLN 51; 1.1.40). As such, it participates in a larger pattern of ontological indeterminacy in the play. Greenblatt is only one of many critics who have noted a “pervasive pattern” in *Hamlet* of “a deliberate forcing together of radically incompatible” perspectives. The inherent materiality of stage ghosts only intensifies this effect as the stage ghost becomes a figure of paradox, fixed between fictional insubstantiality and the actor’s representing body.

More importantly, as the lifelike embodiment of the Ghost produces interpretive tension, it also affects its onstage spectators, particularly Horatio, in increasingly physical ways, causing them to mirror the Ghost they see. Shakespeare first used this idea in his previous ghost play, *Julius Caesar*, as mentioned above, and develops it here in two references that lay the foundation for the play’s deeper exploration of the ghost’s effects on Hamlet himself. First, upon seeing the Ghost Horatio responds that the spirit “harrowes me with feare and wonder” (TLN 56; 1.1.44). Horatio’s word “harrowes,” though it may seem an odd choice (and Q1 has a more stereotypically ghostly word, “horrors”), metaphorically suggests bodily penetration and disruption by the Ghost as by a plow harrowing soil. The word, as critics have noted, also brings to mind the traditional medieval notion of Christ’s Harrowing of Hell. Rather than Christ raiding Hell to release the ghosts, however, the Ghost invades its spectators. The layered references and potential homophones in this line together suggest that the Ghost unleashes its spectators’ emotions, shaping them through its own infectious bodily power.

This infectious power even begins to transform these “harrowe[d]” spectators into ghosts themselves, as when Barnardo reports to Horatio that, at sight of the Ghost, “you tremble and

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looke pale” (TLN 68; 1.1.53). Pallor is a particular attribute of stage ghosts; in 1596, Thomas Lodge describes a face as “pale as the Vizard of [th]e ghost” in the ur-Hamlet, and multiple comedies refer to the apparent convention that stage ghosts would be covered in flour, one even depicting a miller mistaken for a ghost. Ghosts’ pallor links them to the sickliness or fearfulness of a long-suffering body, as when in King John (c. 1594-96) Shakespeare imagines a grieving boy becoming “hollow as a Ghost, / As dim and meager as an Agues fitte.” Horatio’s ghostly pallor thus not only suggests his emotional response of fear, but, more importantly, replicates the Ghost standing before him on the stage, as if suggesting that ghostliness is somehow physically catching. In Thomas Rist’s account of what he calls “purgatorial theater” in Hamlet, such responses to theater come from the fact that “early modern physiology is intrinsically spiritual, for ‘spirits’ are the motive forces of the body.” Shakespeare gives his Ghost the power to elicit the same sympathetic mirroring physical responses from onstage


314 William Shakespeare, The Life and Death of King John (c. 1590-91), in Evans and Tobin, The Riverside Shakespeare, 3.4.84-85.

315 Thomas Rist, “Catharsis as ‘purgation’,” in Craik and Pollard, Shakespearean Sensations, 149.
spectators that early modern actors could draw from playgoers. The liminal embodiment of the Ghost as neither fully flesh nor merely spirit, combining the physical potency of a lifelike body with the force of supernatural ghostliness, increases its uncanny effect on its spectators from the play’s first scene.

Horatio’s physical response to the Ghost has another dramaturgical function beyond just modeling the Ghost’s theatrical power: by linking Horatio’s experience of the Ghost with playgoers’ own, the scene extends Horatio’s mirroring response outward to playgoers as well. Marcellus declares early on that Horatio at first “saies tis but our fantasie, / And will not letbeliefe take holde of him” (TLN 32-3; 1.1.23-24). Horatio interprets stories of the ghost as imaginative “fantasie,” and resists belief in those stories as if it might take physical hold of his body. And this resistance serves the important function of mirroring playgoers’ own resistance to the physical power of theatrical fantasies. As early as 1736, one editor of the play, George Stubbs, noted that Horatio’s focus on finding empirical proof for the Ghost’s reality acknowledges playgoers’ potential skepticism of the supernatural. Such acknowledgement makes the Ghost ultimately “much more likely to gain Credit with us” and increase its eventual impact. That is, Horatio’s skepticism defuses the threat of playgoer skepticism by transforming the scene into a shared experience with the other spectators of the Ghost onstage. Playgoers may, like Horatio, doubt whether theatrical fantasies can become visibly real before them. By depicting Horatio’s doubt, Shakespeare invites playgoers to rest their own belief in the scene on Horatio’s judgment as a spectator.

See my Introduction for more detail.

George Stubbs, Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet Prince of Denmark, Written by Mr. William Shakespeare (London: W. Wilkins, 1736), 8; cited in Kliman, The Enfolded Hamlet.
Even more importantly, Horatio reports that ultimately bodily experience alone convinces him, the “sensible and true avouch / Of mine owne eies” (TLN 72-73; 2.1.36). His grounds for responding to the ghost, that is, are the same as playgoers’ own: sight. Horatio has no concerns (as Hamlet will have) about the problem of apparitions that are not what they seem, either ethically or simply optically. He judges on his eyes alone. As a result, we playgoers who have seen the same sights find ourselves in a paradoxical situation. Judging from our own eyes, we see an actor walking around calling himself a ghost; belief in such a theatrical fantasy cannot take hold. Yet at the same time, this is the same harrowingly substantial sight that Horatio himself has encountered with such profound effect. What exactly has the play just shown us? The Ghost is both reality and representation, both theatrical fiction and performing actor. Horatio’s emphasis on his own sight as the grounds for his belief not only invites playgoers to identify with that belief, but also provides a mechanism by which Horatio’s response to the Ghost can model a similar response from playgoers. Early modern thought particularly emphasized this idea of contagious emotion, as in Robert Burton’s *Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621): “Men, if they but see another man tremble, giddy, or sick of some fearful disease, their apprehension and fear is so strong in this kind, that they will have the same disease.” As Horatio, our onstage proxy, responds to the bodily presence of the Ghost with pallor and trembling, he models the way that playgoers might physically respond as well to the Ghost’s embodied theatrical presence.

318 In a note to this line, Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor’s edition of *Hamlet* contrast Horatio’s word ‘sensible’ with Macbeth’s use of the same word to describe the invisible dagger in *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, in Evans and Tobin, *The Riverside Shakespeare*, note to 2.1.36.
319 Stuart Clark discusses these problems in more detail in *Vanities of the Eye*, 204-235.
320 Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, P. 1, S. 2, M. 3, S. 2; 167-68. Burton does not, however, specify play-going among the possible causes of melancholy, which tend toward the physiological and emotional. For more on early modern ideas of the link between melancholy and imaginative delusions, see Clark, *Vanities of the Eye*, 39-77.
The first ghost scene establishes the Ghost’s status as an actor performing to spectators. The complex dynamics of performance in that scene—embodied Ghost affecting onstage spectators, and embodied scene affecting playgoers in turn—repeat, develop, and deepen in the second ghost scene of the play. Instead of just defending theater from the threat of playgoer skepticism, however, 1.4 engages a greater risk: the idea that the lies and corruption of theater can damage its audiences by reconstituting them physically.

In this scene, Hamlet first encourages the ghost to speak through metaphors that vividly draw attention to the Ghost’s corporeal origins as they build a larger rhetorical theme of opening and disclosure to a listening audience. This ghost, more explicitly embodied than any other theatrical ghost so far, gains its solidity from Hamlet’s conflation of his dead father’s body with the ability to speak. Initially Hamlet expresses confusion about the Ghost’s ambiguous nature as a spirit from either heaven or hell, yet ultimately he decides that its “questionable shape” is provocingly corporeal enough for him to demand some answers (TLN 628; 1.4.43). As he pleads that the Ghost not let him “burst in ignorance” about the reason for its appearance, Hamlet’s language prompts his next idea that his father’s “bones hearsed in death, / Have burst their cerements” (TLN 631-33; 1.4.46-48). This image of bones grotesquely spilling forth from their shroud suggestively parallels Hamlet’s own bursting impatience to hear the ghost’s story.

Similarly, Hamlet’s description of how his father’s tomb “Wherein we saw thee quietly interr’d, / Hath op’t his ponderous and marble jawes, / To cast thee up againe” also implies Hamlet’s desire for the Ghost to similarly break a quiet silence and open his own jaws to speak (TLN 634-36; 1.4.49-51). These metaphors of opening link the Ghost’s ability to speak and Hamlet’s desire to hear with the physical return of the dead king’s corpse.
More specifically, that is, Hamlet initiates the Ghost’s role as actor in this scene not only by placing himself as audience to the Ghost but also by vividly highlighting the actor’s corporeal presence onstage. In calling the Ghost “thou dead corse [...] in compleat steele,” Hamlet imagines this armored spectre as a physically solid dead body (TLN 637; 1.4.52). This corpse is not shrouded like most previous ghosts, though it looks corpse-like enough to bring “cerements” to Hamlet’s mind; perhaps the winding-sheet costume on its own had by this time become a cliché in need of revival through even greater emphasis on the living body of the actor.\footnote{Using lifelike armor and clothing to costume this rotting skeleton leaping forth from the grave makes it a disturbingly zombie-like body, inanimate yet energized, as if it is both living man and rotting flesh. As Alice Rayner writes, in order to “speak” to the stage ghost “we have to recognize it in its living presence,” which requires “a kind of stereoptic double vision that sees thing and nothing at once.”\footnote{In some sense, Hamlet himself recognizes the converse, that the Ghost’s ability to speak to him depends on its link—both metaphorical and practical—with its actor.}

The Ghost’s speaking has consequences for Hamlet himself as they enter alone in 1.5. As the Ghost begins to demand intense auditory attention from Hamlet, asking him to “lend thy serious hearing / To what I shall unfold” (TLN 689-90; 1.5.5), the Ghost implies that such listening has compelling physical effects. When Hamlet replies, “Speake, I am bound to heare,”

\footnote{\footnote{Pierre Kapitaniak would thus be in some sense right that \textit{Hamlet} “déformant sur notre perception de la figure spectrale” (distorts our perception of the ghostly figure) on the early modern stage since “le linceul est généralement de rigueur” (the shroud is generally the rule), while, despite the relative scarcity of references to clothed ghosts compared to shrouded ghosts, Erika T. Lin could still also be correct that, “more typically, [ghosts] were dressed to resemble the person while alive,” particularly in later years. Kapitaniak, “‘Armed at point’ et ‘night gown’: les oripeaux du spectre et l’exception \textit{Hamlet},” \textit{Proceedings of Société Française Shakespeare} 26 (2008), 46-47; Lin, \textit{Shakespeare and the Materiality of Performance}, 86.}

\footnote{Alice Rayner, \textit{Ghosts: Death’s Double and the Phenomena of Theatre} (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2006), xxiv.}
the Ghost responds, “So art thou to revenge, when thou shalt heare” (TLN 691-2; 1.5.6-7). Here, the Ghost links Hamlet’s attentive hearing to his future obedient action of revenge, as if listening is physically binding. In lending his hearing, the Ghost suggests, Hamlet loses control over both his senses and his actions.

The consequences to Hamlet’s physical body of ceding to the Ghost such power become clearer as the Ghost plays a coy game of revealing the very story he claims to hide. “But that I am forbid” to tell the story of the afterlife to “eares of flesh and bloud,” he says,

I could a tale unfolde whose lightest word
    Would harrow up thy soule, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,
Thy knotty and combined locks to part,
And each particular haire to stand an end. (TLN 698-707; 1.5.13-22)

This aposiopetic rhetoric intensifies the attention of listeners, both Hamlet and playgoers, at the very moment the Ghost describes the potential danger of such listening. Once again using language of physical invasion and disruption with the word ‘harrow,’ the Ghost describes the powerful physical effects this other, imagined aural tale would have on its listeners. The ordinary functions of the body go wild as blood freezes, hair stands on end, and eyes bulge from their sockets in a disruption symbolically as profound as a violation of stars’ movements, as disturbing as the Ghost’s own eruption from its quiet grave. According to Carol Chillington Rutter, the Ghost’s “theatrical ‘telling’ works as violently on [Hamlet’s] body as his uncle’s bizarrely theatrical poison worked on his father’s.” Through these metaphors Shakespeare creates for us

323 Extending his demonstration of the Ghost’s physical effects on Hamlet, Rist has argued that Hamlet’s “delay through five acts shows him ‘freeze’… just as the Ghost predicts,” in “Catharsis as ‘purgation’,” 151.
324 Rutter, Enter the Body, xi.
playgoers an awareness of the Ghost’s effects both on Hamlet and, potentially, on our own “flesh and blood” ears.

As critics have often noted, listening itself becomes physically dangerous as the Ghost reveals the secret of a murder that intimately involves the ears.325 Demanding auditory attention twice more—“list Hamlet, oh list”—the Ghost describes how the “juyce of cursed Hebenon” enters the ears, from which it “courses through / The naturall gates and allies of the body” to “posset / And curde” the blood (TLN 747, 751-4; 1.5.62-69). Calling to mind the freezing effects of the Ghost’s other, untold tale, the King’s curdling blood solidifies, according to the Ghost, in response to another kind of liquid spirit entering and taking humoral effect through the ear. Such imagery evokes not only the horrifying intimacy of an unnatural murder but also the poison of the demonic lie that the apparent ‘Ghost’ may be telling. According to Kenneth Gross, “the ghost’s story is a dead king’s poisonous word about the way words can poison kings.”326 Yet it is important to avoid limiting the Ghost to a mere metaphor for rumor or political slander, as Gross attempts to do. The Ghost shapes the play not as a disembodied voice or a free-moving rumor but as an embodied corpse-like form speaking in close physical proximity to Hamlet and to the theatrical audience, both of whom are listening closely and sharing the same air as the speaking spirit. Whatever auditory vulnerabilities that the dead King or Hamlet himself may experience through their bodies thus implicate playgoers as well.


326 Gross, Shakespeare’s Noise, 28.
Theatrical performance itself thus acts as a third type of auditory experience in this scene, one crucial to Hamlet’s later attempt to prove whether the ghost’s story about the poisoned ear is itself a poisoning lie. The ghost’s description of auditory vulnerability suggests particular dangers for playgoers—for audiences—especially since early modern stages were designed for acoustic power more than sound-wired theaters are today. The play itself, like poison through the king’s ear, might twist the smooth and “wholsome” flow of the humoral soul into corruption, or at least pleasurably shock that flow with the thrills of language and spectacle (TLN 755; 1.5.70). As the Ghost imagines his auditory effect on Hamlet, Hamlet’s imagination works to create those effects in his own body; in the same way, imitating the emotional/physical dynamics onstage, playgoers imaginatively experience the play’s own effects. Ultimately, the parallels between the Ghost’s rhetorical influence over Hamlet and its power over playgoers heighten the Ghost’s agency and effectiveness as a performer—whether playgoers understand it as a real ghost performing a harrowing tale, a demonic illusion performing ghostliness, or an actor performing theatrical insubstantiality.

The Ghost’s final cry before exiting, “Remember me,” adds a new dimension to these embodied effects through the religious concepts of bodily participation and response embedded in the word “remember” (TLN 776; 1.5.91). Suggesting a cue to thought and action, the word appears throughout the Anglican service for the Lord’s Supper and resonates particularly in the words of institution, quoted from Jesus and necessary for a valid sacrament: “doe this in

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remembrance of me.”

From 1559, when Queen Elizabeth instituted her revision of the *Book of Common Prayer* and mandated church attendance with the Act of Uniformity, those complying with the law would have heard weekly reminders of the need for “remembrance [sic] of [Christ’s] death and passion” by becoming “partakers of his moste blessed body and bloud.”

Remembrance, in the *Book of Common Prayer*, requires embodied action, and partaking in wine and bread becomes a physical and spiritual response to the remembered physical body of Christ.

Further, remembrance is, in this religious context, a communal experience of mystical union. While communion itself was not legally required, the *Book of Common Prayer* urges congregants to participate in the privilege of remembering Christ in order to become “membres incorporate” in his “mistical body.”

Beginning with the Wycliffite Bible of 1382, the OED records many early modern usages of ‘member’ to mean a piece of a body, whether a physical body or, metaphorically, the collective ‘body’ of Christ. The root word ‘member’ links the church’s central ritual of remembrance to the idea of a communal spiritual body marked by response to God. This religious context suggests that the Ghost demands not only mental but physical remembrance. In asking Hamlet to “remember me,” the Ghost asks him to re-embody the body he sees before him.

329 Ibid.
330 Ibid., 195, sig. 86v.
331 “member, n. and adj.,” particularly sense A. I. 2., “a person who belongs to the metaphorical body of Christ, or of Satan,” *OED Online*, December 2014.
332 Psychoanalytic criticism of *Hamlet* has thoroughly mined the way in which the son is haunted by the ghost of the father whom he seeks and fears to become; see, for example, Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare’s Plays*, Hamlet to
The Ghost’s command that Hamlet “remember” thus appropriates for theatrical purposes what scholars have called early modern “religious habits of thought,” inviting playgoers to connect Hamlet’s response with the physical remembrance that takes place through theatrical performance.\(^{333}\) That is, as Judd Hubert has argued, in this moment the Ghost becomes a playwright, assigning “to the scholarly prince the unlikely part of avenger” that he then struggles to perform to the Ghost’s satisfaction.\(^{334}\) Understanding the Ghost as both actor and playwright might have encouraged the early disseminators of the theatrical legend, first mentioned in Nicholas Rowe’s 1709 biography, that Shakespeare himself performed the Ghost in \textit{Hamlet}.\(^{335}\)

Whether the legend is true or not, the idea of the Ghost as the play’s author giving Hamlet his part resonates with the way Hamlet, as the Ghost’s main spectator, himself must become an actor in imitation of the Ghost. Thus, the ghost’s call for embodied remembrance demands collective response from playgoers as well. As the ghost asks his onstage audience, Hamlet, to imitate him through remembrance, the play also asks playgoers to take on the physical responses of Hamlet and the other actors onstage, so that playgoers become ‘actors’ too in a shared theatrical experience. With the words “remember me,” the Ghost invites the bodies of its different audiences to imitate its own, physically and spiritually.


\(^{334}\) Hubert, \textit{Metatheater}, 99.

\(^{335}\) Ingleby et al., \textit{The Shakspere Allusion-book}, 1:1xxx.
Then, in turn, Hamlet’s response to the Ghost’s command strengthens the link between himself and playgoers as audiences of the Ghost. Hamlet responds energetically to this command, promising twice to “remember thee”; more specifically, he imagines his memory as a playgoer whose attentive ear has recorded every detail of the Ghost’s words: “Remember thee? / I thou poore Ghost while memory holds a seate / In this distracted globe” (TLN 780-82; 1.5.105, 96, 97). Hamlet declares that he will remember the Ghost as long as he can retain his sanity from this experience, linking his own head’s disorder to the spirit’s report of a disordered world’s attack on divine kingship. More importantly, the line implies, remembrance of the Ghost’s story will endure as long as playgoers remain seated (or standing) within the Globe Theater—that is, as long as they resist the distractions of the crowded theater and focus on the Ghost and the play itself.336 This reference to the theater in which the play is being performed also aligns with other moments that deliberately deflate the theatrical illusion of the Ghost by calling attention to its embodiment as an actor, as when later Hamlet asks his companions to “heare this fellowe in the Sellerige” or calls it “olde mole” as if, as Richard McCoy says, to call “attention to the actor banging and hollering beneath the floorboards” (TLN 847, 859; 1.5.151, 162).337 Such references to the play’s theatricality work like Horatio’s skepticism earlier to link Hamlet’s experience to that of playgoers. Hamlet reminds playgoers to remain, like himself, attentively dedicated to remembrance of what they see.


337 McCoy, Faith in Shakespeare, xii. As Margreta de Grazia argues, “old mole” also links “the king who ruled over the land to a subterranean creature synonymous with base earth,” connecting the Ghost once more to its physical, earthly body: Hamlet without Hamlet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 43.
Yet as a playgoer mirroring what he sees, Hamlet also makes the first step toward entering the new role the Ghost has assigned him. Remembrance is not just mental but physical, and an actor must perform a part, not simply observe. Understanding how remembrance orchestrates action clarifies the Ghost’s purpose for appearing to Hamlet at all. “If the immaterial words that come from his immaterial being have this [physical] power,” as Amy Cook asks, “why does he need Hamlet to affect [sic] his revenge?”³³⁸ That is, why does the Ghost not afflict Claudius directly, “harrowing up the soul of his enemy” through words of spiritual poison?³³⁹ The Ghost, as Cook points out, is clearly most interested not in Claudius’s death but in Hamlet’s own action—or, put in my terms, in Hamlet taking on the theatrical role that the Ghost has first performed. That is, in promising “to put an Anticke disposition on,” Hamlet does not actually allay suspicion, as he claims, since his behavior rather draws increased attention (TLN 868; 1.5.172). Rather, Hamlet’s performance links him with the Ghost as a performer. While the Ghost now disappears from the play for several acts, Hamlet’s concerns increasingly center on the issues its presence raised, particularly the implications of taking on a performing role.

Hamlet’s new interest in the meaning of performance is particularly apparent in his response to the Player’s speech about Hecuba, in 2.2. In this scene, Hamlet describes the actor’s passionate performance using terms that are surprisingly reminiscent of the Ghost’s earlier effect on its spectators.³⁴⁰ Carried away by mere theatrical “fixion, in a dreame of passion,” Hamlet marvels, the Player

Could force his soule so to his owne conceit
That from her working all the visage wand,

³³⁸ Cook, *Shakespearean Neuroplay*, 83.
³³⁹ Ibid.
Here Hamlet’s description of the Player’s “wan” visage recalls Horatio’s “pale” appearance in response to the Ghost’s first appearance, and surely Horatio’s “[trembl[ing]” in that scene would have produced a broken voice like the Player’s (TLN 68; 1.1.53). This theatrical fiction’s effect on the Player thus parallels the Ghost’s soul-harrowing, blood-freezing, and distraction-inducing theatrical effects on its spectators in Act 1, as if the Ghost’s theatricality has begun to permeate both Hamlet’s consciousness and the play itself. The Ghost’s performance shaped its spectators in its own image, calling Hamlet in particular to ‘remember’ and reenact the Ghost through vengeance; so now Hamlet becomes concerned with the meaning of reenactment itself.

Hamlet contemplates two new ideas about the significance of acting: first, that real passions can come through imitation, and second, that revenge itself requires theatrical imitation. As Kristine Steenbergh argues, “by imitating the emotions of Hecuba […] the actor experiences her emotions as if they were his own.” This idea that real emotion comes through performing false emotion contradicts Hamlet’s distinction, pre-Ghost, between “actions that a man might play” and “that within which passeth showe” (TLN 265-6; 1.2.84-85). Then, Hamlet found passions imitated and performed to be less real than hidden passions. But now, Hamlet begins to worry that his refusal to show off his emotion contrasts unfavorably with the Player’s ability to “drowne the stage with teares, / And cleave the generall eare with horrid speech” (TLN 1602-3; 2.2.562-63). Hamlet’s idea of theater’s effect here goes beyond simply the physical power over a vulnerable audience that I have traced so far. By metaphorically giving theatrical performance

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the power to “drowne” and “cleave” its spectators, Hamlet imagines violence itself as a kind of theater, almost as if he is readying himself to, as he later advises the Players, “sute the action to the word, the word to the action” (TLN 1865-6; 3.2.17-18). Revenge, as Steenbergh says, is itself a mimetic action that “replicates the original crime.”

Further, by coming up moments later with the idea for the play-within-the-play, what Leslie Fiedler calls Hamlet’s “only deliberately chosen act, his only real success” in the play, Hamlet redirects his revenge back into theater. The Player’s performance in 2.2 models for Hamlet a way to take theatrical action in response to the Ghost’s performance, though Hamlet himself cannot fully understand how to make that theatrical action efficacious. In fact, Hamlet’s growing pleasure in his “Anticke” performances may even account, as Margreta de Grazia has argued, for his long delay between the promise and performance of revenge, a delay extended so prominently by the performance of the Mousetrap play which he himself interrupts. Hamlet’s “zany repertoire” of hyperactive antics and clowning sarcasm even violates his own rigorous instructions to the Players to by no means “teare a Passion to tatters, to verie ragges, to split the eares of the Groundlings” nor “speake no more then is set downe for them,” as if reflecting a deeper “desire to suppress all forms of upstaging” in his role as performer (TLN 1857-59, 1887-88; 3.2.10-11, 39).

Through Hamlet’s response to the Ghost, Shakespeare explores the ways in which theatrical worlds, like ghosts, can take on unexpected reality for playgoers as they, like Hamlet, become performers themselves. Though performance thus becomes more real than

[^343]: de Grazia, Hamlet without Hamlet, particularly 171-96.
[^344]: Ibid., 8 and 39.
Hamlet initially believes, succeeding in making a theatrical passion real also has dangers, as the Ghost’s final appearance shows.

Through its first two appearances, the Ghost’s surprising corporeality has helped it shape spectators’ passions as an actor does, demonstrating theater’s unexpected power as a ghostly “dream of passion” (TLN 1592; 2.2.552). In 3.4, however, the Ghost’s invisibility to the Queen raises for the first time the opposite problem: the danger of theatrical fiction leading to madness. When Hamlet addresses the Ghost, the Queen assumes that “Alas hee’s mad” (TLN 2486; 3.4.105). The scene thus hearkens back to Horatio’s fear for Hamlet, in the second appearance of the Ghost, that it will “deprive your soveraigntie of reason, / And draw you into madnes” (TLN 662-3; 1.4.73-74). Through what Michael Neill calls the scene’s “savage concentration upon story-telling and its power to transform an audience,” Shakespeare here tackles the antitheatricalist concern that unreal, deceitful spectacles such as ghosts might work too powerfully, dangerously imbalancing the spectator’s humoral mind.345

In particular, Hamlet’s focus on transmitting the Ghost’s story causes his impetuous murder of Polonius. Hamlet seeks to show the Queen “a glasse / Where you may see the inmost part of you,” illuminating his mother’s blindness to her own and her husband’s guilt (TLN 2399-400; 3.4.19-20). In the process, he reenacts the Ghost’s role as storyteller as if he hopes his performance will affect his mother as deeply as the original affected him. Hamlet imitates the Ghost’s description and rhetoric about the Queen’s fall from virtue to corruption in her second marriage, as Joseph Wagner has argued, and in thus “appropriat[ing] the very image and seal of

the father” he recreates for his mother his own encounter with the Ghost. Yet Hamlet’s grief and anger, culminating in his attack on Polonius mid-narrative, backfire. Hamlet’s callous attitude toward the “wretched, rash, intruding foole” Polonius suggests that he is blind to his own violence (TLN 2413; 3.4.31). His ongoing attempt to “wring [his mother’s] hart” with the story of Claudius as “a murtherer and a villaine” contrasts oddly, as Alan Dessen points out, with the bloody body of Polonius visible and ignored onstage, prominently displayed in the central discovery space where Polonius was likely hiding (TLN 2417, 2475; 3.4.35, 96). Even the Queen’s guilty or angry cry that “These words like daggers enter in mine eares” recalls our attention not only to the Ghost’s story of poison in the ears but also to the dagger-wounds Hamlet has actually, not metaphorically inflicted on Polonius (TLN 2473; 3.4.95). The scene thus asks whether Hamlet’s encounters with the Ghost, itself an embodiment of murderous anger, may have unleashed his uncontrolled passions. Hamlet’s behavior has raised the threat of a potentially dangerous theatrical contagion at work, an insane detachment from reality arising from his surrender to the passionate effects of the Ghost’s original performance.

These dangers extend to playgoers as, at this precise moment, the Ghost itself enters. This final appearance of the Ghost, visible and embodied by an actor, completes the link between Hamlet and playgoers, implicating both in a shared spectatorship of the Ghost. The Ghost, even more than the dead body of Polonius with which the scene juxtaposes him, exists in a liminal space between living actor and dead character. The Queen’s inability to see the Ghost only

347 Dessen, Elizabethan Stage Conventions, 154-5.
348 Teresa Brennan links negative affects to spirits in The Transmission of Affect, 21.
349 The similarities between these two forms of ‘playing dead’ are greater if the Ghost uses the “appropriate authority entrance for all the corpse that blocks it,” as Andrew Gurr
highlights the actor’s unavoidably visible body by contrast with the “vacancie” or “incorporall ayre” she describes, just as the Ghost’s voice is all the more obvious for her comment that she hears “nothing but our selves” (TLN 2498-9, 2516; 3.4.117-18, 33). Further, the Queen blames any physical response to the spectacle and stories of the Ghost on overactive imagination: “This is the very coynage of your braine, / This bodilesse creation extacie is very cunning in” (TLN 2520-1; 3.4.137, 139). The more playgoers respond with imaginative fervor to the Ghost’s “bodilesse” presence, that is, the more we parallel Hamlet in his murderous madness over nothing. As Hamlet once again “waxes desperate with imagination” at the sight of the Ghost (TLN 675; 1.4.87), we playgoers, enveloped in this fictional story, might seem to be similarly losing control of our passions by responding to mere theatrical ‘brain-coinage.’

Yet by thus highlighting the dangers of responding to theatrical representations, the scene also flatters playgoers for our participation in creating theater’s physical and emotional power. By staging the Ghost as a perceptible reality that the Queen simply cannot see, the scene implies that if anyone’s perception is faulty in this scene, it is hers. Early modern spirits could choose to be visible or invisible at will, and pace W.W. Greg, the multiple spectators of the Ghost and Claudius’s confession at prayer prove that the ghost cannot be a hallucination in its earlier scenes. And in fact, Hamlet’s response to the Ghost here is very similar to the eye-popping, hair-raising response the Ghost generated in previous scenes: as the Queen reports, “Foorth at your eyes your spirits wildly peep, / And […] / Your bedded haire like life in excrements / Start


350 The word “incorporall” is from Q1 only.

up and stand an end” (TLN 2500-3; 3.4.119-22). The Ghost’s visibility to playgoers thus produces an ironic effect by which we playgoers can mirror Hamlet’s physical response to the Ghost even as the Queen’s response reminds us that stage ghostliness is mere theatrical brain-coinage. Such a double response returns to playgoers a sense of insight within the madness of spectatorship.

Specifically, playgoers’ new sense of insight with the Ghost’s arrival works to balance the scene’s depiction of Hamlet’s vulnerability to the Ghost’s earlier narrative. Hamlet’s violent passions in response to the Ghost have suggested playgoers’ vulnerability in turn to being “infected, contaminated, corroded, even poisoned, by [the play’s] paranoid and restless suspicions” as carried in the contagious body of the Ghost. However, when the Ghost enters, just as its words redirect Hamlet’s anger into moral superiority by encouraging him to have pity on his mother and “step betweene her, and her fighting soul,” its visible presence in turn flatters playgoers’ perceptual superiority (TLN 2493; 3.4.113). Like Hamlet, the scene reminds us, we have a choice about our response. The Ghost’s pretended invisibility reminds us that, paradoxically, our vulnerability to theatrical effects arises only through our willingness to imaginatively participate in creating those effects.

Even as the Ghost disappears from the play after Act 3, the effects of its liminal body continue to ripple through its audiences within the play. Ultimately, Hamlet’s own enactment of the Ghost’s revenge enables him to make his “audience” of onlookers “looke pale, and tremble” just as the Ghost once did (TLN 3819, 3818; 5.2.335, 34). And as Hamlet dies, he passes on that actorly power over audiences, asking Horatio, “if thou didst ever hold me in thy hart,” as if in bodily remembrance, to “tell my story” (TLN 3832, 3835; 5.2.346, 49). Peter Sacks, contrasting

352 Pollard, *Drugs and Theater*, 128.
this moment with the Ghost’s earlier call for remembrance “if thou didst ever thy dear father love,” argues that Hamlet’s request demonstrates that he now values linguistic representation of action instead of action itself, as he comes “to recognize the efficacy of the mediating shows and forms which he had rejected at the opening of the play” (TLN 708; 1.5.23). However, while his words invite playgoers to value representation as sufficient in itself, Hamlet does not thereby abandon action but instead links narrative to bodily imitation and enactment. As Hamlet takes his last painful breaths, he imagines that Horatio, too, will “draw thy breath in pain / To tell my story” (TLN 3834-35; 5.2.348-49). Just as ‘remembering’ the Ghost’s theatrical body has driven Hamlet’s actions, Hamlet now invites Horatio, and playgoers, to experience his own bodily pains, to take on the physical effects of remembrance, to perform his story in turn. By ‘remembering’ this harrowing story in both body and spirit, ultimately playgoers carry forward the ghost-like representation that is theatrical performance itself.

The Ghost in Hamlet hovers liminally between two realities, never fully either a physically embodied “figure like the King” or a dangerously fantastical “coynage of your braine” but participating in both (TLN 53, 2520; 1.1.41, 3.4.137) As Hamlet’s Ghost shapes its audiences in its own image, turning them pale and inciting them to performance of their own, Shakespeare models the way theater itself combines awarenesses of embodied fact and imaginative fiction to create something new. And as characters respond to the Ghost in turn, the image of spectatorship that emerges avoids both extremes of skeptical rationalism and gullible madness. The Ghost catalyzes the play’s exploration of theatrical performance as “less a category of deceit or ‘show’ than it is a vehicle or transformative agent,” a kind of ongoing “experimentation” in partnership

with spectators. In his staging of the Ghost as actor in *Hamlet*, therefore, Shakespeare defends theater itself; as Philip Sidney would put it, he “nothing affirmeth, and therefore never lieth.”

In its attention to the Ghost’s uncanny physical effects on spectators, *Hamlet* shows how drawing attention to a stage ghost’s liminal embodiment can heighten playgoers’ response to theatrical fiction itself. In succeeding years, plays continue to experiment with playgoers’ perceptions of embodied ghosts. For example, John Marston’s *Antonio’s Revenge* (c. 1601-2) not only echoes many of *Hamlet*’s ghostly motifs—the appearance of a father as a ghost to his grieving son, ghostly echoes from under the stage, the uncanny connection between mentions of the ghost and its appearance—but also explicitly suggests that its ghost can even take physical action in the play-world, as when the ghost, visiting his sad widow, “draw[s] the Curtaines” of her bed.

Similarly, later plays such as Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1611) and Philip Massinger’s *The Roman Actor* (1626) depict dream ghosts that nevertheless leave behind real objects, while in *Macbeth* (1606) Shakespeare revisits this dramatic irony in the invisible yet bloody-bodied ghost. Such plays suggest the lasting dramaturgical influence of *Hamlet*’s innovative depiction of the embodied ghost as actor.

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354 Cook, *Shakespearean Neuroplay*, 142, 146.
“I’m not here”: The ghost and its corpse in The Lady’s Tragedy

While Hamlet uses its Ghost to explore theatrical embodiment, King Hamlet’s actual corpse never appears. A decade later, The Lady’s Tragedy (1611), also known as The Second Maiden’s Tragedy and attributed to Thomas Middleton, literalizes the relationship between body and spirit by staging both a ghost and a corpse of the same person. The Lady’s ghost returns to protect its corpse, producing in the final scene the unlikely sight of the ghost and corpse both onstage at the same moment: “Enter the Ghost in the same form as the Lady is dressed in the chair.” Since an actor can only play one character at a time, such a juxtaposition of ghost and corpse onstage “in the same form” uniquely draws attention to the means of staging both at once. By depicting an uncanny connection between the Lady’s spirit and body, and by highlighting their theatrical staging, the play reinvigorates the uncanny theatrical self-awareness inherent to stage ghosts. Hamlet blended its Ghost out of an actor’s body and a fictional character, creating what cognitive scientists call “emergent structure” out of these associations between ghostliness and theatricality. The Lady’s Tragedy invokes this blend of ghost and body (perhaps by now somewhat of a theatrical cliché) only to break it apart and analyze its components in more detail, juxtaposing a stage ghost with a stage corpse to sharpen playgoers’ attention to theatrical embodiment once more. Middleton uses the ghost’s dependence on its corpse for a larger purpose: to demonstrate how theatrical characters rely in turn on the inescapable, frustratingly material, yet physically seductive body of the actor.


359 Cook, Shakespearean Neuroplay, 91.
From the ghost itself to both the hero and the villain, characters in *The Lady’s Tragedy* find it impossible to separate the spirit from the dead body it used to animate. Contrary to previous Christian and neoplatonic discourses suggesting that “the soul governs the body and the body is a mere vessel for the soul,” Sheetal Lodhia has argued, in *The Lady’s Tragedy* “the material, the body, is shown to govern the spirit.”\(^{360}\) The ghost’s allegiance to its corpse in this play is not original in itself, since contemporaneous plays include the idea that spirits hover particularly around the graves of their corpses.\(^{361}\) *The Lady’s Tragedy*, however, extends this concept throughout its plot, well before the crucial final scene.

First, in the view of the Tyrant and his soldiers, the Lady’s corpse serves as a unique point of access to her dead spirit, both dangerously and pleasurably so. For example, after the Lady kills herself to escape the Tyrant’s lust, her enemy invades her tomb in order to take the body. As they approach the tomb, however, the Tyrant’s soldiers make non sequitur declarations of courage that actually betray their fear of ghosts; when it comes down to it, none of them seem willing to open the tomb at all. One explains apologetically that “I love not to disquiet ghosts / Of any people living, that’s my humour, sir,” as if the only thing preventing him from invading their territory is a groundless personal quirk about ghosts, whom he comically includes in the category of “people living” (A4.3.35-36).\(^{362}\) This soldier’s idea that ghosts are “people living” foreshadows not only the awakening of the Lady’s ghost, but also the link between that ghost, the previously living Lady, and the corpse they seek to claim, all played by the same actor.

\(^{360}\) Sheetal Lodhia, “‘The house is hers, the soul is but a tenant’: Material Self-Fashioning and Revenge Tragedy,” *Early Theatre* 12.2 (2009): 135.

\(^{361}\) See Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* (c. 1610-11), 5.5.502-504.

\(^{362}\) The performance text inexplicably omits the comic line “that’s my humour, sir.”
Meanwhile, the Tyrant himself embraces that living actor as he opens the tomb and retrieves the Lady’s body. Like the soldiers, he imaginatively connects the dead corpse with its onetime spirit, but turns such fears into pleasure by declaring that “I’ll clasp the body for the spirit that dwelt in’t / And love the house still for the mistress’ sake” (4.3.113-14). His commentary on the link between this “body” and the absent “spirit” highlights the actual presence of that spirit in the actor playing dead, just as the estranging metaphor of calling a body a “house” for the character it previously played draws attention to the portrayal of that corpse with the Lady’s actor. In some sense, his words remind us, the Lady still dwells onstage within the person of her actor.

While the presence of the living actor behind the corpse, despite these hints, may remain subconscious for playgoers during this scene, the appearance of the Lady’s ghost to her lover Govianus in the very next scene, 4.4, further highlights the surprising link between ghost and corpse. The ghost wishes, it turns out, to ask Govianus for help in rescuing its corpse from the Tyrant’s necrophilic intentions, as if concerned that mistreating the body could sully the spirit as well. But even before we discover the ghost’s attachment to its corpse, the ghost’s language implies that her consciousness inhabits both her corpse and her ghost simultaneously. The ghost’s first words in the scene, “I am not here,” heard from “within” the tiring house that temporarily serves as a stage tomb, are spoken even before the actor appears onstage (4.4.40). In the staged ambiguity about who is speaking, these words suggest all the more clearly a reference to the body we have just seen the Tyrant take away from ‘here,’ as if the words might emanate from the dead corpse itself. Even though the Lady’s literal corpse is not speaking, her ghost’s “I” refers to that corpse, not the ghostly self that is actually “here.” The paradox, understandably, confuses Govianus, who dismisses these “idle sounds,” only for the ghost itself to appear a
moment later to prove its own sensory reality (4.4.42). “I am not here” suggests that the ghost and corpse are somehow united, as if the ghost speaks from a self embedded in the absent corpse.

Govianus, the ghost’s primary onstage spectator, is confused by this complex relationship between the Lady’s ghost and corpse. When he hears that the ghost wishes “to tell you all my wrongs,” initially, he cannot imagine how anyone can “offend thee” now that the Lady is dead, since “Thou art above the injuries of blood... [and] No life that has the weight of flesh upon’t / And treads as I do, can now wrong my mistress” (4.4.56-59). In other words, he believes, the Lady’s spirit is separate from her body and so is no longer subject to any dangers that an embodied person might inflict; why then does she care about the fate of her corpse? His words suggest almost a chemical concept of density: spirits rise “above” the bodily “weight of flesh.” Particularly interesting in light of the ghost’s earlier personal pronoun choice is the fact that the “thou” he speaks to does not include the body at all, as if the Lady is merely the disembodied ghost he sees. Govianus, working from the assumptions of Protestant orthodoxy that “a bodie is no sp[irit, nor a spirit a bodie,” cannot understand the link between the ghost and its corpse.363

Yet at the same time, Govianus also responds to the ghost in a physical way that belies his theological conviction that spirit and body are separate. When the Lady’s ghost first appears, Govianus undergoes the same hair-raising, startled physical response already seen in Hamlet, experiencing it as “pleasing” and a “delight” “to have my breast shake, and my hair stand stiff” (4.4.46-47). The ghost’s visual similarity to the living Lady provokes the pleasurable “fever” of seeing her once more (4.4.52). Govianus’s physical response to the ghost of his Lady is more than just a decade-old convention of ghostly spectacle; specifically, in the context of their previous relationship, the physical thrill the Lady produces takes on a romantic or even sexual

363 Scot, The Discoverie of Witchcraft, ch. 28, 534.
tone. Later, too, Govianus declares an attachment to the ghost that disturbingly mirrors the
Tyrant’s attachment to the corpse: “I desire to have it haunt me still / And never give over, ‘tis so
pleasing” (5.1.182-83).\textsuperscript{364} This fear that the ghost will “give over” and abandon him even leads
him to momentarily contemplate not rescuing the corpse at all to compel the pleasure of future
visits. Just as “the body of the Lady haunts her Ghost,” according to Lodhia, in turn the ghost’s
presence materially haunts Govianus.\textsuperscript{365}

As the Lady’s embodied ghost continues to speak as if from its corpse, the corpse gains
in turn almost a ghostlike presence onstage. In declaring that “I’m gone / My body taken up,” the
ghost speaks again as the “I” of the stolen corpse (4.4.61-62). While the idea that “I’m gone”
ostensibly emphasizes the stark difference between the disembodied ghost and the bodily corpse
“taken up,” the conventional phrase “my body” also, paradoxically, suggests the corpse-body’s
presence in the speaking character visible onstage. Further, as the ghost’s narrative highlights the
Tyrant’s inappropriately romantic treatment of the Lady’s corpse, the corpse itself gains
unexpected sensory capacity as if it is actually able to hear and feel the Tyrant’s attentions:

\begin{verbatim}
I am now at court
In his own private chamber. There he woos me
And plies his suit to me with as serious pains
As if the short flame of mortality
Were lighted up again in my cold breast;
Folds me within his arms and often sets
A sinful kiss upon my senseless lip;
Weeps when he sees the paleness of my cheek…
\end{verbatim}

(4.4.66-73)

Through romantic overtures impossible for a corpse to notice or respond to, the Tyrant’s actions
treat the corpse as if it remains a living Lady, just as resistant, cold, and pale toward the Tyrant

\textsuperscript{364} Richard Grinnell describes Govianus’s attitude as “spiritual necrophilia” in “And
love thee after:’ Necrophilia on the Jacobean Stage,” in \textit{Between Anthropology and Literature},

\textsuperscript{365} Lodhia, “‘The house is hers, the soul is but a tenant’,” 147.
as when alive. Although the ghost notes particularly the dead aspects of this speaking corpse, such as its “cold breast,” “senseless lip,” and the “paleness” of its cheek, such descriptions of the corpse’s inability to sense or feel anything only increase the uncanniness of hearing its experiences reported through the ghost (4.4.70-73). The ultimate effect of such focus on the “senseless” corpse’s experience is rather to imply the ghost’s ongoing physical sensitivity to and through the corpse’s body.

Thus, as the ghost draws attention to its complex relationship with its corpse, both ghost and corpse take on characteristics of the other, placing them both in a liminal position between silent body and active spirit: the ghost is embodied in its corpse, and the corpse lives through the speaking ghost. The obvious link between such an embodied ghost and a living corpse is the presence of the single living, embodied actor performing both. The presence of the actor shapes playgoers’ awareness of the Lady’s ghost in particular because unlike Hamlet, in which King Hamlet never appears onstage in his living form, The Lady’s Tragedy highlights the visual similarity between the ghost and the actual Lady who has previously appeared alive with her beloved in extended scenes (1.1, 2.1, and 3.1). The ghost’s entrance uses both sound effects (wind, clattering doors) and visual effects (a moving tombstone, bright light) to draw attention to the main spectacle, a ghost described as “his Lady, as went out […] all in white” (4.4.42 s.d.). That is, the ghost is dressed just like the virginal Lady at her death and thus, of course, also like the resulting corpse. A marginal prompter’s note in the play’s manuscript at the ghost’s entrance reads “Enter Lady: Rich. Robinson,” confirming that the ghost in this scene was originally played by the Lady’s actor (B4.4.42 s.d.). The ghost’s appearance thus calls upon playgoers’ remembrance of the same actor as the living Lady.
The ghost’s concern for its own body and playgoers’ awareness of the ghost’s actor together invite playgoers to consider theater’s fundamental dependence on the body of the actor to perform its ghostly characters. Even as the Lady’s ghost speaks for the corpse, it also remains dependent on the corpse’s sensitive materiality. And as Govianus shifts his thinking to value the corpse as the ghost does, the presence of the same actor who played both the living Lady and her corpse must necessarily catalyze his response. In a sense, Govianus learns to value the corpse by seeing the actor’s body that links it to his beloved. Just like the second plot of the play, in which a gulling scene of fake violence goes horribly wrong, the Lady’s plot uses its corpse and ghost to explore theatricality itself. As Caroline Lamb argues, the play “attunes spectators to the partnership between presentation and representation.”\footnote{Caroline R. Lamb, “Corporeal Returns: Theatrical Embodiment and Spectator Response in Early Modern Drama” (PhD Diss., University of Western Ontario, 2011), 96.} By exploring the relationship between the Lady’s ghost and corpse as they serve different roles but remain inextricably connected, the play offers playgoers an opportunity to unpack the partnership between not just corpse and ghost but also the presented body and the represented character.

In the final scene of the play, 5.2, the Tyrant brings the Lady’s corpse onstage for a necrophilic interlude that culminates in Govianus using the corpse itself to poison the Tyrant as the Lady’s ghost enters to bless him and honor its corpse. As the ghost and corpse finally meet, the interaction between these two characters previously played by a single actor creates a startling and paradoxical tableau. That is, Richard Robinson cannot play both the ghost and corpse at the same moment. Though this paradox is crucial to the final effect of the scene, as I will explore, the question it raises also shapes its staging from the beginning: which character ought the Lady’s actor to play? In what follows, I assume with Susan Zimmerman that

\footnote{Caroline R. Lamb, “Corporeal Returns: Theatrical Embodiment and Spectator Response in Early Modern Drama” (PhD Diss., University of Western Ontario, 2011), 96.}
“Robinson appeared as corpse rather than as ghost,” based on two major pieces of evidence. First, as Zimmerman argues, the Lady’s corpse is central to the final scene, arriving onstage long before the ghost’s brief entrance at the end. And second, an even more telling clue, the stage directions and speech prefixes in this scene name the corpse “Lady,” just as the ghost had earlier been called, whereas now the ghost is “Ghost” or “Spirit.” That is, the play’s notations consistently use “Lady” for the living woman and the ghost during the first four acts of the play and then continue for the corpse but not the ghost in the fifth. Though it remains possible that the Lady’s corpse was a dummy or second actor, I here present a reading of the final scene based on the staging that the Lady’s actor performs the corpse and a second actor performs the ghost. Playgoers’ awareness, in these final moments, of Robinson’s presence in the corpse rather than the ghost would combine with themes of the ghost’s allegiance to its corpse and the Tyrant’s attention to the nature and effects of visual artifice, together highlighting once more the centrality of the body to theatrical representation itself.

This final scene of the play focuses on a poisonously painted corpse. As Farah Karim-Cooper and Tanya Pollard have shown, the cosmetic adornment common to both painted boy actors and the fashionable London ladies attending their plays served as a symbol of theatrical

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368 “Enter the Ghost in the same form as the Lady is dressed in the chair” (5.2.128 s.d.); “SPIRIT: My truest love, / Live ever honoured here and blessed above” (5.2.139-40); “The Spirit enters again and stays to go out with the body, as it were attending it” (B5.2.156 s.d.).

369 I extrapolate from the play’s abundance of detail in stage directions to argue that such notations originate from theatrical production, if not also from the author himself. Stage directions do not mention the corpse before Act 5, referring for example to “the Lady’s tomb.”
corruption itself as centered in bodily artifice. From the start, the scene’s theme thus seems to present quite a negative perspective on its own theatrical artifice, as if in support of the antitheatricalist idea that theater poisons and corrupts its spectators through artificial spectacle and false beauty. The song accompanying the entrance of the Lady’s corpse at the beginning of the scene explicitly considers the dangers inherent in beauty, which it describes as “a flatt’ring glass that cozens her beholders” (5.2.15). More importantly, the song’s metaphor of beauty as a mirror deceiving its spectators suggests theater itself (called in Hamlet a “Mirrour up to Nature”) as a visual display of false beauty for a watching crowd (Hamlet TLN 1870; 3.2.22). Artifice gains even more deceptive power as the Tyrant asks Govianus, disguised as a “picture-drawer,” to paint the Lady’s pale face so as to suggest life in her dead body, commanding, “Let but thy art hide death upon her face” (B5.2.31, 67). Finally, the idea that art can “hide death” ironically intensifies the bodily danger of art’s deception when Govianus poisons the cosmetics, so that, as the Tyrant kisses the painted corpse, its artistry in fact inflicts death on his body. The scene thus seems to suggest that theatrical artistry, too, leads to deception and death for its “beholders.”

However, presenting such a theme unironically in a play would be an act of self-sabotage. Instead, the play uses the presence of the actor, as with the corpses of the previous chapter, to deftly ironize and defend itself against this association between theatrical embodiment and death. Painted first as a Lady, then his face perhaps mealed to play her ghost, and now playing a corpse painted by the Tyrant to look alive, the actor materializes as the product of multiple ghostly layers of cosmetic theatricality. He is disguised as female; disguised as disembodied; disguised as dead. Yet these cosmetic disguises come full-circle as the Tyrant’s supposedly false painting

370 Karim-Cooper, Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama, 75-88; Pollard, Drugs and Theater, 101-22.
ultimately emphasizes the one material fact about the body in front of us that is indeed true: it is alive. According to Celia Daileader’s description of her encounter with the Lady’s corpse in a modern-day performance, the living presence of the actor gave playgoers an “ontological sense of her vitality,” which, “together with the tyrant’s insistence of the same, made it too tempting to look at the actress, not the role, and to imagine how it felt to play dead and be fondled.” Daileader’s report supports Lamb’s idea that the play’s “represented realities do not merely swallow the performance space whole; they compete” with the materialities of staging and performance itself. The play gives its play-world a living quality by emphasizing the Lady’s uncanny embodiment and life even as a stage corpse.

Read in this way, the scene reminds us, as if to prepare us for the final, theatrical appearance of the ghost, that artistic illusions do not have to deceive fully to be satisfying; awareness of artificiality can coexist with pleasure in the illusion. The Tyrant, for example, is fully aware from the beginning that having the Lady’s corpse painted will not bring her back to life. Even as he acknowledges that reversing her death is as “unpossible” as turning ashes into wood once more, however, he still enjoys the self-deception of painting, desiring to “by art force beauty on yon lady’s face” (B5.2.85, 96). In the same way, the scene reminds us, an awareness of artificiality’s power can itself produce pleasure for spectators. The presence of the living actor playing the corpse, that is, gives playgoers an ironic superiority to the Tyrant’s obsession with altering the corpse to make it look alive, since that body is, for playgoers who can see through this theatrical illusion, at least, already living. Not only is theatrical illusion never as fully deceptive as the antitheatricalists suppose, since playgoers remain aware of material reality, but

such awarenesses even increase its power. While Zimmerman argues that the presence of the living actor forces the play into “ideological confusions” by mixing an “ostensible condemnation of idolatry” with “an enactment of its dynamics,” the play rather coopts these religious ideas to defend against religious attacks on theater itself.\textsuperscript{373} The scene’s focus on the deadness, deadliness, and deceptiveness of the corpse paradoxically invites attention to the real, living presence of the actor portraying that theatrical fiction, giving playgoers pleasure in their own awareness of artificiality and rescuing theatrical deception from its deadly associations.

This awareness of actors’ bodies comes to a climax when the Lady’s ghost unexpectedly enters while her corpse is still onstage, producing the evident impossibility of a double Lady. The Tyrant’s horrified response—”I called not thee, thou enemy to firmness”—implies that what the Tyrant sees as the ghost’s undesirable immateriality shakes his own “firmness,” a term layering together the mental fearlessness, physical self-control, and sexual readiness that the ghost has just disrupted (B5.2.129). Yet the Tyrant’s fearful, shaken response to the ghost illuminates not merely his preference for the helpless corpse but also the strangeness and theatrical instability of this moment, unprecedented in early modern drama. If my hypothesis about the staging of this scene is correct, that is, a new actor enters as the ghost while Robinson plays dead in the Lady’s chair. Early modern playgoers were most likely accustomed to a certain amount of doubling, in which an actor plays new roles in the same play, or even “dodging,” a term David Bradley uses to describe doubling in which an actor alternates between multiple roles.\textsuperscript{374} Here, however, a new actor plays the same role than another actor previously played, an odd enough scenario by itself, and, further, does so while standing next to the role’s previous

\textsuperscript{373} Zimmerman, “Animating Matter,” 235.

\textsuperscript{374} Bradley, From Text to Performance, 36.
actor.\textsuperscript{375} Such unusual doubling demands what Lamb calls “the viewer’s perceptual fluctuation” between representation and material reality.\textsuperscript{376} The ghost’s entrance thus challenges the very “firmness” of theatrical fictions: visibly split from the actual body of the Lady personified in Robinson as the corpse, the ghost becomes almost a purely theatrical figure, detached even from its original actor’s body.

Such perceptual instability cannot be balanced for long without disrupting the fiction altogether, and indeed, the two separate entrances for the ghost in the final scene suggest that Middleton limits its presence onstage to only the space of a few lines. Yet even in its brief presence, the ghost demonstrates the power of playgoers’ perceptions to link these split enactments of the Lady into an uncannily joined representation, just as the ghost itself seeks to rejoin the apparent opposites of spirit and body. The stage direction specifies that the ghost enters “in the same form as the Lady is dressed in the chair” (B5.2.128 s.d). Rather than wearing the white of her previous appearance, that is, the ghost (played by its new actor) now wears the same “black velvet” accented with pearls that Robinson does as the corpse, as if they are twins, one substantial and the other ghostly (B5.2.13 s.d.). And just like early modern stage twins, dressed and made up to look identical but played by different actors, the ghost and corpse must submit to playgoers’ interpretation for the finishing touch. Lodhia argues that though the staging

\textsuperscript{375} Modern spectators might consider the instability of this experience undesirable; when movie actors die before filming is complete, for example, almost invariably directors use body doubles and CGI to obscure this fact, as in Ed Wood’s \textit{Plan 9 from Outer Space} (Distributor’s Corporation of America, 1956) and Alex Proyas’s \textit{The Crow} (Miramax, 1994). Alternatively, the work provides an in-continuity explanation for the casting change, as in \textit{Doctor Who} (BBC, 1963-2014) or Terry Gilliam’s \textit{The Imaginarium of Doctor Parnassus} (Sony Pictures Classics, 2009). Most similar to the staging style I imagine for \textit{The Lady’s Tragedy} is the unexplained, mysterious doubling in David Lynch’s \textit{Lost Highway} (October Films, 1997) or Todd Haynes’s \textit{I’m Not There} (The Weinstein Company, 2007).

\textsuperscript{376} Lamb, “Corporeal Returns,” 114. Lamb helpfully analyzes the problem of staging the ghost/corpse, but her reading loses precision when it assumes that Robinson must play the ghost.
of this scene “attempts to reconcile” the spirit and the body, it utterly “fails to manage […] the radical division of the Lady’s self.”\textsuperscript{377} In a sense this is true: neither Govianus nor the ghost nor theatrical illusion itself can link these split enactments of the Lady back together. Yet playgoer imagination can. In this moment, the entire theatrical illusion of the ghost’s reality hangs solely and self-consciously on playgoers: on our willingness to believe in Robinson’s double presence on stage, contrary to visual evidence.

In the end, the play models how spectators ought to respond to the Lady’s destabilizing ghost by contrasting two onstage spectators’ final reactions. The Tyrant has fearfully called the ghost an “enemy to firmness” as it interrupts his interlude with the corpse. Yet Govianus responds differently; he uses the same word, “firmness,” to declare his resolve to never marry another woman, since the Lady’s “constancy strikes so much firmness in us” (A5.2.203).\textsuperscript{378} By privileging Govianus’s chaste resolve over the Tyrant’s cowardice, linked by the idea of firmness, the play suggests that Govianus’s response to the destabilizing juxtaposition of ghost and corpse is a better model for playgoers’ response to theater. The Tyrant, lustfully seeking only the body, fears the Lady’s spirit rather than welcoming it as Govianus does. In contrast, throughout the play Govianus does not reject either the body or its value as a spectacle, obeying the ghost’s request to reclaim her corpse and painting it himself in his “masque of revenge.”\textsuperscript{379} In the end, he accepts both spiritual and material aspects of the Lady as worthy of respect and balancing them as two parts of a unified whole: “Thou need’st not mistrust me,” he says to the ghost; “I have a care / As jealous as thine own” (B5.2.158-9). In concerning himself so faithfully

\textsuperscript{377} Lodhia, “‘The house is hers, the soul is but a tenant’,” 155.

\textsuperscript{378} This speech, perhaps too necrophilic for an orthodox hero, was marked for cutting by the censor in the performance text, according to Taylor and Lavagnino’s edition.

\textsuperscript{379} Karim-Cooper, \textit{Cosmetics in Shakespearean and Renaissance Drama}, 75.
for the ghost’s corpse, even as he aligns his priorities with those of the spirit, Govianus models a proper spectatorial attitude of attention to both body and spirit, actor and character.

Through its ghost and corpse, *The Lady’s Tragedy* acknowledges that theater is both materially embodied and imaginatively constructed, existing in liminal tension between two realities. The play’s interest in the physical embodiment of the ghost, the living quality of the corpse, and the impossible staging of their joint appearance suggests the importance of playgoers’ dual awareness of both the play-world and its staging. Middleton challenges playgoers to recognize the embodied nature of theatrical performance—to see through the theatrical effect to the shifting body of different actors—only to deepen our understanding of how theater’s risky reliance on actors’ bodies actually brings characters to life. While it might seem dramatically valuable to guide playgoers to focus on the transcendent character rather than the actorly vessel, this play suggests that eliminating the body, even with all its material limitations, is both impossible and wrongheaded. The play draws attention to the presence of the physical body behind the fiction and suggests that theater’s transparent embodiment gives this kind of artifice a special power. Just as the Lady’s ghost depends on its corpse, so too do theatrical characters depend on the animation and life of the actor’s body. If we consider a ghost as the same kind of spiritual, timeless substance of the imagination as a theatrically fictional character, the all-important corpse the Lady seeks to rejoin might in some sense also be the ineluctable body of the actor.

**Aftereffects: The emergence of the fake ghost**

This chapter has traced the ways in which, building on the metatheatrical ghosts of *The Spanish Tragedy*, ghost tragedies develop the paradoxical embodiment of stage ghosts into
defenses of theatrical embodiment more generally. As a ghost’s effect on characters within the
play models the effect of the play itself on playgoers, the ghost’s power over both onstage
spectators and playgoers depends on the paradoxical presence of the actor’s body. By
foregrounding the material presence of the actor in contrast to received ideas of ghosts as weak,
illusory, or deceptive, Hamlet and The Lady’s Tragedy emphasize the unexpected truth and
power of their spectacles of ghosts and thereby undermine antitheatricalist criticism. Yet the
history of early modern ghost plays does not stop with these representations of surprisingly real
ghosts. Starting in 1607 and continuing until the closing of the theaters in 1642, ghost plays
increasingly imagine ghosts as transparently false performances, mere tricks played on spectators
who foolishly think them real.380 By making the embodied and performative ghostliness of
Hamlet and The Lady’s Tragedy mockingly literal, fake ghost plays demonstrate the ongoing
influence of those earlier ghost plays.

Such fake ghost plays, generally comedies or tragicomedies, follow the basic pattern of
Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher’s The Knight of the Burning Pestle (1607).381 When in this
play Jasper pretends to be a ghost, he fools not only his target character, Venturewell, but also a
frame spectator, the Wife, who completely misses that Jasper is merely pretending when she
vehemently condemns the actions of “his very Ghost.”382 Even as fake ghost plays approach
stage ghostliness in this new and self-parodying way, however, by which “the drama pokes fun
at its own ossifications,” they also extend the tensions established by Hamlet and The Lady’s

380 See Appendix: Fake ghosts, 226 below, for a complete list.
381 Technically, as the Appendix shows, Knight of the Burning Pestle is not the first fake
ghost play, but it is the first to establish the idea of apparent ghostliness as a deliberate and
theatrical trick, rather than a supernatural miracle or accident of misinterpretation. See 222-227
below.
382 Beaumont and Fletcher, Knight of the Burning Pestle, 5.1.36.
Tragedy.\textsuperscript{383} That is, fake ghost plays simultaneously emphasize playgoers’ insight into the falsity of ghostly spectacle—no extant fake ghost play ever lies to playgoers by presenting a fake ghost as real—and explore the power of even the most fake ghost to shape its spectators both physically and emotionally.\textsuperscript{384}

On one hand, fake ghost plays directly and explicitly explore the constructive effects of fake ghosts on onstage spectators, extending the idea from Hamlet and The Lady’s Tragedy that ghosts, like actors, induce physical effects. These fake ghost performances characteristically succeed in regulating their onstage spectators’ unruly passions, particularly romantic afflictions. Fake ghosts cure everything from a general’s lovesickness in John Fletcher’s The Mad Lover (1617) to a lover’s cold-heartedness in Philip Massinger’s The Bashful Lover (1636).\textsuperscript{385} Even tragic plots make use of the fake ghost’s emotional power over its onstage spectators, as when in Thomas Goffe’s The Courageous Turk (1619) a servant disguises himself as the ghost of his king’s father to cure the king’s “intemperate lust.”\textsuperscript{386} Even the deceptive fakery of disguise and performance in these plots ultimately leads to reconciliation and harmony through fake ghosts’ physical and emotional effects on spectators.

At the same time, spectatorship of ghosts (as of actors) involves not just passive receptivity but active interpretive response, an idea explored earlier through Hamlet’s imitative response to the Ghost and implicit in the active playgoer interpretation required for staging the

\textsuperscript{383} States, Great Reckonings in Little Rooms, 195.

\textsuperscript{384} In plays such as Shakespeare’s Macbeth (1606) and Webster’s The White Devil (c. 1612-13), ghosts may be hallucinations or real, but they are not fake disguises.


\textsuperscript{386} Thomas Goffe, The Courageous Turke (London: B. Alsop and T. Fawcet for Richard Meighen, 1632), LION, 2.4.4.
Lady’s ghost and corpse. Such privileged knowledge offers playgoers a feeling of clarity and insight impossible in real life, a pleasurable sense of an “almost godlike understanding of people and events” that also increases playgoers’ trust in the play-world.\footnote{Simon, \textit{The Audience and the Playwright}, 12.} The fake ghost’s dramatic irony has a particularly reassuring effect in Cyril Tourneur’s \textit{The Atheist’s Tragedy} (c. 1607-11), in which Snuffe and Charlemont’s comically transparent ghost disguises intensify by contrast the effect of Montferrers’s dreamlike and yet physically embodied appearances as an actual ghost.\footnote{Tourneur, \textit{The Atheist’s Tragedie}, \textit{LION}; fake ghosts appear in Act 4: 206-11 and 344-45; the real ghost appears in Act 2: 611-62 and Act 5: 29-34.} By revealing the theatrical process of enacting ghostliness, even mockingly, the early fake ghosts of this play might have encouraged playgoers’ trust in its real ghosts. Over time, however, the more that fake ghost plays draw on and parody the power of the embodied real ghost, the more stage ghosts diminish in turn, such as John Webster’s hallucinatory, impotent ghosts in \textit{The White Devil} (c. 1612-13) and \textit{The Duchess of Malfi} (1614).\footnote{One exception to this trend is Massinger’s \textit{The Roman Actor} (1626), 5.1, in which the ghosts of Rusticus and Sura physically remove a treasured statue from the sleeping Caesar’s chamber during what he thinks is merely a dream.} As the fake ghost itself becomes a cliché, the dramatic irony that separates playgoers from onstage spectators ultimately reduces stage ghosts’ embodied power.

Although fake ghosts continue to explore the material theatricality of ghostliness, therefore, ghost plays after \textit{Hamlet} and \textit{The Lady’s Tragedy} do not reach the complexity of these two theatrical achievements. Yet the basic paradox of stage ghostliness remains: though ghosts are mere actors, they affect their spectators through their embodied theatricality. Ghostly spectacle, as \textit{Hamlet} and \textit{The Lady’s Tragedy} established, works by linking the inescapably material actor and the actively interpreting, trusting, and mirroring playgoer. Embodied ghosts
make transparent the interpretive work by which playgoers construct theatrical meaning, in the process inviting playgoers to more fully experience theater’s own unexpectedly material power.
Statues and sympathetic faith in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*

Statues in early modern plays, though ostensibly artificial and inanimate, often appear surprisingly lifelike with beneficent spiritual power to match. In this chapter, I examine enacted statues in early modern drama, culminating in sustained readings of William Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi*. These plays use the real body of the actor portraying the artificial figure of a statue to counter typical early modern rhetoric about the idolatry and deceptiveness of statues that look alive. The more that Shakespeare and Webster invite playgoers to attend to the actor performing the theatrical construct of a statue, the more simultaneously natural that stage statue seems, revealing itself as truly the fleshly body that marble statues merely imitate. Stage statues uniquely highlight the difference between a play and a statue: although theater, like sculpture, often depicts living, natural bodies, plays actually use actors’ natural bodies to produce these artistic representations. Through invoking the potent religious associations statues carry and sacramental habits of thought about the relation between material body and imaginative soul, these plays ultimately use enacted statues to explore how physical response can lead to spiritual growth. The liminal bodies of staged statues—rupturing the division between artificial and natural—thus invite playgoers into an embodied theatrical spectatorship that functions, like Richard McCoy’s “poetic faith,” precisely through courageously acknowledging doubt.\(^{390}\)

Statues portrayed by actors appear much less often in early modern drama than ghosts or corpses do, especially since some theatrical statues, such as the statue of Jupiter that crashes

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from the altar in Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker's *The Virgin Martyr*, must be props.\(^{391}\) Despite their rarity, enacted statues create particularly memorable effects as their power over spectators coincides with their characteristic artificiality. I lay the foundation for my analysis of enacted statues in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi* by linking together, in this chapter's first section, earlier representations of statues as living performers and as spiritually potent automata. Such tropes counter prevailing notions of statues as passive objects of others’ emotion or even deadly idols, instead emphasizing the natural life and agency of statues in order to show how statues’ very artifice allows them to affect others more deeply. These moving statues gain affective agency as they redefine and reclaim the idea of artifice to include both the natural power of the performing body and the spiritual power of spectators’ belief. I connect stories of medieval religious automata with statues in early modern plays, particularly William Wager’s *Trial of Chivalry* and Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*, to show that a statue’s straightforward engagement with perceptions of its artificiality can actually increase its impact on spectators. Paradoxically, these statues gain life and agency through their own constructed nature. Such depictions of statues reveal an alternate early modern perspective on the value of artifice that foreshadows the power in the transparent artifice of theatrical statues themselves, played by the living bodies they purport to represent.

Statues’ performative agency and spiritual benefits unite in the most important statue plays of the period, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, in which onstage spectators’ responses encourage playgoers to notice the actor's body within the enacted statue. These statues embody what Kenneth Gross describes as “an elusive process of identification and exchange, a

sense of magical infection” that hearkens back to the spectator-freezing figure of Medusa—but instead of freezing fellow characters, these statues soften their hearts. In their unexpectedly natural appearance, these statues sympathetically animate the bodies and awaken the faith of their spectators within the play, bringing bodily and spiritual life instead of the death antitheatricalists and iconoclasts feared from religious and theatrical artifice. Combining previous plays' ideas of the enacted statue as divine miracle and as theatrical deception, the statue of Hermione in The Winter's Tale softens the hearts of its onstage spectators as the statue itself softens from apparent marble to natural flesh. In The Duchess of Malfi, meanwhile, what appear to be natural bodies—the corpses of the Duchess's family—turn out to be wax figures that have powerful physical and spiritual effects on the Duchess that work without her conscious knowledge. As if through what Mary Floyd-Wilson has called a “sympathetic contagion” that shapes bodies in occult, supernatural ways, these artificial bodies create emotional effects in their observers that show how theater itself affects playgoers. Bodily sympathies thus parallel spiritual effects; just as statues shape their spectators within the play through emotional and physical sympathies, the theatrical bodies of enacted statues shape playgoers as well and link our own natural bodies with these artificial characters of theater. Both plays thus use onstage spectators’ sympathetic bodily responses to the statues they see to model how enacted statues’ theatrical power works through sympathy, both bodily and spiritual.

Even more than other types of liminal bodies, statues—as products of human artistry—distinctively engage the particular tensions and rewards of artificial representation. By exploring the contrast between statue and living actor that artistic realism might demand they conceal,

393 Floyd-Wilson, Occult Knowledge, 47.
early modern statue plays contest any simplistic notion that statues—or plays—are fundamentally deceptive. Instead, playwrights work to awaken playgoers’ belief in the artificial fiction of theater by linking their bodies together with the statues onstage. Enacted statues demand an audience that appreciates their inherent duality as both artificial and embodied, and, in experiencing that complexity, better understands its own power to interpret, sympathize, and enjoy. By imagining such an audience, these statues attempt to awaken their watchers from stone into life.

“You must imagine now you are transform’d”: Statues as living artifice

The idea of artifice or craft, in early modern use as well as in the respective Latin and Germanic etymologies, carries a paradox. Both terms typically suggest a range of negative meanings, ranging from deliberate deceit to derivative impotence. “Craft” can suggest a witchlike power to manipulate nature—what English monk William Bonde calls in 1526 the horrifying “wonders” produced through the Devil’s “craft of nature.” And “artifice” can suggest mere imitative mediocrity compared with nature’s perfection, since as John Eliot says in 1593, “no artifice of man can tell how to counterfeit” a bird’s song. Yet there is no necessary conflict between artifice and natural substance. In fact, “artifice” and “craft” fundamentally suggest creative work, as when an anonymous 16th century herbal declares that “Hony is made by artyfyce, and craft of bees,” and in 1646 Thomas Browne attributes Adam’s existence to “the

Artifice of God.” The life-giving ingenuity ascribed to bees or to God works quite differently from the deadly cunning or dead, impotent idolatry that Protestant antitheatricalists, in particular, might associate with theater.

As the rest of this section will show, such tensions between notions of artifice as either weak or potent—and, if potent, either dangerous or life-giving in that potency—fundamentally shape early modern theatrical statues. Two important tropes emerge. First, as we see in a brief reference in William Shakespeare’s *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and in the statue-disguise plot of William Wager’s *The Trial of Chivalry*, playwrights twist the notion of the statue as dead artistic object to suggest instead the possibility of a living, self-created artistry expressed through the idea of statues as performers themselves. As the idea develops that statues can symbolize performative agency, playwrights also challenge, as in Ben Jonson’s *Sejanus*, the negative connotations of religious statues as seductive Popish trickery. These animated statues onstage thus work to directly counter negative associations of artistry with passivity and deception, while exploiting its positive associations with emotional power. To understand this trope, I draw on earlier Catholic approaches to moving religious statues, for which an awareness of an automaton’s constructed nature could actually increase religious devotion. Whether they are theatrical performances or miraculous automata, statues gain unexpected power even through their artifice.

From plays to poems, much early modern writing uses statue metaphors to imagine women as powerless objects of sculptural beauty. As critics have long argued, statue metaphors tend to imagine the beloved as an artistic creation to explore a male lover’s dominance over the

object of his affections, often referencing the Ovidian story of Pygmalion and Galatea. Such
metaphors, as Lori Newcomb puts it, attempt to “contain women in immobility” in order to
control them. In John Marston's 1598 poem on Pygmalion, for example, the narrator imagines
the “flinty hard” condition of his beloved as an especially “wished state,” since, he brags, “of her
you soone should see / As strange a transformation wrought by mee.” The statue in this
metaphor represents the desirably resistant feminine object which the narrator’s skilled seduction
can soften, as if her cold, statue-like virtue of the early modern heroine, as Abbe Blum has
shown, “can, paradoxically, promote her victimization.” The basic condescension of such an
idea of woman as subjugated statue reveals itself more plainly in another of Marston’s
metaphors. In The Dutch Courtesan (c. 1603-5), Freevill likens sleeping with a prostitute to

397 Leonard Barkan, “Living Sculptures: Ovid, Michelangelo and The Winter’s Tale,”
English Literary History 48.4 (1981): 639-67; Abbe Blum, “‘Strike all that look upon with
mar[b]le’: Monumentalizing Women in Shakespeare’s Plays,” in The Renaissance
Englishwoman in Print, ed. Anne M. Haselkorn and Betty S. Travitsky (Amherst: University of
Massachusetts Press, 1990), 99-118; Valerie Traub, Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of
Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 25-49; Lynn
Enterline, “‘You Speak a Language That I Understand Not’: The Rhetoric of Animation in The
Is Lost Be Not Found’: Monumental Bodies, Spectacular Bodies in The Winter’s Tale,” in Ovid
and the Renaissance Body, ed. Goran V. Stanivukovic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press,
2001), 239-59; Susan Snyder, Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey (Newark: University of

398 Newcomb, “‘If That Which Is Lost Be Not Found’,,” 240.

399 John Marston, “Pigmalion,” The Poems of John Marston, ed. Arnold Davenport
(Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1961), LION, lines 188-91; cited in Barkan, “Living
Scultures,” 660.

400 Blum, “‘Strike all that look upon with mar[b]le’,” 103.

401 Sukanya B. Senapati helpfully cautions that while “Marston does indeed depict
patriarchal misogyny,” he does so “only within the context of showing the absurdities of anxious
male competition”: in “‘Two parts in one’: Marston and masculinity,” in The Drama of John
Marston: Critical Re-Visions, ed. T. F. Wharton (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,
2000), 125.
making use of a “statue, / A body without a soule, a carkass three monethes dead,” thus imagining an idol-like statue as the emblem of corrupt feminine materiality.\textsuperscript{402} Writers continue to use statue metaphors to objectify women throughout the period: even decades later, Henry Glapthorne’s \textit{Argalus and Parthenia} (c. 1632-38) uses statue metaphors to imagine Parthenia as an artistic object. Her beauty destroyed by poison, Parthenia despairingly compares herself to “a piece of Alabaster spoyl'd / By an unskilfull Carver” and “a most imperfect statue.”\textsuperscript{403} Such metaphors suggest that the female body, like art, is worthless if physically damaged. Idolatrous worship of stony women transforms easily into contempt as these statue metaphors convey the female body’s lack of agency as a sexual object.

In contrast, however, Shakespeare’s \textit{The Two Gentlemen of Verona} (c. 1594-95) uses a statue metaphor to suggest the embodied power and value of Julia's performing self, layered through multiple roles and disguises. In a soliloquy about her grief at Proteus's rejection of her love, Julia imagines herself as a statue in order to contrast herself favorably with the painting of Silvia that Proteus seems to prefer. Calling the painting a “senseless form,” as if it lacks both mental subjectivity and bodily substance, Julia declares that, “were there sense in his idolatry, / My substance should be statue in thy stead.”\textsuperscript{404} Julia wishes herself a three-dimensional statue to replace Silvia’s painting, arguing that Proteus ought to transfer his idolatrous affections to an artistic object more substantial than a mere painting. In so doing, she twists the typical metaphorical emphasis on statues' immobility and inaction to assert instead the worth of her own


\textsuperscript{403} Henry Glapthorne, \textit{Argalus and Parthenia} (London: R. Bishop for Daniel Pakeman, 1639), \textit{LION}, 2.2.39-40, 41.

willing, sensing body. If Proteus had sense—if his idolatry were directed toward a more sensible object—he’d prefer the living, embodied Julia to Silvia’s dead painting. In other words, Julia puns on the word “sense” to emphasize the sensory capacity, both in mental competence and physical sensitivity, of her own bodily “substance,” which, she implies, a more sensible and sensitive Proteus would recognize as more valuable than the senseless picture of Silvia. The statue metaphor expresses not objectification but sensory subjectivity and physical presence.

Julia’s tendency toward disguise and performance in the play further reinforces my argument that she imagines a statue as an embodied artistic performance, rather than an immobile artistic object. Just before describing herself as a statue, Julia also calls herself an actorly “shadow,” a representation like the painting she holds: “Come, shadow, come and take this shadow up” (4.4.197). Her term calls attention to her ongoing performance in disguise as a boy, which itself has just involved telling Silvia stories of performing as a woman. Through both her statue metaphor and her disguises, Julia claims creative, self-dramatizing agency as she pursues Proteus's affections. Certainly what one editor calls Julia’s “metadramatic gender self-consciousness” prefigures later disguised heroines in Shakespeare, but more immediately it connects her statue to her acting, similarly embodied rather than flat forms of artistic representation.  

Julia's statue metaphor suggests the expressive power of physical substance in artistic representation, as shown not only in the disguise she puts on to fool Silvia and other onstage observers but also in the performance that Julia's boy actor gives for playgoers. While this play's statue reference alludes to Ovidian tropes of the idolized, artistically objectified

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405 William C. Carroll, ed. The Two Gentlemen of Verona (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2004), note to 4.4.158.
female statue, Shakespeare uses them to ultimately affirm such a statue's performing, embodied agency through the person of Julia.

The link between a statue and embodied acting becomes literal only a few years later in the first early modern play to depict the process of enacting a statue, William Wager’s *The Trial of Chivalry* (c. 1599-1604).406 Here, Ferdinand, thought dead, pretends to be his own memorial statue. The play self-consciously represents this statue as a performance, a representation of a representation that has a more powerful effect on onstage spectators than the original man himself ever did. In depicting such an enacted statue, the play extends Julia’s metaphor from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* to imagine a statue not as an artistic object but as an actor itself, in the process also reversing the usual gender dynamics of monumentalizing metaphor by depicting a woman who longs for artistic representations of men. Because this play is relatively unknown, I offer here an extended analysis of how it uses statues to explore the meaning of artifice itself: by performing as a statue, Ferdinand combines a statue’s alluring artificiality with the agency of a living body to move Katharina’s affections in a unique way.

From the beginning, the plot circulates around the power of art objects to induce love. Having rejected Ferdinand’s suit out of sudden love for his friend Pembrooke, Katharina commissions a painting of Pembrooke for private keeping; her words to the painter emphasize that she “crave[s] thy cunning Arte” for its ability to provide her with a “counterfet” of

406 William Wager, *The History of the Tryall of Cheualry with the Life and Death of Cavaliero Dicke Bowyer* (London: Simon Stafford for Nathaniel Butter, 1605), *EEBO*. Depending on whether this play or *Sejanus* was performed first, this may also be the first play to use an actor to perform a statue at all. I have not found any published discussion of this play’s statue; recent work on the play includes Gillian Woods, “The Contexts of The Trial of Chivalry,” *Notes and Queries* 54.3 (2007): 313-18. Though the classic attribution to Wager is doubtful, I use it here for simplicity’s sake.
Pembrooke “to the life.” So far Katharina describes the picture as a mere substitute for the living man, but when Pembrooke remains loyal to his friend and refuses her suit, she begins to see the picture itself as an object of unfulfilled desire. The picture successfully depicts Pembrooke’s outward self, she complains, but fails to represent “his stubborn unrelenting heart / That lurkes in secret as his master doth, / Disdayning to regard or pity me” (B4v). In a sense, therefore, the picture’s failure to capture this inner self—both artistically and romantically—makes it reflect Pembrooke’s nature all the better for Katharina’s lovesick pleasure.

Katharina’s response to artistic representation only increases as a different painting, this time of Ferdinand, paradoxically affects her more than the man himself ever did. Ferdinand, having overheard Katharina’s love for Pembrooke and assuming the worst of his friend, initiates an onstage duel in which Ferdinand apparently dies. In grief, Pembrooke commissions a painting of his dead friend and takes it to the supposed tomb, where (disguised) he meets Katharina. Now that she thinks Ferdinand dead, Katharina finds herself suddenly overwhelmed with desire for his painting too, begging, “Oh take it not away: since I have lost / The substance, suffer me to keepe the shaddow” (G1r). For Katharina, art objects have a particular attraction, perhaps because their artifice proffers the pleasures of romantic control. Ferdinand’s picture entirely wins her affections. This newfound attachment contrasts ironically with both her previous indifference to the man himself and her inattention now to Pembrooke, present though disguised before her; her affinity for representations overcomes any response to actual living men. Perhaps sensing this affinity, Pembrooke then offers to have a statue made of Ferdinand kneeling on the tomb.

When Ferdinand himself returns to enact this statue, his presence not only increases its representational potency, adding what Katharina might call embodied “substance” to the

painting’s shadowy artifice, but in the process also transforms this inanimate artistic object into a living subject. Once Katharina departs, Ferdinand unexpectedly rejoins his faithful friend, who recommends that “Instead of thy resemblance cut in stone, / Kneele here thy selfe, and heare her pitious mone” (H1v). This statue is no mere representation but the kneeling and listening man himself, his senses and body active even in stillness. As Julia had imagined herself doing in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, Ferdinand performs as a statue to induce love in his spectator.

Pembrooke plans and positions Ferdinand, finishing his stage-managing with the words, “You must imagine now you are transform’d” (H1v). Ferdinand’s performance, Pembrooke reminds us, transforms him from living man into art object, which in turn will seem, to Katharina, an artificial representation of the living man. Ferdinand thus retains agency in his imaginary transformation; he remains a natural body merely representing artificiality. As Gross argues, a statue’s impact derives from its the inherent “tension, a frustrating but vivifying gap, between […] the human body, with its actual or potential motion, and the necessary immobility of the material artifact that represents it.”

In pretending to be a statue, Ferdinand turns this tension between agency and objectification inside out by becoming a living, active, self-transforming and self-imagining performer—that is, a shadow with substance.

As we might expect, the statue’s double artifice—both sculpture and performance—has a particularly powerful effect on Katharina. When she enters, she comments on how like the statue is to Ferdinand and uses the same Ovidian language we have seen before to wish that it would come alive like the “Image of Pigmalion,” as if Ferdinand has become the artistic creation she

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408 Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, 126; Gross draws this idea from Roman Jakobson’s “The Statue in Puškin’s Poetic Mythology,” 1937.
has desired, her own Galatea.\footnote{Using the word “feign” to mean “to relate or represent in fiction,” Katharina even names Ovid’s story as yet another representation, which further reflects the foolishness of her particular liking for representations of Ferdinand: “But that was fayned, as my desire is fond” (H2r). See meaning 3a for “feign, v.” in the OED.} Attempting to face reality, however, Katharina promises instead to join her beloved in death: “to accompany thy shaddow here, / Ile turn my body to a shaddow too” (H2r). Katharina’s language, playing here on two meanings of ‘shadow’ to link the artificial representation she sees with the ghost she wishes to become, creates deeper dramatic irony through a third meaning. Even as she imagines herself and Ferdinand as two kinds of dead shadows, statues and ghosts, playgoers also recognize Ferdinand’s living and wooing presence as itself an actorly ‘shadow,’ inducing mirroring affections in Katharina’s body. Ferdinand's performance and Pembrooke's stage managing thus help Katharina shift her unruly affections from Ferdinand's shadowy picture to the living “shadow” that is the acting Ferdinand himself. The moral is not precisely, as we might expect, that Katharina learns to prefer a living lover to the false shadows of representation; rather, to win her affection Ferdinand himself becomes, through performance, the artistic object that she craves. The twists of this unlikely plot thus expand the idea of artifice to encompass both the statue’s shadowy representation and Ferdinand’s living performance.

These two examples—the statue plot of The Trial of Chivalry and Julia’s statue metaphor in The Two Gentlemen of Verona—thus counter the dominant early modern trope that statues are objects of others' creative control, exploring instead how statues can become artistic agents themselves through their very artificiality. Statues model the performative paradoxes of acting as living artifice. The same attributes of statues—long lasting, artistically created, representational, available for spectatorship—that writers had often used to critique or mock women as corruptible
sexual objects instead come to suggest the strengths of performance, for both men and women. The embodied materiality of these statues generates not objectification but unexpected agency as Julia and Ferdinand’s living ‘substance’ lends their ‘shadowy’ artistic visions lasting power. These portrayals of statues as living artifice demonstrate how the combination of artificial representation and living agency in theater can paradoxically affect spectators more powerfully than either nature or artifice alone.

As these living statues embody the unexpected power of theater’s living artifice, the question remains: is this power deceptive or beneficial? Even if playwrights can prove that the artifice of both statues and theater encourages agency rather than objectification, might not that very strength be dangerous? This question had long troubled religious debates over statues in ways that have strong implications for theater as well. Through the 16th century, iconoclastic Protestant reformers had come to see statues as the epitome of deceptive materiality and death, seducing gullible worshippers into idolatry. By 1533, reformers were discarding figures of saints as dead “stocks and stones;” people would mockingly “prick them with their bodkins to see whether they will bleed or no.” Statues became symbols of artistic deception in particular as reformers recognized that “the dual perspective required of the theatrical spectator was notably akin to that of the Catholic worshiper before the statue.” In 1629 John Rainolds explicitly links the dangerous effects of statues and of theater by describing how just as “men

\[\text{410 Zimmerman, } \textit{The Early Modern Corpse}, 8.}\]


\[\text{412 Zimmerman, } \text{“Animating Matter,” 221.}\]
may be ravished with loue of stones, of dead stuffe, framed by cunning grauers to beautifull womens likenes,” so also “the cladding of youthes in such attire is an occasion of drawing and provoking corruptlie minded men to most heinous wickedness.” In other words, ornamented boy actors, like statues, have an uncanny ability to seduce spectators through the enchantments of their false and artificial appearance. To these antitheatricalists, theater's negotiation between representation and reality suggests the deadly trickery of idolatrous statues, whether moving or no.

Yet such Protestant condemnations of religious statues betray a misunderstanding of medieval Christian practice, which had not simply ignored the obvious materiality of religious figures but rather valued this awareness of artificiality as part of a process of spiritual understanding. Mechanically moving statues, or automata, had appeared in medieval pageants and plays for centuries. Theatrical wonders—mirabilia—such as a mechanical golden angel in the Saint Thomas pageant at Canterbury, a figure of the Holy Ghost descending on cords from the roof of a cathedral, a mechanical serpent, mechanical devils, or jaws of hell opening and closing proliferated. Yet stories about these religious automata suggest that spectators did not perceive their movement as miraculous or find their mechanistic nature a surprise. With artisans in local guilds creating and performing these mirabilia, their theatrical workings would not have been a secret. Rather, as transparently mechanical aids to devotion, these automata model a beneficent kind of artifice that stimulates spectators’ own belief. Mirabilia represented miracles but did not pretend to be them; medieval Catholics may have even venerated these objects partly

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413 Rainolds, *The overthrow of stage-plays*, F1v.
for the way their ingenuity honored God. By treating their own artifice not as an encumbrance or dangerous deception but rather an aid to life-giving faith, medieval religious automata, I suggest, offer an intriguing model for the theatrical spectatorship that the enacted statues of later plays demand.

One automaton in particular, a praying miniature monk currently in the Smithsonian, powerfully represents spiritual meaning through its mechanistic nature. Made in the 16th century by Juanelo Turriano, the monk was commissioned at the request of King Philip II of Spain in thanks to God for his son’s miraculous healing. The monk walks around in a square, beating its breast and kissing a cross, as its lips move in prayer. The monk’s jerky mechanical movements hardly suggest a divine miracle. Yet such an obviously artificial praying machine might have seemed, in its mechanical movements, to replicate what Keith Thomas calls the “mechanical means” of Catholic salvation, since “the more numerous the prayers the more likely their success.” While reformers might have found such rote prayers hollow, therefore, Elizabeth King argues that the monk’s mechanical movements could have powerful spiritual meaning for a believer desiring to imitate that never-ceasing style of prayer. The little monk functions as no magic trick but as a manifestation of human gratitude to God, a scientific miracle offered in return for a medical miracle. This Catholic automaton enables spiritual devotion

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417 King, “Perpetual Devotion,” 278.
within an awareness of its constructed nature. The transparent theatricality of the moving statue does not seek to deceive the spectator but rather directs attention to the greater miracles of God. 

In the case of an English automaton, the Rood of Grace, such a dual understanding did not prevent the attacks of Anglican iconoclasts. The Rood of Grace was a crucifix figure of Jesus with various mechanical movements inside that enabled its eyes and mouth to move and even, according to wilder stories, allowed it to nod its head, shed tears, and walk around.418 In 1538 John Hilsey, Bishop of Rochester, destroyed the Rood, grouping it with other idolatrous Catholic statues and declaring it a deliberate fraud. Contemporary Protestant sermons attacking the Rood presented a narrative of deceitful Catholic authorities and gullible pilgrims. One writer, John Hoker, even used an elaborate metaphor of the Rood as an actor performing for a theatrical audience to convey its fraudulent nature.419 However, Leanne Groeneveld argues that medieval veneration of the Rood of Grace was not due to any suggestion of magic but rather was based both on the figure’s value as a devotional aid and on a miraculous origin story in which the Rood had arrived at Boxley Abbey on the back of a stray horse.420 In fact, according to the disdainful William Lambarde in 1570, Boxley’s monks themselves even advertised the Rood’s status as a mechanical marvel, since the story of the Rood’s craftsman and his wayward horse was “by them selves published in printe… for their estimation and credite.”421 As with theatrical mirabilia, it seems that pilgrims' knowledge of the image’s mechanism did not detract from its spiritual

419 Ibid., 19.
420 Ibid., 41-43.
meaning or diminish their devotion.\textsuperscript{422} The Rood’s artifice, for these early pilgrims, did not conflict with its religious significance.

When Protestant iconoclasts associated the Rood of Grace with Catholic deception in order to serve their religious and political agenda, they “enforced clearer categories of function and purpose for images, categories taken for granted still today” when modern critics assume such religious objects deceived their spectators.\textsuperscript{423} Perhaps iconoclasts’ negative reactions to automata arose from feeling fooled because they “believed all too deeply.”\textsuperscript{424} If so, when misinterpreting these automata as successful deceptions rather than pleasurably transparent marvels, we fall into the same confusion as these early modern iconoclasts. Religious automata call attention to their own artifice and theatricality, even as they paradoxically suggest “the materialization of the immaterial, the arrival of divinity into corporeality.”\textsuperscript{425} Though these seemingly alive medieval automata are actually dead machines, whereas the performing statues of early modern plays are actually living actors, both demand that their spectators remain aware of the tension artifice creates between embodied reality and appearance for the full effect. The more a spectator understands that the automaton is emphatically not alive, the more wondrous its movement becomes in reminding the spectator of the distance and yet the nearness of the numinal world of spiritual devotion. Such a medieval approach to the veneration of statues surprisingly also fits, as I will explore later, with later Reformed theologies of the Eucharist, in

\textsuperscript{422} Groeneveld, “A Theatrical Miracle,” 40.
\textsuperscript{423} Ibid., 14.
\textsuperscript{424} Steven Ozment, \textit{The Reformation in the Cities} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), 44.
\textsuperscript{425} Wendy Beth Hyman, \textit{The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature} (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2011), 10.
which “spiritual truth […] is at the same time represented and displayed through the symbols themselves.”

In each case, the material sign and the spiritual signified can coexist.

The idea of an artificial statue’s spiritual potency works particularly in Ben Jonson’s

*Sejanus* (1603). *Sejanus* depicts an actual supernatural miracle rather than an automaton, but playgoers experience Fortuna’s statue through the same tension between miracle and artifice that medieval automata exploit. When the statue of Fortuna miraculously “averts her face” from an offering before her, in anger the blasphemous protagonist, Sejanus, condemns the religious statue as a “juggling mystery,” implying that its movement is merely a trick (5:186, 193). Against this iconoclastic accusation, however, the play affirms that the statue is wholly supernatural and divinely ordained. Shortly after Sejanus’s attack on this moving statue, Sejanus falls dramatically from power. The statue’s movement ostensibly demonstrates the gods’ power against Sejanus’s blasphemous disdain for what he calls the “scrupulous fant’sies” of religion (5:89). For playgoers, however, just as the statue's movement causes Sejanus to condemn the statue as a “juggling mystery”—that is, a magic trick—that movement also highlights the play itself as a theatrical ‘fantasy’ and the statue as an actor’s performance—like Ferdinand’s in *The Trial of Chivalry*—for our entertainment (5:193). Sejanus's skepticism, mistaken within the play-world, is entirely correct in a playgoer's perception, since in one sense the statue is indeed a theatrical trick by an actor, not a miracle at all. Yet theatrical performers, like the gods Sejanus rejects are jealous, desiring playgoers’ attention, belief, and praise to make their effects real. Our awareness of the statue’s theatrical mechanism, like medieval Catholics’ awareness of an automaton’s


mechanical nature, draws out our imaginative faith all the more. Even as Sejanus condemns the “fine arts” and “artificial tears” of flattery and rhetoric, therefore, the play also suggests that the transparent theatrical artifice of embodied performance is itself a kind of divine miracle.

Ultimately, therefore, the theatrical dynamics of Jonson’s miraculous statue draw on the two models of living artifice explored in this section. While enacted statues use living bodies to perform their artificial representations, automata redeem artifice in a different way by transparently turning it to a spiritual purpose. By blurring the boundaries between artificiality and natural life, both types of statues ultimately highlight theater’s own ability to influence spectators, evoking faith in the living fiction while acknowledging its artifice. Together, the paradoxical agency of performing statues and the spiritual power of automata will unleash more complex sympathies—affecting spectators’ bodies even more directly than before—through the more complex enacted statues to come in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

**“Standing like stone with thee”: Spectatorship as bodily mirroring in *The Winter’s Tale***

William Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (1611) depicts its enacted statue as both performance and miracle. More deliberately and self-consciously than any previous statue play, *The Winter’s Tale* explores the meaning of embodied theatrical artifice in order to represent how awareness of that artifice can paradoxically aid belief. Though much has been written about art and metatheatricality in *The Winter's Tale*, I focus here on the particular way in which the theatrical embodiment of Hermione’s statue shapes the experience of onstage spectators and, by

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extension, playgoers as well. Hermione’s reanimation from a wondrously lifelike statue works on two levels. Even as onstage spectators remark on the statue's artistic lifelikeness, playgoers recognize the living presence of the actor. More importantly, the statue scene suggests (when placed in the context of the play as a whole) that the awakening of the living body behind the seemingly artificial statue creates a similar emotional and spiritual awakening for its spectators. By using the living body of the actor to shape playgoers' experience of the statue, The Winter’s Tale suggests that even a skeptical awareness of theatrical artifice paradoxically increases belief and wonder.

I am by no means the first to argue that this scene demonstrates the value of playgoers’ awareness of artificiality. Judd Hubert, for example, suggests that the way Paulina prevents Leontes from kissing Hermione’s statue symbolizes how a certain detachment and “gap between spectator and spectacle” is paradoxically necessary in order to maintain the illusion. Richard McCoy has argued that in this play Shakespeare offers “manifest fictions” that demand playgoers’ active engagement to become real. My reading of the play adds to such arguments by holding that such paradoxes and impossibilities create a mirroring relationship between the body of the statue, the bodies of its observers within the play, and the bodies of playgoers. Ultimately, the statue highlights its own bodily liminality as neither wholly alive nor wholly artificial in order to help playgoers participate more fully in the theatrical experience ourselves.

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430 Hubert, Metatheater, 130.

431 McCoy, Faith in Shakespeare, 143.
The statue scene’s theatrical function is particularly significant because this scene does not appear in the non-theatrical source for the play, making Hermione’s revival a complete surprise. Robert Greene’s 1588 novel *Pandosto* leaves the Hermione figure, Bellaria, dead, ending instead with the King’s suicide after his reunion with his daughter. 432 The statue scene in the theatrical version of the story thus represents a major innovation by the King's Men. 433 Further, though spectators today may often know the ending in advance, clear references within the play itself also suggest that the scene expects at least its original audience of playgoers to believe that Hermione is truly dead. Not only does no previous version of this story resurrect the Queen after her death, but earlier in this play Leontes has reportedly viewed the bodies of his dead wife and son (the latter of whom stays dead), and Antigonus has also dreamed vividly of Hermione’s ghost (3.2.229-30, 3.3.12-41). Thus, unlike other Shakespearean plays such as *Pericles*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Much Ado About Nothing*, in which “the audience is well-prepared to enjoy the discovery at the end” of the character restored to life, *The Winter’s Tale* presents Hermione as dead. 434 Unlike Ferdinand’s ‘statue’ in *The Trial of Chivalry*, that is, which playgoers recognize from the beginning as merely a pretense performed by Ferdinand himself, Hermione’s statue seems to truly be a statue.

Within this context, the repeated descriptions of the statue as startlingly lifelike create a perceptual jolt for playgoers, drawing attention to the natural, living body of the actor performing


433 I mention the entire company, rather than merely the playwright, because of the interesting fact that the King’s Men introduced at least three of the statue plays I discuss in this chapter: *Sejanus*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Duchess of Malfi*.

it even as these descriptions affirm the statue’s constructed, inanimate nature. As Paulina first reveals the statue, she compares its excellence to the quality of Hermione’s character when alive:

As she lived peerless,
So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
Excels whatever yet you looked upon
Or hand of man hath done. (5.3.14-17)

The excellence of the statue’s artistry as a “likeness,” similar to but not the same as the living woman, logically depends on its status as a “dead” object. Yet simultaneously, Paulina’s declaration that the statue “excels” whatever the “hand of man hath done” also implies the statue is so well made that it seems natural, a divine rather than human creation to match Hermione’s own status as a divinely animated natural body. Such emphasis on the conflict between representational quality and lifelike appearance draws attention in turn to the one body that is both natural and artistically performing: the actor playing Hermione’s statue. A similar paradox appears in Paulina’s statement they are about to see “the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death” (5.3.19-20). Her apparent meaning is that the statue represents life as well as sleep does death, suggesting that the statue is not alive just as sleep is not death. However, the word “lively” also implies that, just as sleep is a living representation of death, the statue too is a living (or ‘lively’) representation, liminally positioned between death and life. Paradoxical, tantalizing references to the statue’s lifelike appearance increasingly draw playgoers’ attention to the living presence of the actor performing the statue in the scene.

For playgoers who believe Hermione is truly dead, these references must function initially as authorial apologies for potential defects in the theatrical fiction of a statue, deliberately drawing attention to the actor to remind us that theater depends fundamentally on our imagination, rather than a natural, physical reality. Most notably, Paulina warns spectators that if they watch too long, “your fancy / May think anon it moves” (5.3.60-61). This comment
acknowledges that an actor cannot perfectly maintain the stillness of a statue, and thus communicates to playgoers that the playwright is aware of this fact and wishes us to ignore any movement. In contemporary television, this narrative technique is called “lampshade hanging,” defined by TVTropes.org as “dealing with any element of the story that threatens the audience's Willing Suspension of Disbelief—whether a very implausible plot development, or a particularly blatant use of a trope—by calling attention to it... and then moving on.” Such a counter-intuitive move implies that the author is aware of the difficulty of the illusion and appeals to playgoers to accept the illusion anyway—a technique that, in a broader sense, all liminal bodies use to encourage playgoers to accept their theatrical fictions. By repeatedly referencing the statue’s lifelike appearance, Shakespeare asks playgoers to first experience and then ignore—even deliberately repress—our awareness of the actor’s presence.

Yet by asking playgoers to deny our naïve perception of the actor’s body over and over again, the play heightens the surprise of the conclusive moment when it suddenly affirms those perceptions of a living body as real. The play uses playgoers’ own knowledge of and acquiescence to dramatic convention against us. We have had to ignore the obvious presence of a living person—even more noticeable here than with the statue of Fortuna in Sejanus, which does not recall a living character previously seen on stage—and submit instead to the theatrical convention that the same boy actor who once played a living woman is now her artificial statue. The more playgoers have struggled to suppress this awareness, therefore, the more surprising and cathartic is the eventual reversal. When Hermione revives, the living body of the actor—now suddenly drawn back to our attention—vindicates our original, suppressed awareness of the actor’s living body. Paradoxically, the statue’s transformation into the living Hermione thus

highlights the artifice of the actor’s performance and the playgoer’s participatory role in making it real. When the statue begins to move, as Marguerite Tassi argues, “the joke is on the sophisticateds in the audience” who attempt to “remain aloof in face of such trickery” as using a living actor to enact a statue.  

“O, she’s warm!” Leontes declares, wondering whether this transformation is “magic” or “art” (5.3.109-11). In fact, the agents of this transformation have been playgoers’ own spectatorial perceptions. The more that we playgoers are willing to deny our own belief in the actor’s life to see the statue as only a statue, the more we participate in the wonder of the eventual theatrical miracle by which the statue affirms our original instincts by becoming human.

This point stands, finally, even if playgoers recognize (as most do today) that Hermione is alive. The play does not entirely conceal the possibility that, within the play-world, Hermione is pretending to be the statue. In particular, Leontes’ comment on the statue’s wrinkles might stand out to very attentive playgoers as something more than a simple metatheatrical acknowledgment of the actor’s body, since Hermione herself must be wrinkled (5.3.28-29). Ultimately, however, I agree with critics, most recently Justin Kolb, who have argued that the statue alludes to ideas of both performance and miracle to become “a thing animated by the recognition of the audience.”

The more lifelike the statue looks, the more it reveals itself as an

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436 Tassi, *The Scandal of Images*, 211.


438 Justin Kolb, “‘To me comes a creature’: Recognition, Agency, and the Properties of Character in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale,*” in Hyman, *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, 60. See also Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, 202. Andrew Gurr has noted the statue’s similarity to another impossible effect, the bear: just as the statue cannot really come to life, the bear cannot really scare (or eat) the actor playing Antigonus. Whether a trained bear or an actor in a bear skin, the bear too must be a liminal body, caught between fictional and theatrical appearances: “The Bear, the Statue, and Hysteria,” 424.
artificial theatrical performance by an actor, if not also by Hermione. And in turn, the more the statue scene highlights its own theatricality, even by noting Hermione’s wrinkles painted onto the boy actor, the more it draws attention back to the performing work of the actor’s natural, living body. As Paulina says after Hermione’s revival, if this story were merely narrated it “should be hooted at / Like an old tale, but it appears she lives” (5.3.116-17). The living body of Hermione’s actor and its enacted appearance onstage profoundly shape our perceptions as the play invites playgoers to awaken to the theatrical reality and our own relationship to it.

The statue’s metatheatrical significance shapes more than just playgoer perceptions; it also shapes playgoer bodies, specifically through the mediating bodies of the onstage characters who respond to Hermione’s statue. The play develops this bodily mirroring through two metatheatrical motifs that appear before the statue scene. First, performance has bodily effects on its spectators, as we see particularly when Perdita imagines theatrical play as reanimating Florizel. When Perdita offers to strew him with flowers, Florizel replies sarcastically, “What, like a corse?” (4.4.129). But she reverses his simile with playful energy, answering, “No, like a bank for love to lie and play on; / Not like a corse; or if, not to be buried, / But quick and in mine arms” (4.4.130-32). Perdita’s metaphor brings a dead body to life, gesturing subtly toward Hermione’s coming reanimation. More importantly, this playful and flirtatious transformation of corpse to lover comes through the imaginative fun Perdita associates with theatrical “Whitsun pastorals” (4.4.134). A change of costume—“this robe of mine”—even changes Perdita's mood as she performs a new role that brings life and pleasure to her and those around her (4.4.134). The obvious benefits of Perdita's theatrical play ironically counter the ostensible dislike of artifice she maintains in her conversation with Polixenes on art and nature in the same scene.

McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 129.
Perdita’s playing anticipates the statue’s reanimation by creating not falseness and detachment but new bodily life and emotional intimacy. Performance, that is, shapes the bodies and emotions of its spectators.

The second metatheatrical motif prefiguring the statue scene emphasizes how responses to art can themselves have artistic effects. Just before Hermione’s statue appears on stage, a series of reports from Paulina’s steward describe the layered effects of various forms of art—stories, statues, and performance—as if to foreshadow and heighten playgoer anticipation for the metatheatrical impact of the statue itself on its onstage observers. First, however, these reports self-consciously highlight their own potential fictionality. A courtier introduces the reunion of Perdita and Leontes as a “tale” of which “the verity […] is in strong suspicion,” as if the unreliable source makes the whole report potentially a fiction (5.2.28-29). The question of stories’ “verity,” which may remind us of Leontes’ own self-conceived suspicion of Hermione’s truthfulness, heightens playgoers’ awareness of the improbable, constructed nature of the play as well, in which stories proliferate dangerously and shape their audiences. Further, the steward himself repeatedly disclaims his ability to relate the family’s reunion, “a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of,” even as he enthusiastically goes on to try to describe it anyway (5.2.42-43). Such an unutterable narrative, being uttered, marks itself as a representation distinct from reality, particularly as the courtiers describe Perdita’s reunion with her father: “I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it and undoes description to do it” (5.2.56-58). Described in terms of its originality, this event is judged almost like a play itself, with no source or precedent to explain it and no review or report able to match it. The steward even self-deprecatingly puns on an audience’s potential boredom with an unbelievable play, describing his own story as “like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though
credit be asleep and not an ear open” (5.2.61-63). No one believes the story and no one is listening, but the players will “rehearse” their parts anyway. Finally, the steward describes Perdita’s behavior as if it was a deliberate performance for theatrical effect, noting particularly “one of the prettiest touches of all” that as it “angled for mine eyes, caught the water though not the fish” (5.2.82-84). As in the style of a playgoer’s own review of his evening’s entertainment, the steward evaluates the aesthetic artistry of Perdita’s response to Leontes’ narrative about the queen’s death, and comments (complete with a judicious pun for his own audience’s amusement) on his own tearful response to her emotional display.

The scene focuses further on the relation between artistry and its observers by revealing Paulina’s response to Perdita’s story as a theatrical performance that extends actors’ emotion to reproduce itself out through audiences’ own mirroring performances. When the steward describes how Paulina embraces “the Princess,” another courtier declares, “the dignity of this act was worth the audience of kings and princes, for by such was it acted” (5.2.76, 79-81). As Paulina and Perdita together “act,” the ambiguous referent of “by such” blurs the lines between audience and actor by reminding us that not only are these emotions performed near (“by”) this royal audience (whose listening thus confers dignity upon the performers), but princess Perdita herself, one of “the audience of kings and princes,” is also one of the actors.

Audience and actor further blend in the steward’s description of the general response to Perdita’s moving displays of emotion at yet another narrative, “the relation of the Queen’s death” by Leontes (5.2.84-85). According to the steward’s report, Perdita’s own “attentiveness” to Leontes’ “confess’d and lamented” narrative “wound[s]” her so that she begins to “bleed tears,” presumably mirroring Leontes’ own tearful storytelling (5.2.86-89). What the steward perceives as Perdita’s theatrical performance is itself an audience’s response to Leontes’ own emotional
narrative. In turn, Perdita’s performance has its own effect, awakening (in the steward’s
description) the audience of courtiers out of their statue-like calmness. With unconscious
foreshadowing, the steward even uses the metaphor of a statue coming to life, declaring, “I am
sure my heart wept blood. Who was most marble, there chang’d color” (5.2.89-90). Stoniness
here figuratively suggests the listeners’ lack of emotion before they respond to Perdita’s
performance, as if preparing playgoers as well to respond emotionally to the actual statue
performance soon to come; tears and blood, by contrast, indicate the fluid softness of a natural,
living body as it responds humorally to its environment.

Finally, the description of the queen’s statue itself, which Perdita so desires to see,
completes the layering effect. The statue is such a perfect imitation of Nature that the sculptor
might even “beguile Nature of her custom” if he could only manage to “put breath into his
work”—the very breath for which playgoers may be watching in the statue, as argued above
(5.2.98-99). Further, the steward describes the statue’s imitative quality with the unexpected
word, “performed” (5.2.96). The statue performs Nature; in response, Leontes and Perdita
perform their grief; in response, courtiers perform the whole improbable tale for each other and
ultimately for playgoers. The scene juxtaposes these layers of performance to create a single
analogy of art’s complex emotional power, imagining the various mirroring audiences of the
statue transformed from stone into emotional life through their own performance of what they
see and hear. Most importantly, by narrating this bodily mirroring effect, 5.2 prepares us for the
actual enactment of this mirroring—and the statue’s performance by an actual living body—in
the scene to follow.

The statue scene develops these two metatheatrical motifs—the bodily effects of
performance and the layering together of performer and audience—by enacting a mirroring
relationship between the body of the statue, the bodies of its observers within the play, and the bodies of playgoers. But playgoers are affected not only by what Penelope Woods calls the “intransigence of particular theatrical objects to be collapsed into that which they represent.” Rather, as I will show, the statue’s liminal body physically shapes its onstage observers in ways that potentially extend to playgoers as well. One director has even suggested that the scene explicitly addresses playgoers and onstage spectators together in the moment before the statue moves. In a 2002 production on a reproduction of the Blackfriars stage, Ralph Alan Cohen found that the statue was not visible from all sections of the playhouse, and “audience members too far upstage to have a view into the discovery space so wanted to see the statue Paulina revealed that they stood and moved to a better vantage spot.” In fact, the staging orchestrated audience members’ movement so well that Paulina’s command that “all stand still” seemed directed straight at them (5.3.95). Scott Maisano describes this moment of “frozen time” as “Time’s final gift to the audience: a chance to live, to feel, to experience something approaching eternity in an instant” as statue, onstage spectators, and playgoers all stand still together. Such descriptions suggest what textual arguments will support: the scene works metatheatrically, asking playgoers to see the scene as a model for their own embodied theatrical experience.

Supported by the play’s preparatory explorations of bodily mirroring, the statue produces bodily effects in its onstage spectators that reflect its own stony substance. From the beginning the scene links onstage spectators’ silence to the statue’s own silence. As the statue appears, Paulina comments, “I like your silence; it the more shows off / Your wonder” (5.3.21-22). The

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other characters’ amazed silence, mirroring the statue’s own stillness, initiates a pattern in this scene by which onstage spectators consciously or unconsciously emulate, both physically and emotionally, what they see. (Presumably this silence applies to playgoers as well, though the mirroring I describe will extend much deeper than this.) Leontes furthers this pattern when he describes his own silence using a standard synecdoche for statues, ‘stone’: “Does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?” (5.3.36-37). Though he expresses guilt for his lack of words or emotion, the wordplay implies that the statue causes his silence. Lynn Enterline condemns the appropriative way that Leontes here “reads Hermione as a version of himself,” seeing even her stoniness as his own.443 However, the larger parallel this comment establishes between the effects of statues and those of theatrical spectacle is not gendered. Leontes attributes Perdita’s stillness as well to a mirroring effect from the statue, which has “From thy admiring daughter took the spirits, / Standing like stone with thee” (5.3.40-42). In other words, both Leontes and Perdita have become statues in response to the spectacle before them, Leontes through his shameful shock and Perdita through the absence of her “spirits.” Hermione’s statue turns its observers into statues themselves.

The bodily mirroring between statue and onstage spectators goes beyond mere petrification to represent spectators as embodying the same artistic and emotional life that defines the statue itself. Seeing the statue’s effect on Leontes, Paulina mock-humbly explains that “If I had thought the sight of my poor image / Would thus have wrought you—for the stone is mine—/ I’d not have show’d it” (5.3.57-59). In her sly brag about this statue of “mine,” Paulina disparages the statue’s artistry in order to draw further attention to its remarkable power (despite its supposed “poor” quality) over the spectators. Specifically, a double meaning for the

\[\text{\textsuperscript{443}}\text{Enterline, ‘‘You Speak a Language That I Understand Not’,” 42.}\]
verb “wrought” means that Paulina both notes the powerful emotional awakening that the statue produces as it ‘works up’ its spectators and, using an older, more basic definition of the word, implies that the statue shapes its spectators into art objects themselves.\textsuperscript{444} Even when the statue later begins to move on Paulina’s command that it “Strike all that look upon with marvel,” a pun suggests the same subtle double meaning, as the title of an article by Abbe Blum implies; when the statue moves, playgoers no longer remain “mar[b]le” like the statue itself, rapt in stillness, but rather “marvel” with emotion and life (5.3.100).\textsuperscript{445} Imitating the statue’s nature throughout the scene, spectators become both art objects and responsive living bodies.

Leontes models this more complex response when he mirrors the statue’s life as well as its stoniness. When Paulina warns that “your fancy / May think anon it moves,” he responds with vehemence, “Would I were dead, but that methinks already——” only to interrupt himself with further commentary on the statue’s lifelike appearance (5.3.60-62). The editorial history of this line illuminates its complexity. Simplistically continuing the motif of Leontes’ stoniness already established in lines 21-41, the nineteenth-century forger John Payne Collier made a spurious ‘Shakespearean’ emendment, inserting the line “I am but dead, stone looking upon stone.”\textsuperscript{446} Though his line accurately emphasizes the mirroring quality of the scene, it mistakes its trajectory, which increasingly draws attention to the living actor. In contrast, Collier’s

\textsuperscript{444} The present tense of “wrought” is “work.” Sense 26 of the OED definition for “work” is “to create (a work of art).” Sense 39b is “to act on the feelings of; to agitate, excite” and sense 41a is “to cause pain to (a person),” in “work, v.,” OED Online, September 2014, Web.

\textsuperscript{445} Blum, “‘Strike all that look upon with mar[b]le.’”

contemporary, Howard Staunton, identifies a more complex mirroring that incorporates the statue’s lifelikeness, critiquing the improbability of

Leontes whimpering of himself as ‘dead,’ just when the thick pulsation of his heart could have been heard! and speaking of the statue as a ‘stone’ at the very moment when, to his imagination, it was flesh and blood! Was it thus Shakespeare wrought? … The king's real meaning, in reference to Paulina's remark, that he will think anon it moves, is, ‘May I die, if I do not think it moves already’.447

Staunton argues correctly that Leontes, whose first reaction to the statue was to describe himself as being made stone by it, now becomes more and more alive and animated. Leontes goes so far as to stake that life on the statue’s, linking them together as living creatures of flesh and blood. As Leontes’ sense of the statue’s life and movement grows, so too, in Staunton’s reading, does both Leontes’ own physical presence and, in turn, playgoers’ sense of what the play itself accomplishes. “Thus Shakespeare wrought” precisely through spectators’ embodied response, according to Staunton’s repetition of Paulina. The emotional power of the statue’s physical life has potentially “wrought” playgoers ourselves through Leontes’ mediating experience. Thus the mirroring effects of the statue do not stop at a simple transformation of Leontes and other onstage spectators into stone. Leontes’ belief in the statue’s life fills his own body with hope and energy.

These complex connections between the body of the statue, both stony and alive, and the body of its spectators, Leontes in particular, model how theater itself affects playgoers physically. Paulina’s commands and descriptions of onstage spectators’ experience clearly illustrate and encourage the experience of playgoers as well, especially as Leontes’ grief metatheatrically affects the bodies of other characters in turn. When Polixenes asks to be allowed

to “piece up in himself” any grief that Leontes is willing to give over to him, he imagines that he can assuage that grief by holding it together in his own body (5.3.56). This layered image of bodily sympathy—Polixenes participating in the emotional and physical experience of Leontes’ spectatorship—aids the metatheatricality of this scene. In dramatizing spectatorship itself as a process of transmitting emotion, the play suggests that emotional sympathy involves reciprocal bodily mirroring, which extends outward as observers become the observed in turn.

Into this exploration of spectators’ belief in artistic fictions, whether statue, disguise, or play, the statue scene invokes ideas of religious belief. Paulina’s demand that “you do awake your faith” famously appeals to playgoers’ own belief in order to create the miracle onstage (5.3.95). Many have explored the tension between Catholic and Protestant meanings in the scene, with little consensus. It seems clear that Shakespeare in fact draws together many different types of religious experience in the statue scene not for a directly religious purpose so much as to aid his metatheatrical defense of theatrical faith. The statue’s transformation works on two levels, since “the faith to be awakened is partly the faith that the cheap stage trick was performed in good faith” rather than as a deception. In their complexity, the scene’s religious allusions highlight the way that theater, like religion, can engage the dangers of doubt in order to increase the pleasures of communal faith.

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Throughout the scene, therefore, Shakespeare acknowledges that, as antitheatricalists feared, theatrical faith is not necessarily safe. Belief in the statue’s eventual transformation throughout the scene seems a form of insanity that involves seeing things that are not really there. Paulina repeatedly warns that she must hide the statue before the assistance of something that Leontes calls “madness,” “magic,” and “art,” and Paulina calls “fancy,” “wicked powers,” and of course “faith,” causes the onlookers to be “so far transported,” “stirred,” or “afflict[ed]” as to think the statue lives (5.3.39-95). These descriptions suggest on one level that belief is a form of disease, madness, or witchcraft with the power to physically move or “transport” those observing the artistic representation. Ultimately, however this dangerous faith in the unreal is also apparent in the love and hope fundamental to Hermione’s decision to preserve herself, and in Leontes’ decision to apologize. By acknowledging the dangers of onstage spectators’ response to the statue as a miracle, the scene channels the power of that faith-filled response into playgoers’ response to the statue as a theatrical performance.

More particularly, the scene’s attention to the actor’s presence itself has religious undertones. As we saw in stories of medieval response to moving statues, the emotional and spiritual power of an automaton arises from the exact contrast between appearance and reality that iconoclasts bemoan. In the same way, the statue’s failure to look exactly like a statue actually helps playgoers accept the transformation, since as McCoy points out, as a play “it never pretends to be an actual miracle.”\footnote{McCoy, \textit{Faith in Shakespeare}, 143.} Similarly, Susannah Brietz Monta has argued that Shakespeare’s self-conscious references to the presence of the actor behind the theatrical representation mirror theological methods of coping with religious doubt, since early modern “pastoral theology often consoles spiritually uneasy readers by acknowledging that in this world
faith is always mixed with doubt.”\textsuperscript{452} In other words, she argues, the scene must “expose its theatrical trickery… in order to awaken a nuanced, mixed faith in its fiction.”\textsuperscript{453} Such nuanced faith is necessary for “our imaginative participation and willing suspension of disbelief in an illusion.”\textsuperscript{454} The statue scene defends theater by using its metatheatrical emphasis on the potential falsity of theatrical belief to affirm playgoers’ engagement as a deliberate and self-aware faith, rather than an irresistible seduction.

As it builds on these broad religious attitudes of acknowledging artificiality and accepting doubt, the statue scene alludes to the Eucharist in particular. As Leontes touches Hermione’s hand for the first time, he exclaims, “O, she’s warm! If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (5.3.109-11). As the inert statue becomes flesh and blood, Leontes thinks the warmth of Hermione’s hand can only indicate “magic” at work; he hopes, therefore, that this “magic” is as orthodox as eating. “Eating” at first seems a very strange exemplar against which to judge the legality of magic, but the word “lawful” has a specific religious meaning. Earlier, “unlawful” indicates unorthodox magic, as when Paulina commands that “those that think it is unlawful business / I am about, let them depart,” a command that also implicates any who stay, including playgoers, in approving the orthodoxy of what follows (5.3.96-97). “Lawful” thus indicates not legal validity but religious orthodoxy, as when Paulina promises that Hermione’s “actions shall be holy as / You hear my spell is lawful” (5.3.104-5). The only “magical art” distinctive for its

\textsuperscript{452} Susannah Brietz Monta, “‘It is requir’d you do awake your faith’: Belief in Shakespeare’s Theater,” in Degenhardt and Williamson, Religion and Drama in Early Modern England, 116.

\textsuperscript{453} Monta, “‘It is requir’d you do awake your faith’,” 128.

\textsuperscript{454} McCoy, Faith in Shakespeare, 145.
religious orthodoxy in early modern England was in fact the religious ritual of the Eucharist, by which bread and wine became, for both Anglicans and Catholics, the body and blood of Christ.

Leontes’ casual simile thus unfolds into the scene the complex theological concept of the Eucharist, a subject of much debate in the sixteenth century. Anglican theologians such as William Perkins and Richard Hooker shifted the English church away from the medieval Catholic theology of Thomas Aquinas, which had held that the real substance of the Eucharist changed even if the outer appearance remained the same. Instead, Reformed theology invited the congregation to experience what Perkins calls the “sacramentall union, namely the proportion which is betwixt the signe & the thing signed.” Congregants no longer had to ignore the plain evidence of their senses to believe that bread was Christ; Eucharistic bread retained its physical form and gained symbolic significance through ritual, becoming the flesh of Christ while also truly remaining (not just in appearance) mere bread. Anglican theology balances between the Catholic idea of actual physical transformation and the more rigorously symbolic approach of Ulrich Zwingli and others, who in Hooker’s view “accompt of this Sacrament but onely as of a shadow destitute emptie and voide of Christ,” rather than, as Hooker argues, a means for the “reall participation of Christ and of life in his body and bloud.” Those attending England’s required weekly church services would have become accustomed to such a liminal awareness of the bread’s significance—neither mere artificial shadow nor magical divine substance. These early modern churchgoers, attending The Winter’s Tale, would all the more easily have

455 William Perkins, A golden chaine: or, the description of theologie (Cambridge: Iohn Legat, 1600), Internet Archive, 112; for more, see Bryan Spinks, Two Faces of Elizabethan Anglican Theology: Sacraments and Salvation in the Thought of William Perkins and Richard Hooker (Lanham, MD: Scarecrow, 1999), 82.

recognized how, as Anthony Dawson argues, “the statue both is and is not Hermione, or how Hermione both is and is not a statue.” Shakespeare thus appropriates cultural habits associated with the Eucharist to deepen his playgoers’ experience of theater. Understanding how a supposed statue has a warm hand—how an actor can perform a woman, and a woman a statue—requires recognizing that, as Leontes hopes, this theatrical magic is itself an art “lawful as eating” the transformed body and blood of Christ (5.3.111). Engagement comes, paradoxically, through an awareness of representation.

More importantly, according to Reformed theology the Eucharistic transformation takes place not invisibly within the elements of bread and wine, as in Catholic tradition, but spiritually, within the congregation itself. Hooker argue that “The reall presence of Christes most blessed bodie and bloode is not therefore to be sought for in the sacrament, but in the worthie receiver of the sacrament.” Only through congregants’ participation in the spiritual Body of Christ, i.e. the Church, does the Eucharist enact the real presence of God. In fact, according to John Calvin in 1536, while the sacrament is a symbol, “by the showing of the symbol the thing itself is also shown,” so that “if the Lord truly represents the participation in his body through the breaking of bread, there ought not to be the least doubt that he truly presents and shows his body.” For early modern Anglicans, the Eucharistic ritual is not a magical transformation of bread, though at the same time it remains more than merely symbolic. Instead of the Eucharist representing or becoming Christ, Christ uses the Eucharist to represent the collective Church as itself his own

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body. This perspective differed sharply from Catholic theology, which held that the ritual alone made God present; priests could even conduct the Mass by themselves with the same spiritual efficacy. Anglicans, however, emphasize the way congregants’ participation makes Christ’s body real in a powerful communal experience. As Anthony Dawson has argued, Leontes’ allusion thus makes playgoers’ visual experience of the statue, like the experience of consuming the Eucharist, into “a communal pleasure, a type of participation.” The material bread and wine gains the “reall presence” of Christ’s flesh and blood only through the spiritual participation of the congregant in the collective Church body. In the same way, Hermione’s statue becomes real for Leontes, and for us, only through faithful participation orchestrated through our collective, responsive bodies.

By depicting theater as a kind of ritual in which a theatrical ‘person’ comes into being through the willing belief of playgoers, the scene extends Hermione’s release from stone and her spectator Leontes’ awakening of faith for the participation of playgoers as well. One actor playing Hermione describes the “emotional release” of awakening, at Paulina’s command, from the statue’s role as a still, silent watcher of the scene. In the same way, Paul Yachnin and Myrna Selkirk argue, playgoers “themselves enjoy a heightening of vitality and community” as they, with “the return of Hermione’s personhood, warm life, and experience of community,” are “released from their suspenseful stillness and solitude into the pleasures of strong emotional response and communal ovation.” Linking together the body of the statue with the bodies of

460 Dawson and Yachnin, The Culture of Playgoing, 106.
461 Yachnin and Selkirk, “Metatheater and the Performance of Character,” 146.
462 Ibid., 156.
the onstage audience, and connecting both outward to the bodies of playgoers, the statue scene creates a collective, participatory emotional power based in shared bodily experience.

Further implications for living statues’ effect on audiences become apparent two years later in a masque by Thomas Campion, in which transformed statues bring spectators’ actual bodies into a communal dance. Performed at a royal wedding only two years after the first performances of *The Winter’s Tale* and accompanying a specially commissioned revival of Shakespeare’s play, in addition to a second living-statue masque by Francis Beaumont, Campion’s *The maske on the marriage night of Count Palatine & Ladie Elisabeth* further illuminates the powerfully participatory elements of *The Winter’s Tale.*

Campion’s masque tells the story of eight silver statues of women whom Prometheus made of clay and inspired with fire to bring to life, until Jove in anger petrified them. Through prayer to Jove, however, the statues come alive and join in the dancing with eight male noblemen dressed as stars. Crucially, as statues and stars dance together, the bride, groom, and other spectators are “drawne into these solemn Revels” as well (221). The transformation of the statues not only brings spectators into the dance, but also induces passions in those spectators, as the masque calls down its “transformed fires” upon the watching bridal couple to “fill their breasts with love's desires” (136-37). Just as the Promethean fire of artistic creation transforms statues into loving subjects, the masque itself generates romantic (and reproductive) passion in the hearts of its bridal spectators.

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This participatory element in Campion’s masque, though customary, suggests particularly for this narrative that the Promethean celebration of art and love involves and enlivens spectators too, just as we have seen more subtly in *The Winter’s Tale*. In the metatheatrical vision of Campion’s masque, as in Shakespeare’s play, characters and spectators begin together as inanimate, motionless statues that have the potential to transform, through the fire of art, into dancing bodies, alive with an experience of communal passion. The masque thus illuminates how, in *The Winter’s Tale*, Hermione’s awakening statue powerfully catalyzes spectators’ artistic, emotional, and physical participation in the play’s own creative spectacle.

Ultimately, the play’s layering of physical and imaginative experience works through three levels: the body of the statue, the physical responses of its onstage spectators, and its embodied presentation in a play. Highlighting the parallel between the experiences of onstage spectators and of playgoers, Paulina’s summary of the statue’s liminal status applies to theatrical art more generally: “That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale: but it appears she lives, / Though yet she speak not” (5.3.115-18). Paulina’s statement seems to diminish the reality of the play-world by reminding playgoers that we are ourselves in a theatre being told an “old tale.” Yet theatrical fiction is built not only of words but of bodies.

Although Campion’s masque comes two years after the first performances of *The Winter’s Tale*, some critics have proposed that Campion’s statues actually swayed Shakespeare to revise the play by adding the statue scene. See David Bergeron, “The Restoration of Hermione in The Winter’s Tale,” in *Shakespeare’s Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), and Snyder, *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey*, 221-33. Simon Forman’s description of *The Winter’s Tale* from May 11, 1611, which does not mention the statue scene, might reflect an earlier version of the play that ended with the reunion between Perdita and Leontes. In support of this theory, Susan Snyder points out that Forman “describes the revelation of Perdita’s birth and her restoration to Leontes as if Forman saw it [on stage] rather than heard it recounted” as the Folio version presents it (Snyder 225). My argument about the link between these two pieces does not, however, depend on who influenced whom.
Paradoxically, the more we recognize that the actor performing the statue truly lives, the more Hermione herself lives too, whether as a silent statue or as a woman overcome with emotion at the sight of her daughter. Tales told of a living statue cannot be believed, according to Paulina, yet the ostensible statue has been and remains truly alive, conveying in its silent physical presence more than any old tale ever could. The statue’s hardening and softening effects thus model for playgoers the more fundamental sympathetic power of communal, physical experience, transmitted despite and even through imperfect faith in the theatrical illusion.

“True substantial bodies:” Theater as living deception in *The Duchess of Malfi*

Like *The Winter’s Tale*, John Webster’s *The Duchess of Malfi* (c. 1612-14) uses the relation between onstage spectators and artificial statues—in this case, the figures “fram’d in wax”—to model the sympathetic effects of theater itself on playgoers (4.1.110). Though the wax figures in *The Duchess of Malfi* do not move like Hermione’s statue, they embody similar layers of representation, first as waxworks pretending to be corpses and then more broadly, I argue, as living actors pretending to be both. This hypothetical staging allows the plays to parallel each other more deeply as we playgoers deny the evidence of our eyes that living bodies are present, believing instead in what turns out to be a trick played on onstage spectators. Unlike in *The Winter’s Tale*, however, the trick is not that these figures are secretly alive but that, within the play-world at least, they are artificial; rather than the natural corpses Ferdinand claims them to be, they are mere wax. Thus, if enacted by living actors Ferdinand’s wax figures produce an antagonistic effect on both onstage and offstage spectators, an effect that links playgoers’

experience with that of the Duchess. Instead of validating our awareness of the actors’ natural bodies, as in *The Winter’s Tale*, Ferdinand’s trick brazenly contradicts and exploits that awareness, all the more for the visual similarity between the wax figures and the real corpses that appear later. Playgoers’ sympathetic response to the Duchess thus depends on the shared painful experience of theatrical figures whose bodies are not what they seem. Yet though the wax figures pain her temporarily, in the end the Duchess transcends Ferdinand’s deceptions in the same way that we playgoers do—by responding to natural bodies. That is, Ferdinand, a mere character, cannot perceive the presence of actors that I argue perform the wax figures, but somehow the Duchess shares with us the ability to see through the artificial character to the natural body beneath. Staged in this way, *The Duchess of Malfi* demonstrates the power of living bodies, hovering behind the theatrical fiction, to influence our own watching bodies.466

The similarities of approach between these two plays reflect other commonalities. Both date and theatre company link *The Duchess of Malfi* and *The Winter’s Tale*: the King’s Men first performed *The Duchess of Malfi* between 1612 and 1614, very close to their first performance of *The Winter’s Tale* in 1611. Both plays also present the rare stage spectacle of a pregnant woman, which is both a symbol of embodied natural creativity and, when enacted by a young boy, also

466 In a recently published article, Lynn Maxwell has independently arrived at an argument similar to mine, suggesting that Ferdinand’s wax figures point to the power of art to plague the bodies of its spectators and to turn them into art objects themselves through sympathetic magical and theatrical effects. My reading, while paralleling hers in many ways, explores in more detail how the Duchess’s response to the figures invokes playgoers’ special knowledge to join their perceptions of the wax figures’ actual bodies to the Duchess’s moral insight. By placing Webster’s play in context of other statue plays, I also clarify distinctions among a range of metatheatrical functions for enacted statues. See Lynn Maxwell, “Wax Magic and The Duchess of Malfi,” *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies* 14.3 (2014).
creates liminal tension through the manifest theatricality of a fake belly. David Bergeron was the first to mention the important similarities between the displays of inanimate figures in these two plays, but he identifies only a shared link to funerary effigies. More importantly, both Shakespeare’s statue and Webster’s wax figures do not appear in the plays’ non-theatrical source material, suggesting that a particular interest in the wax figures’ metatheatrical function led Webster to alter his source, William Painter’s 1567 tale of a widowed Duchess and her jealous brother. Such similarities suggest that Webster’s play references and builds on Shakespeare’s exploration of how playgoers respond to enacted statues.

However, Webster’s play, unlike Shakespeare’s, gives no clear evidence that actors rather than wax props stage its wax figures in 4.1. Ferdinand’s figures (unlike Hermione’s statue) never move or speak, and realistic artificial human figures were possible: Philip Henslowe’s diary lists several prop heads and limbs (though not full wax bodies), and a wax effigy of Prince Henry had appeared prominently in his funeral procession only a few years before The Duchess of Malfi. The stage direction even specifies “artificial figures” (4.1.54 s.d.). However, according to the play’s title page, the published text was adapted for reading rather than performance, making its stage directions a potentially unreliable source for information about theatrical staging.

467 For a brief discussion of pregnancy onstage in these two plays, see Matthew Taunton, “‘Monumental Alabaster’: Sculpture in The Winter’s Tale and When We Dead Awaken,” Static 5, London Consortium (2009): 5.


471 The title page notes that the play includes “diverse things printed that the length of the play would not bear in the presentment;” see Marcus, The Duchess of Malfi, 61.
Further, the easiest and cheapest option for staging a brief display—if we presume that the King’s Men did not keep an stock of whole wax bodies in adult and child sizes—would have been to use the existing actors playing Antonio and the children.\footnote{472} Admittedly, however, such an argument from the fundamental practicality of the early modern commercial theater cannot definitively prove the presence of actors playing the wax figures.

In the context of previous early modern plays’ use of enacted statues, however, it is worth considering how the presence of actors portraying these wax figures would serve the play and its affective work on playgoers. The presence of living actors, first, could strengthen playgoers’ identification with the Duchess and her perceptions, rather than with Ferdinand. Second, staging the wax figures with actors could suggest a mechanism for how the Duchess resists Ferdinand’s theatrical control. Playgoers’ awareness of the actors’ presence might subconsciously shape our experience of the Duchess’s response, as if the actors’ living bodies strengthen her in ways that Ferdinand does not realize or intend. As when she somehow recognizes Ferdinand’s figures as wax even before he informs us that these apparent corpses are artificial, that is, the Duchess might in some sense see through the stage corpses of her family to the actors performing them. If staged with actors, therefore, the wax figures would function far beyond what previous critics have called their sensationalist “Madame Tussaud's” trickery for the sake of cheap horror; rather, they would generate complex metatheatrical effects.\footnote{473} As when I previously explored a single staging possibility in \textit{The Lady’s Tragedy}, therefore, I will assume for the sake of argument that

\footnote{472} I default to the stage direction in using the plural of “children” here, thereby including the two younger children who did not escape with Antonio, because they are held separately from their mother who would not know whether they have been killed, and because the resulting display of multiple children would parallel the display of their actual corpses in 4.2.

actors rather than wax props portray Webster’s wax figures, their natural bodies unleashing powerful ironies embedded in the play.\footnote{As Maxwell argues in “Wax Magic,” 50.}

If actors portray the wax figures as I suggest, the presence of actors shapes playgoers’ perceptions in ways that parallel Ferdinand’s own deceptive spectacle. Having imprisoned the Duchess in a darkened prison cell, Ferdinand pretends to reconcile with her by offering a disembodied hand that he implies is the living hand of Antonio, her husband. His actual goal is to confuse and horrify her, as quickly becomes apparent when she realizes the hand is not attached to a person and calls for lights, only to discover a display of bodies. Although Ferdinand later reveals that “these presentations are but fram'd in wax,” neither Duchess nor playgoers know that; at first both sets of spectators perceive them to be natural bodies—\textit{that is, corpses} (4.1.110). Neither can doubt that, within the play-world, these are the bodies of Antonio and children, now “appearing as if they were dead” (4.1.54 s.d.). Particularly if actors portray the wax figures, playgoers accustomed to interpreting living bodies as theatrically dead would have every reason to perceive Ferdinand’s display as real corpses.\footnote{The 2010 Red Bull Theatre production of \textit{The Duchess of Malfi} highlighted this exact theatrical ambiguity, though it did so in an entirely different way by staging the children as dummies in all their scenes, so that Ferdinand’s display of the Duchess’s eldest child in “wax” still fooled us into temporarily interpreting this dummy as a stage corpse. Presumably the rigors of present-day child labor laws made it difficult for this Off-Broadway production to consider using child actors, a problem that early modern companies did not face. Yet the Red Bull production still found it important to link the ‘living’ children visually to the ‘wax’ children, as I argue here. See Cameron Hunt McNabb, “Review of The Duchess of Malfi, presented by the Red Bull Theatre at St Clement’s Episcopal Church, New York City, February 27 – March 28, 2010,” \textit{Early Modern Literary Studies} 15.2 (2010-11): 17.1-9.}

As a result, Ferdinand’s revelation that these figures are artificial “wax,” not real bodies, places us playgoers in the same position of confusion as the Duchess. We may have felt a temporary perceptual superiority over the Duchess in the episode with the hand: it is clear, well...
before the Duchess realizes it, that Antonio is not present and Ferdinand only carries a
disembodied hand. We might even recognize the hand as representing merely the wax prop that
it actually is, thereby distancing ourselves from the Duchess’s pain. Yet this superiority and
distance immediately vanishes when Ferdinand boasts of his trick with the wax figures. The
potential sense of dramatic irony from seeing through Ferdinand’s first trick, by encouraging an
awareness of the theatrical presence of actors, in turn makes us playgoers even more vulnerable
to Ferdinand’s second trick. The natural bodies of actors playing these wax figures would
increase playgoers’ sense of confusion, parallel to what the Duchess herself must feel. We would
have, like the Duchess, perceived these wax bodies as the natural flesh of (stage) corpses. Any
sadness we may have felt with the Duchess upon seeing her family’s dead bodies would only
increase the shock of embarrassment or irritation at learning of Ferdinand’s arrogantly theatrical
manipulation. The play thus exploits playgoers’ awareness of dramatic convention and belief in
the reality of the apparent corpses to deceive us, just as Ferdinand seeks to use his wax figures to
control the Duchess. As we playgoers recognize the deceptions enacted against the Duchess as a
spectator of wax figures, we sympathetically share the experience of being deceived by theatrical
tricks.

This metatheatrical interpretation of Ferdinand’s theater partially aligns with Huston
Diehl’s argument that the play “reflexively explores the very act of seeing required of
[Webster’s] audiences.” According to her view, the Duchess becomes a kind of Protestant
martyr, abused by Ferdinand’s deceptions into believing (as if seduced by Catholic idolatry) that
“a man-made image is the ‘true substantial body’ that it represents.” Diehl argues that by

476 Diehl, Staging Reform, 185.
477 Ibid., 184.
rejecting art’s painful deceptions, the Duchess experiences new spiritual heights of Protestant reflection. Yet my argument reaches a different conclusion. Rather than simply encouraging playgoers to resist spectacles’ power, the play emphasizes the power of living theatrical bodies to shape their spectators both physically and emotionally. The Duchess’s sympathetic response to the wax figures pains her, but it also unexpectedly inspires her with bodily courage and spiritual insight.

At first, Ferdinand’s display indeed seems to harm the Duchess through its crafty, occult artificiality. Even before Ferdinand reveals the figures as wax at all, the Duchess declares that the sight of the supposed corpses “wastes me more / Than were't my picture, fashion'd out of wax / Stuck with a magical needle” (4.1.61-63). She explicitly compares her pain at the thought of her family’s death to that induced by sympathetic wax magic, a concept familiar at the time. In expressing her pain at what she perceives to be real corpses, the Duchess paradoxically imagines them instead as artificial wax figures: these bodies, apparently struck down in death, become images of herself whose bodily harm “wastes” and sickens her own living body in turn. The Duchess experiences bodies as having powerful sympathetic effects on each other that reflect and even generate a shared physical nature. Both as apparent corpses and as wax, therefore, Ferdinand’s figures successfully shape the Duchess’ bodily response. According to Lynn Maxwell, Ferdinand's command for the duchess to “bury the print” of the trick hand in her heart even suggests “that her heart is soft and retentive like wax” (4.1.45). As Ferdinand invokes the vulnerability of wax, that is, he reveals his hope that his display will soften the

\[478\] See Scot, *Discoverie of Witchcraft*, book 12, ch. 16; 257. Such wax magic also appears onstage in Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* (1607) and in Ben Jonson’s *Masque of Queens* (1609).

\[479\] Maxwell, “Wax Magic,” 44.
Duchess in turn, weakening her emotional defenses and molding her into the soft and submissive woman he desires her to be. As Lynn Enterline argues, “it is as though she has an unconscious intuition of becoming like what she sees- and perishing for it.”

The artifice of theater becomes another kind of witchcraft, in which the sights displayed become playgoers’ own “picture” to pain us too as the playwright’s “magical needle” pains characters. Theater itself might thus seem a kind of dangerous sympathetic magic worked through artificial bodies, as Diehl imagines.

Yet this weakening effect of Ferdinand’s display on the Duchess is only temporary. Ferdinand attempts to control and punish the Duchess for her independence, but she ultimately determines her own identity against his attempts at control, declaring “I am Duchess of Malfi still” (4.2.137). I argue that the presence of actors’ bodies playing the wax figures would aid the Duchess as she resists the power of Ferdinand’s deceptive spectacles. If the statues are staged in this way, Ferdinand, unlike his directorial counterpart Paulina in The Winter’s Tale, works against the true nature of the supposedly artificial bodies he displays. Unlike Paulina’s performing statue that truly comes to life, Ferdinand’s spectacle is a lie. The Duchess’s family is not dead at all, at least not at the moment of Ferdinand’s display, and more importantly, in my proposed staging, neither are the actors playing these wax figures. In a sense, Ferdinand’s spectacle indeed shapes the Duchess’s body to mirror what she sees, but does so in ways that go beyond what he intends. The Duchess’s subconscious awareness of the wax figures as wax, even before playgoers learn of their artificiality, points to her deeper ability to perceive the truth.

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behind theatrical artifice, at least through her bodily response.\footnote{The Duchess’s response to the wax figures thus shares similarities with Prince Hal’s innocent yet teasing response to Falstaff’s fake corpse, as discussed in the chapter on corpses, 79-90 above.} Just as the Duchess senses herself being shaped through the wax magic of Ferdinand’s waxen deceptions even when she thinks she sees only corpses, in another sense the living spectacle of actors ultimately brings her spiritual life rather than death.

The shaping effects of Ferdinand’s wax figures depend on the negative connotations of statues established early in the play. References to statues in first three acts of \emph{The Duchess of Malfi} insist that statues are emotionless and coldhearted, and that such artistic representations only mock and confine the true self. From her first scene the Duchess deliberately distinguishes herself from a statue in order to establish her own passionate love for Antonio. When she speaks of herself as “flesh and blood,” not “the figure cut in alabaster / Kneels at my husband's tomb,” her description of the kneeling artificial statue, representing her previous marriage, heightens by contrast the visual impact of the Duchess’s living body kneeling before Antonio (1.2.363-65). Through this metaphor, the Duchess imagines herself as the opposite of a stone statue: a living, breathing body whose love is a bodily response to the shared life of flesh and blood. The metaphor implicitly highlights the physical and emotional sympathy between Antonio and the Duchess as she awakens Antonio’s heart, “so dead a piece of flesh,” by describing her own awakening out of monumentalization to life (1.2.361). Webster’s phrasing here may even deliberately contradict William Painter’s original metaphor characterizing the Duchess as driven merely by objectifying lust, as when “Pygmalion loved once a Marble piller.”\footnote{Painter, “The duchesse of Malfi,” 173v, reprinted in Marcus, \emph{The Duchess of Malfi}, 352.} In this version, by contrast, Webster’s alabaster Galatea has already brought herself to life and actively woos her
Pygmalion by drawing his attention to her own transformation to living flesh. Antonio similarly twists Ovidian statue stories to encourage female sexual agency when he jokingly reasons in another scene that, because “Anaxarete / Was frozen into marble” for rejecting a suitor, Cariola should quickly find a husband in order to avoid the same fate (3.2.26-27). Webster intensifies the Duchess’s agency by contrast with the idea of the maidenly, emotionless art object, as references to emotionally-frozen female statues emphasize the sexual energy, bodily mutability, and reproductive creativity so prominent in the Duchess’s pregnancies yet so disturbing to Ferdinand.

The play’s statue metaphors suggest that Ferdinand’s interest in displaying his own figures to the Duchess derives primarily from statues’ connotations of physical and emotional frozenness. Whether because of classist or misogynist discomfort with the Duchess’s independent choice of a husband or because of a general obsession with his sister’s sexuality, Ferdinand clearly would prefer that the Duchess be that unsullied, artistically immobile “figure cut in alabaster” from which she imaginatively recoils so early in the play (1.2.364). Ferdinand takes particular pride in the provenance and excellence of his artificial pieces, “fram’d in wax / By the curious master in that quality, / Vincentio Lauriola” (4.1.110-12). Highlighting their status as art objects designed and controlled by himself, Ferdinand probably expects that his wax figures, in the tradition of other statue spectacles, will shape the Duchess’s body into a similarly frozen, idealized form that could be as easily controlled, as he implicitly boasts when he announces that she is “plagu’d in art” and mocks her foolish belief that these “presentations” of his are “true substantial bodies” (4.1.109, 110, 113). In a sense, his displays are fundamentally about control of “that body of hers” with which he is so obsessed (4.1.118). Once we learn that within the play-world the dead bodies and hand are mere artificial wax, it becomes clear that Ferdinand displays these wax figures in order to shape the Duchess’s body through mirror effects.
that simultaneously soften and harden her. That is, as Ferdinand uses the figures’ magical waxiness to pain the Duchess and soften her emotional defenses, associations between sculpture and sexual frigidity suggest that he more fundamentally seeks to immobilize the Duchess in art.

At first, Ferdinand’s figures seem to succeed in transforming the Duchess, through her sympathy with the theatrical display, into an object of his control. Not only does the Duchess become an artistic object, her own “picture, fashion’d out of wax,” but she finds herself an involuntary participant in Ferdinand’s plays as well, imagining “this world a tedious theatre, / For I do play a part in't 'gainst my will” (4.1.62, 81-82). Her life becomes a scripted performance that she cannot alter, like the objects of Ferdinand’s theatrical displays. In the same way, in response to the sight of her family’s bodies she declares herself hardened indeed, begging Bosola to “bind me to that lifeless trunk / And let me freeze to death” (4.1.66-67). Even in the next scene, Cariola describes the way the Duchess now looks like her “picture in the gallery, / A deal of life in show, but none in practice” (4.2.30-31). Any seeming life in the Duchess is now only artificial. Cariola goes on to describe the Duchess as another piece of art: “some reverend monument / Whose ruins are even pitied” (4.2.32-33). Cariola’s metaphor implies that the Duchess is now, in her pitiful ruin, reduced to stony rubble, no longer even an artistically objectified marble. It seems that, as Ferdinand wishes, the Duchess has responded to the artificial representations of her family by herself becoming an effigy, frozen and destroyed.

However, the plan backfires. The Duchess’s softening emotion is not weakness, and she hardens not into the artificial statue Ferdinand wishes but a figure of strength in the face of death. Even as she subconsciously links the figures to the wax they “really” are within the play—imagining them as magical dolls—she recognizes them even more deeply as the natural, flesh-and-blood bodies of the family she loves, alive or dead. Ferdinand’s artificial wax figures cannot
weaken or imprint her heart because it is already soft with love for Antonio. Even the threat of monumentalization transforms in the Duchess’s language into something quite different from the idea of sexual abstinence it suggested previously: in imagining herself “freezing to death” at Antonio’s side, the Duchess implies that her emotional and sexual bond to her husband persists (4.1.67). While the Duchess does mirror the bodies she sees, she transcends Ferdinand’s sordid trick to align once again with the privileged perspective of playgoers, for whom the wax figures can remain the “true substantial bodies” of actors even as they seem the artificial creations of a theater company (4.1.113). The Duchess’s ability to subconsciously recognize Ferdinand’s display as wax would thus extend to seeing through the theatrical fiction itself to the living bodies beneath. In this way, the presence of actors’ natural bodies that I propose behind the wax figures further would connect the Duchess’s experience to playgoers’ own as both together resist Ferdinand’s attempts at theatrical control of their bodily perceptions and response.

Webster’s portrayal of the Duchess’s embodied spectatorship models how the shared physical experience of theater itself can work to generate self-reflection and spiritual insight. The Duchess triumphs, in the end, not through overcoming spectacle directly—she never consciously discovers Ferdinand’s trick—but rather through her unsentimental yet theologically faithful awareness of both the vigor and vulnerability of the human body. Under Bosola’s threat of death, the Duchess acknowledges her body’s vulnerability as if in obedience to the anatomical precept “know thyself,” saying, “I know death hath ten thousand several doors / For men to take their exit” (4.2.211-12). It is almost as if the Duchess’s embodiment of living love throughout the play gives her a deeper awareness of the natural body’s physical capacity for life and death. Her self-knowledge in turn gives her resolve, as when, rejecting Bosola’s attempts to degrade and terrify her at her brothers’ command, she famously declares, “I am Duchess of Malfi still” (4.2.137).
Through these insights into death’s inevitability, the Duchess sees past the bodily deceptions Ferdinand designs to a deeper theological awareness. She tells Bosola that “I perceive death, now I am well awake, / Best gift is they can give, or I can take,” since “Who would be afraid on't, / Knowing to meet such excellent company / In th' other world?” (4.2.216-17, 203-5). The Duchess describes this new ability to “perceive” the gift of death—and even the option to actively “take” her own life rather than submit to further deception or control—as the result of an awakening, like Hermione’s from stone in *The Winter’s Tale*. The Duchess rebels one last time against Ferdinand’s monumentalizing attempts to neuter her agency and sexuality, pinning her confidence defiantly on a reunion with her own self-created family in the afterlife. Ferdinand has attempted to destroy her through the spectacle of her family’s death, but in the face of her own death, she awakens to spiritual hope that reshapes that spectacle’s meaning.

The Duchess’s calm faith in her family’s immortality gives a deeper significance to the coming spectacles of the children’s actual deaths. As Bergeron notes, Bosola’s display of the “Children strangled” “ironically counterpoints the earlier display of wax figures, for now we see the real children truly dead” (4.2.248 s.d.). Yet as Ferdinand’s previous deceptions lead playgoers to examine these bodies more closely than usual, the Duchess’s ready awareness of the true meaning of death resonates with the corpses’ breathing actorly bodies. Stage death, in fact, appears as a metaphor for immortality in *The Immortality of the Soul*, in which early modern philosopher Henry More argues that “the Knowing and Benign” soul will respond to death like actors who “lye stretcht stark dead upon the stage: but being once drawn off, find themselves

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well and alive, and are ready to taste a cup of wine with their friends in the attiring room.”

Actors’ confidence that death is only temporary, for More, epitomizes the ideal Christian attitude to real death. Despite Ferdinand’s theatrical deceptions, the Duchess’s hope in her family’s immortality “in the other world” persists just as More recommends, maintained somehow especially through the living presence of the child actors belonging to the theatrical “company” that will reunite when the play is over (4.2.204-5). In a sense, the bodies of the Duchess’s family remain alive in her spiritual imagination as easily as actors’ bodies remain alive for playgoers.

The responses of playgoers and Duchess to Ferdinand’s spectacle thus reciprocally shape each other. Although we both suffer from Ferdinand’s theatrical deception, the Duchess’s example implies that if we can channel our physical and emotional response in the right way, perhaps we too can make the inward examination that the Duchess models. But though Diehl argues that playgoers’ spiritual insight depends on entirely rejecting material spectacle, in my reading playgoers’ insight into theatrical bodies remains essential, not only for ourselves but for the Duchess. Playgoers’ perceptions of Ferdinand’s figures—particularly if we see them first as corpses, then as wax statues, and finally living actors—deepen the Duchess’s awareness of life that goes beyond death. And in turn, her response to spectacle shapes ours. Just as Ferdinand’s theatrical bodies unintentionally produce physical and spiritual effects in the Duchess that far transcend the simple “despair” he desires, so too does theater itself, with the tension it generates between the bodies of actor and character, draw complex insights and bodily responses from playgoers. Maxwell argues that “just as wax magic relies on the power of sympathy to work

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485 Interestingly, the Duchess’s ongoing presence as the Echo in 5.1—most likely visible to playgoers for clarity and for ironic effect, though not a full-fledged ghost visible to Antonio and Delio—emphasizes her own immortality for playgoers in the same way.
profound change on the targeted subject, so too does the stage;” yet the sympathy the play elicits from playgoers does not simply make us vulnerable to magical deceptions but empowers us through the same creative vigor that the Duchess embodies.\(^\text{486}\) By training playgoers to trust the evidence of our own eyes, Webster affirms our good-willed cooperation in the ongoing experience of the play. The ideal response to spectacle, in this play, involves a creative and perceptive sympathy with the bodily truth beneath.

As artificial representations of nature that draw, paradoxically, on their own potential enactment by living bodies, Webster’s wax figures suggest a way of reading theatrical representation as neither wholly truth nor wholly deception. Rather than accepting cultural distinctions between living nature and inanimate art, Webster revels in the tensions between both the life and corruption of the natural body and the sympathetic and seductive effects of art. His theatrical art, therefore, is less about finding a perfectly safe mimesis than about accessing the complex art inherent to statues, what Gross calls “a potency shared by the imagination of the artist, the processes of nature, and divine creativity.”\(^\text{487}\) The artistry of theater combines the dangerous powers of artificial statues with the energy of living bodies. As Thomas Middleton’s commendatory verses to *The Duchess of Malfi* describe, “every worthy man / Is his own marble; and his merit can / Cut him to any figure and express / More art than death’s cathedral palaces.”\(^\text{488}\) In other words, becoming a statue preserves a man from death in the very liveliness and artistry of his meritorious deeds and actions. Middleton’s lines, like *The Duchess of Malfi*


\(^{487}\) Gross, *The Dream of the Moving Statue*, 93.

\(^{488}\) Thomas Middleton (1623); quoted in Marcus, *The Duchess of Malfi*, 96.
itself, suggest that a liminal interplay between natural and artificial bodies can be more powerful than either alone.

In *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Duchess of Malfi*, artificial statues function symbolically as a metonymy for theatrical artifice. Enacted statues heighten playgoers’ awareness of the difference between the frozen artifice of statues and the living artifice of theatrical performance, softening wary playgoers toward theater more generally. Yet Webster’s wax figures, even if enacted, ultimately have a different effect than Shakespeare’s enacted statue in *The Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare uses the idea that an actor is a hardened statue to soften playgoers as they realize that the statue has become a living body after all. The play affirms playgoers’ initial, naïve perceptions that the statue is a natural, living body, and powerfully connects us to onstage spectators as our submission to the actor’s statue performance increases our eventual joy at being tricked. By contrast, *The Duchess of Malfi*, if living actors play the wax figures, abuses playgoers’ initial perceptions that the wax figures are natural bodies. Instead of coming to life, the wax figures prefigure the actual deaths of the Duchess’s family, inflicting deceptive pain on both her and playgoers. *The Duchess of Malfi* examines more fully the danger of the sympathetic contagion that works in Shakespeare’s statue scene as well, demonstrating Floyd-Wilson’s argument that “theater’s capacity to move or alter its spectators” functions in the same way as Ferdinand’s “witchcraft practices.”

Yet the painful sympathy the wax figures provoke also helps the Duchess and, by proxy, playgoers, to accept both death’s physical reality and its ultimate unimportance in spiritual terms. Though the falseness of the wax figures does not, in the end, protect Antonio or the children from death, their enactment by living actors would, at least metatheatrically, reunite the Duchess

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489 Floyd-Wilson, *Occult Knowledge*, 47 and 113.
with her family one last time before she dies. Further, when Antonio and the children die, the visual similarity of these corpses—also portrayed by actors—to the false theatrical spectacle of the wax figures suggests a spiritual truth that the Duchess affirms, that their souls remain alive to greet her in heaven. The artificial bodies created by both waxworks and theatrical performance may seem to cause only false pain and despair, but in fact give their spectators spiritual strength and self-knowledge. As we experience the pains of sympathy with the Duchess, we too become “well awake” to the presence of life in death (4.2.216).

_The Winter’s Tale_ suggests that spectators’ faith awakens statues, while my reading of _The Duchess of Malfi_ demonstrates how enacted statues can encourage spectators to rely on a deeper faith. After these two plays, early modern drama continued to use statues—particularly fake statues—for exploring the spiritual quality of theatrical belief. In particular, Philip Massinger’s _The City Madam_ (1632) and James Shirley’s _St. Patrick for Ireland_ (1637-40) depict characters who pretend to be statues and who hope to thereby shape their spectators both physically and spiritually. In different ways, however, the statues in these plays lack a special power to catalyze moral transformation as Shakespeare and Webster depict. Massinger’s _The City Madam_ complicates the trope of statues’ sympathetic power by depicting a stubborn spectator unwilling to imaginatively enter theatrical reality, softening to theatrical statues too late. Sir John Frugal orchestrates a statue performance by his daughters’ rejected suitors to teach a lesson to his coldhearted daughters, his haughty wife, and his greedy brother, Luke, but while the statues provoke repentance in the women, their stillness only increases Luke’s immovable hardheartedness.⁴⁹⁰ Meanwhile, Shirley’s _St. Patrick for Ireland_ reverses the direction of

statues’ expected theatrical impact, instead depicting various statue transformations as catalysts for moral change in the ‘statues’ themselves. For example, the pagan courtier Dichu’s miraculous petrification at Saint Patrick’s prayer softens his heart toward God, and the mischievous disguise of Endarius and Ferochius as pagan idols, which at first aids their access to their ladies, eventually also leads to repentance.  

Yet although these and scattered other statue plays continue to explore the link between spiritual power and theatrical art, the deft treatments of enacted statues by Shakespeare and by Webster, metatheatrically exploring the relation between living artifice and its spectators, remain unmatched among early modern statue plays.  

The other enacted statues after The Duchess of Malfi appear in Thomas Middleton’s A Game at Chess, in Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works, ed. Gary Taylor and John Lavagnino, 2007 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 5.1, and Randolph’s The Jealous Lovers, 5.6. The Jealous Lovers, copies Sejanus wholesale: the statue of Hymen miraculously turns away onstage rather than bless the marriage of a couple who are, unknowingly, siblings, as an onstage spectator’s skepticism similarly acknowledges playgoers’ doubts. By contrast, the moving statues in A Game at Chess, despite (or because of) their similarity to automata, only symbolize the temptation of idolatrous spectacle.
Coda

Liminal corpses, ghosts, and statues work to unleash playgoers’ theatrical sympathy through actors’ bodies. Drawing on Reformation-inflected tensions in theologies of the body, and responding to the anxieties of antitheatricalist writers, liminal bodies make theatrical embodiment itself more visible and, in the process, more powerful. Some plays link liminal bodies and theatrical performance more directly than others do: *The Spanish Tragedy* explicitly engages the problem of a stage corpse’s ambiguous appearance, while *The Lady’s Tragedy*, decades later, explores the link between character and actor much more subtly by staging a split between ghost and corpse. Yet in their different ways, all of the plays discussed here use liminal bodies to exploit actors’ living bodies for sympathetic effect. Corpses, ghosts, and statues all function theatrically through the tension of a living actor playing dead: these dead bodies provoke powerful physical response from fellow characters, yet that same physical and emotional power betrays the presence of the living actors’ bodies within the theatrical illusion. Breathing stage corpses evoke our sympathy for both the dead character and the hard-working performer; the solid presence of stage ghosts makes grieving families’ loss more real while demonstrating theater’s power to embody ghostly stories of the past; quivering stage statues soften their spectators’ hearts even as they strengthen faith and enliven the seemingly dead artifice of theatrical representation with performative power. Through self-conscious attention to the paradoxes of theatrical embodiment as both artistic power and artificial fakery, plays stimulate playgoers to respond in a similarly intense way to theatrical fictions despite and even through an awareness of the actor.

Ultimately, one final liminal body hovers unnoticed throughout each play: the body of the playgoer. Visible to actors, yet ignored by characters, we exist in a liminal relation to the play-
world itself. Playgoers’ bodily presence, practically invisible within the surviving text-based evidence of performance, is in fact the goal for and on which all the emotion and action of the play is performed. Analyzing the liminal bodies within plays thus reinstates the presence of the playgoer as a participant in theater’s creative, paradoxical act. Liminal bodies reach outward to evoke sympathetic response, whether that sympathy is sorrowful, hilarious, disturbing, patriotic, invigorating, or faithful—and our response enlivens the represented play-world in turn. At the same time, liminal bodies remind us that the play-world in which such bodily sympathies unfold is also a playhouse enclosing living, solid actors speaking to living, solid playgoers. By acknowledging and exploiting the shared bodily experience pressing upon us from within the theatrical fiction, early modern plays allow playgoers the temporary, paradoxical experience of feeling real sympathy for artificial characters. As corpses that seem unexpectedly alive, ghosts that seem unexpectedly solid, and statues that seem unexpectedly natural transform their onstage spectators into mirroring bodies, they shape the liminal experience of playgoers as well.
Appendix

Plays are listed by first performance date, with author, title, and company or venue. Performance dates are taken mainly from Literature Online; performing company information is taken from various sources including published play texts, Arthur F. Kinney’s A Companion to Renaissance Drama (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), and Frederick Gard Fleay’s A Chronicle History of the London Stage 1559-1642 (London: Reeves and Turner, 1890). Citations for all plays appear in the Bibliography.

Early Modern Corpse Plays

Theatrical deaths (7) (I include any inset-performance through which real death occurs.)

(c. 1585-89) Thomas Kyd, The Spanish Tragedy (Lord Strange’s Men?): Hieronimo plans a play-within-the-play that represents the history of the wrongs done against him; in the play, he and Bel-Imperia actually kill the other actors under cover of stage-killing the characters they play. See also Frame ghosts.

(1606) Thomas Middleton, The Revenger’s Tragedy (King’s Men): In Act Five, two separate groups of murderers kill and attempt to kill Duke Lussurioso in “masques” of dancing, though there is no onstage audience except the victims themselves.

(1611) Thomas Middleton, The Lady’s Tragedy (King’s Men): Votarius and his lover, the Wife, plan to convince her cuckolded husband that all is well by staging a violent rejection, but their weapons get switched, the gulling backfires, and the performance of violence becomes real. See also Lifelike corpses, Fake corpses, and Real ghosts.

(c. 1623-24) Thomas Middleton, Women Beware Women (King’s Men): In Act Five, a deadly masque-within-the-play kills off several characters, but the deaths do not appear to the onstage audience to be play-death at all. Instead, the deaths come out of nowhere and simply confuse the Duke and the other spectators.

(1626) Philip Massinger, The Roman Actor (King’s Men): Thinking his favorite actor, Paris, has cuckolded him, Domitian stages a theatrical scene in which he unexpectedly kills Paris to “make thy end more glorious.” See also Real ghosts.

(c. 1632-33) John Ford, Love’s Sacrifice (Queen’s Men): In Act Three, Julia, Colona, and Morona, who have been seduced and impregnated by the treacherous Ferentes, kill him in the middle of a dancing masque.

(c. 1641) James Shirley, The Cardinal (King’s Men): In Act Three, a rejected lover, Columbo, puts on a masque for the wedding of his rival, D’Alvarez, to the Duchess, during which he reveals the groom’s dead body onstage. Stage directions do not indicate performed violence.
Fake corpses (20) (I exclude fake deaths that are not staged, only reported, as in Glaphorne’s *The Lady Mother.*)

(c. 1589-90) Christopher Marlowe, *The Jew of Malta* (Queen’s Men): In Act Five, Barabas pretends to be dead to escape prison, then rises once left alone, crediting a “sleepy drinke.”

(c. 1590-94) Anonymous, *Locrine* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men?): In Act Two, Strumbo pretends to be dead in a battle and comically refuses to get up when his servant speaks to him. Playgoers may think him dead until he speaks. See also Real ghosts.

(c. 1595) William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In Act Five, Bottom and Flute pretend to die while playing Pyramus and Thisbe in a play. Playgoers know he is not dead.

(c. 1595) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In Act Four, Juliet takes a fake death potion and her family mourns her death; in Act Five, Romeo describes the apparent corpse as beautiful and lifelike. Playgoers know she is not dead.

(1597) William Shakespeare, *The First Part of Henry the Fourth* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In Act Five, Falstaff seems to die in a fight, but then rises and comments metatheatrically on the other stage corpses lying around him. Playgoers may or may not know he is dead, depending on Hal’s reaction.

(c.1598-99) William Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing:* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In Act Four, Claudio rejects Hero at their wedding; she collapses as he exits and playgoers may briefly think her dead until she revives momentarily; Claudio believes reports of her death.

(1600) John Marston, *Jack Drum’s Entertainment* (Children of Paul’s): In Act Two, Pasquill pretends he is dead by painting his chest red with cosmetics to frighten his rival, who calls him a ghost when he arises. Playgoers know he is not dead.

(c. 1601-2) Thomas Heywood, *How a Man may Choose a Good Wife from a Bad* (Worcester’s Men): A jealous man tries to poison his innocent wife, but playgoers know the poison is actually only a fake death potion. Her suitor, Anselme, comments on her supposed corpse’s lifelike appearance.

(c. 1599-1602) John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida* (Children of Paul’s): In Act Five, Antonio is brought onstage in his coffin, provoking sympathy between his father and Mellida’s father, previously enemies. Antonio then awakens to reveal that his apparent death was a plot to bring reconciliation so that he could marry Mellida.

(c. 1602-4) John Marston, *The Malcontent* (Children of the Chapel/King’s Men): In Act Five, Malevole pretends to let Mendoza poison him, but immediately reawakens.

(1607) Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Children of the Chapel): Jasper, a character in the play-within-the-play, pretends to be dead in Act Four in order
to meet his lover and help her escape in the coffin; however, the fake corpse remains hidden until he reveals himself as alive. See also Fake ghosts.

(c. 1609-12) Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, The Captain (King’s Men): In Act Three, a drunken Jacomo attacks Frederick for mocking his foolishness; Frederick falls down, apparently dead, and everyone grieves him but he rises unhurt once Jacomo is taken away.

(1611) William Shakespeare, Cymbeline (King’s Men): In Act Four, Imogen accidentally takes a fake death potion, and is presumed dead, though playgoers know she is only sleeping. Her friends comment that she looks asleep, not dead. See also Real corpses.

(1611) John Fletcher and John Shirley, The Night-walker (King’s Men): Upon false report of unchastity the night before her wedding, Maria faints and is thought dead, with no hint otherwise, but wakes up in her coffin at the end of Act Two. See also Fake ghosts.

(1611) Thomas Middleton, The Lady’s Tragedy (King’s Men): In Act Three, the Lady asks her lover Govianus to kill her to prevent the Tyrant from raping her, but he falls down instead. Thinking him “gone before me,” she kills herself, upon which he awakens from his swoon. See also Theatrical deaths, Lifelike corpses, and Real ghosts.

(c. 1612-13) John Webster, The White Devil (Queen Anne’s Men): In Act Five, Vittoria and Zanche shoot Flamineo and think him dead, but he arises, revealing that the pistols he gave them were not loaded. See also Real ghosts.

(c. 1612-13) Thomas Heywood, The Iron Age, part II (Queen Anne’s Men?) In Act Five, Synon seems to be dead in a battle, but then rises up unexpectedly. See also Real ghosts.

(c. 1616-19) John Fletcher, Nathan Field, and Philip Massinger, The Knight of Malta (King’s Men): In Act Four, Oriana awakens in a tomb from a fake death potion. Playgoers know she has been only sleeping.

(c. 1628-38) William Cartwright, The Siege (university drama?): In Act Five, Philanthus is tricked into pretending to be dead to win a widow’s love; when he arises from the coffin, wearing a sheet, his friends mock him as a ghost. See also Fake ghosts.

(c. 1632-36) Thomas Killigrew, The Prisoners (Queen Henrietta’s Men): In Act Four, Gallippus briefly pretends to be dead to elicit sympathy from the woman he has abducted.

Lifelike corpses (4) (I exclude necrophilia toward props, as in Middleton’s Revenger’s Tragedy.)

(c. 1603-4) William Shakespeare, The Tragedy of Othello, the Moor of Venice (King’s Men): In Act Five, Othello kills Desdemona and then comments on her lifelike appearance; she unexpectedly revives before dying once more.
(c. 1606) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of King Lear* (King’s Men): In Act Five, Cordelia is brought in, dead, but Lear thinks she looks alive even as he dies.

(1611) Thomas Middleton, *The Lady’s Tragedy* (King’s Men): In Act Five, the Tyrant has the Lady’s corpse painted to make it look alive to satisfy his necrophilia; Govianus, disguised as the painter, secretly uses poison in the paint to kill the Tyrant. See also **Theatrical deaths, Fake corpses**, and **Real ghosts**.

(c. 1621-23) Philip Massinger, *Duke of Milan* (King’s Men): In Act Five, Marcelia’s painted corpse fools her mad husband into thinking she is merely in a coma.

**Early Modern Ghost Plays**

**Frame ghosts (18)** (I include any ghosts in metatheatrical frames, including epilogues and prologues.)

(published 1559) Jasper Heywood, trans. Seneca’s *Troas* (university drama): *REED* indicates Latin performances at Trinity, Cambridge in 1551-52 and 1560-61; the original text does not stage any ghost, but Heywood’s English adaptation suggestively alters the play to stage the ghost of Achilles in the Prologue as a beholder of the coming action, which even a Latin version might have done.

(published 1560) Jasper Heywood, trans. Seneca’s *Thyestes* (university drama): At the beginning of the play, the ghost of Tantalus listens in expectation as the Fury Megara describes the play to come.


(published 1566) Thomas Nuce, trans. Pseudo-Seneca’s *Octavia* (university drama): *APGRD* indicates Latin performances at Christ Church, Oxford in 1588 and 1590-91; though English performances are speculative, at the beginning of Act 3 in both versions, the ghost of Agrippina describes the coming action with anticipation.

(published 1566) John Studley, trans. Seneca’s *Agamemnon* (university drama): The ghost of Thyestes opens the play with an extended speech about his excitement at the coming spectacle. *APGRD* indicates a performance in 1566, but gives little evidence.

(c. 1585-89) Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy* (Lord Strange’s Men?): The ghost of Andrea appears at three points in the play, including the Prologue, and comments metatheatrically on his desires for spectacle. See also **Theatrical deaths**.
Thomas Hughes, *The Misfortunes of Arthur* (Inns of Court): At the beginning of the play, the ghost of Gorlois describes the revenge he will “wreake.”

Anonymous, *The True Tragedie of Richard the Third* (Queen’s Players): The ghost of George, Duke of Clarence, calls for revenge in two Latin lines at the beginning of the Prologue.


Thomas Nashe, *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (court drama): The ghost in the Prologue functions as merely a comical impersonation of Will Sommers.

Anonymous, *The Tragedie of Caesar and Pompey* (university drama): The invisible ghost of Caesar watches Act 3 and comments on his powerlessness as a “shadow.”

Fulke Greville, *Alaham* (closet drama): At the beginning of the play, the ghost of an “old king of Ormus” summarizes the play to come and promises to “ruine” and “plague” his posterity.


William Alexander Stirling, *Alexandreaen Tragedy* (closet drama): For the first 256 lines of the play, the ghost of Alexander the Great relates his history, focusing on his own remorse rather than the coming play.

Ben Jonson, *Catiline his Conspiracy* (King’s Men): The ghost of Sylla gives a speech as a Prologue, focusing on summarizing and planning the play to come.

Jasper Fisher, *Fuimus Troes* (Magdalen, Oxford): The ghosts of Brennus and Camillus promise in the Prologue to “incite” and “inrage” their countrymen to revenge.

Ben Jonson, *Masque of Owls* (court drama): The ghost of Captain Cox, learned book collector and entertainer to the Queen, frames the masque as a reference to the history of royal entertainment at Kenilworth.

Thomas May, *Julia Agrippina* (public theater): The ghost of Caligula speaks a Prologue in which he at first declares he can no longer “performe” “mischief,” but at Megara’s request to “with thy contagious presence blast this roofe,” he agrees, describing his living kindred as “actors” who “must play their parts” at his instigation.
Real ghosts (32) (I include all staged ghosts. I do not distinguish, however, between ghosts seen by multiple characters and ghosts that are potentially hallucinations or dreams.)

(c. 1587-88) Robert Greene, *Alphonsus, King of Aragon* (Queen’s Men): Medea conjures the ghost of the oracle Calchas, who rises in a cardinal’s garment.

(c. 1591-92) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Richard the Third* (Lord Strange’s Men): In Act Five, ten ghosts appear to Richard and Richmond, speaking different messages to each man to encourage or discourage.


(1592) Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (Admiral’s Men): The demonic Mephistophiles conjures “spirits” of Alexander, his Paramour, and Helen for Faustus, but they never speak.

(1594) Anonymous, *Locrine* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men?): In Act Three, the ghost of Albanact enters twice; the first time no one sees him; the second time only the villain sees him. In Act Four, the ghost physically strikes another character in revenge. See also Fake corpses.

(1595) George Peele, *The Old Wives’ Tale* (Queen’s Players): After commenting throughout the play on characters’ lack of charity toward an unburied man, Jacke reveals his identity as the ghost of that man at the end of the play by leaping into his grave.

(c. 1599) Thomas Heywood, *The Second Part of King Edward the Fourth* (Lord Strange’s Men): The ghost of Friar Anselme enters and converses with the guilty Doctor Shaw, but remains invisible to an innocent messenger.

(c. 1598-99) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In Act Four, the ghost of Caesar haunts his murderer, Brutus.

(c. 1600-1) William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (Lord Chamberlain’s Men): In three appearances, the ghost of Hamlet’s father has a powerful physical effect that first makes the ghost’s spectators ghostly and then links playgoers’ perceptions to Hamlet’s by making the ghost invisible to the Queen.

(1600-1) John Marston, *Antonio and Mellida part II / Antonio’s Revenge* (Children of Paul’s): In Act Three, the ghost of Andrugio appears to his grieving son from his own tomb and reveals secrets, then visits his widow and “draw[s] the Curtaines” of her bed. The ghost also calls himself “spectator of reuenge” during a masque that turns violent.

(c. 1600-5) Anonymous, *Ieronimo, part I* (public theater?): Horatio and playgoers are the only ones to see Don Andrea’s ghost onstage.
(1606) William Shakespeare, *The Tragedy of Macbeth* (King’s Men): In Act Three, the ghost of Banquo appears to his murderer, Macbeth, at a banquet just as Macbeth mentions Banquo’s absence; no other characters can see the ghost.

(c. 1607-11) Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist’s Tragedy* (King’s Men?): The ghost of Montferrers appears in Act Two to call his son to revenge and in Act Five to condemn the villain. See also Fake ghosts.

(c. 1610-11) George Chapman, *The Revenge of Bussy D’Ambois* (Queen’s Revels): In Act Five, five ghosts provide Bussy with accurate information about current events before he even knows they are dead.

(1611) William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (King’s Men): In Act Three, the ghosts of his dead father, mother, and brothers appear to Posthumus in what he thinks is a dream, but they leave a tablet/book behind that confirms their reality. See also Fake corpses.

(1611) Thomas Middleton, *The Lady’s Tragedy* (King’s Men): In Act Four, the ghost of the Lady appears to her lover from her own tomb to ask him to rescue her corpse; subsequently, in Act Five, the ghost enters to join her corpse onstage. See also Theatrical deaths, Fake corpses, and Lifelike corpses.

(c. 1612-13) Thomas Heywood, *The Iron Age, Part II* (Queen Anne’s Men?): The ghosts of Hector and Agamemnon provide secret information about the past to Orestes and Aeneas, but remain invisible to Clytemnestra. See also Fake corpses.

(c. 1612-13) John Webster, *The White Devil* (Queen Anne’s Men): Silent ghosts appear to those who wish for their presence. The ghost of Isabella appears to her revenging brother in Act Four as if she is his hallucination. The ghost of Brachiano appears to Flamineo in Act Five. See also Fake corpses.

(c. 1612-19) Gervase Markham and William Sampson, *Herod and Antipater* (Red Bull): In Act Five, eight ghosts haunt Antipater, their murderer, as he sleeps; at his execution, the ghost of Salumith enters between Furies, invisible to everyone but Antipater.


(c. 1613-18) Thomas Goffe, *Orestes* (university drama): The ghost of Agamemnon appears to his son Orestes in Act Four to demand the “performance” of vengeance.

(1614) John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (King’s Men): In Act Five, the ghostly Echo of the Duchess likely appears onstage from her own tomb and speaks to Antonio and Delio in echo form, but they do not interpret her as a real presence. Antonio mentions seeing a vision for a moment, but dismisses its reality. See also Enacted statues.

(written c. 1626) William Hemings, *The Jew’s Tragedy* (possibly never performed): In Act Five, the ghost of his father appears to the increasingly insane Eleazer.

(c. 1624–25) Philip Massinger, *The Unnatural Combat* (King’s Men): In Act Five, the ghosts of Malefort’s son and the Lady haunt Malefort, their killer, with gestures and signs immediately before a “flash of lightning” kills him.

(c. 1625–26) J.W., *The Valiant Scot* (venue unknown): In Act Five, three ghosts haunt Wallace, who has promised and failed to avenge them, and who now claims they are lying or counterfeit ghosts.

(c. 1625–26) William Sampson, *The Vow-breaker* (venue unknown): Anne’s lover, who has killed himself, haunts her in revenge; in Act Two, she dismisses the ghost as unreal and representational, but in Act Three she finds that its effects are more powerful than she expects.

(1626) Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (King’s Men): In Act Five, the ghosts of two tortured senators, Rusticus and Sura, haunt the tyrant Domitian in what he tries to call merely a dream until he realizes that they have physically removed a statue. See also *Theatrical deaths*.

(c. 1629–32) Richard Brome, *The Queen’s Exchange* (King’s Men): In Act Three, six ghosts enter to music and dancing in order to prophesy success to Anthynus.

(c. 1634–36) Nathaniel Richards, *Messallina* (King’s Revels): Ghosts enter as a spectacle to haunt Messallina.

(c. 1634–38) John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom* (Cockpit and Red Bull): In Act One, George, knowing little of his birth and raised by a witch, uses her rod to call up the ghosts of his murdered parents, for whom he then seeks revenge.

(1642) Thomas Fuller, *Andronicus* (university drama): In Act Five, Andronicus dreams of and describes the ghost of Alexius, though no stage direction indicates whether or not the ghost appeared onstage.

**Fake ghosts** (19) (I exclude passing references to characters as ghostlike; only deliberate disguises or extended belief that a character is a ghost qualify.)

(c. 1589–90) John Lyly, *Love’s Metamorphosis* (Children of Paul’s): In Act Four, Protea supernaturally transforms onstage into the revenging ghost of Ulysses to rescue her beloved from a Siren.
(c. 1597-1604) Thomas Heywood, *The Fair Maid of the West, part I* (public theater): When in Act Four Besse sees her lover whom she thinks dead, she thinks him a ghost: she comments on the ghost’s reasons for revenge and her own resolve to take action in response.

(1607) Francis Beaumont, *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (Children of the Chapel): Jasper, a character in the play-within-the-play, pretends to be his own ghost in order to win the consent of his lover’s father to the match. See also Fake corpses.

(c.1607-8) John Mason, *The Turk* (venue unknown): Timoclea villainously disguises herself as the ghost of another character, Julia, whom characters and playgoers think dead, though Julia later appears alive.

(c. 1607-11) Cyril Tourneur, *The Atheist’s Tragedy* (King’s Men?): In two different scenes in Act Three, Castabella, Snuffe, and Sebastian believe the living Charlemont is a ghost only because they think he is dead (3.1 and 3.2). In Act Four, Snuffe comically disguises himself as “the Ghoast of olde Montferrers” for a tryst in a churchyard; when he leaves his “sheete,” “haire,” and “beard” behind, the hero Charlemont uses them to terrify D’Amville out of an attempted rape. See also Real ghosts.

(1611) John Fletcher and John Shirley, *The Night-walker* (King’s Men): Maria is thought dead. In Act Two, a thief caught in her house pretends to be her ghost; at the end of the scene, Maria accidentally impersonates her own ghost as she wakes up in her coffin. Maria appears as her own ghost to her argumentative friends in Acts Three and Five until they repent. See also Fake corpses.

(c. 1613) S.S. *The Honest Lawyer* (Queen Anne’s Men): In Act Five, a flash of gunpowder convinces a fearful onlooker that he sees a “spirit.”

(1617) John Fletcher, *The Mad Lover* (King’s Men): In Act Five, Chilax plays along when his delusional general, Memnon, thinks he is the ghost of Diocles, an old enemy.

(1619) Thomas Goffe, *The Courageous Turk* (Christ Church, Oxford): The ghosts of Hector and Achilles enter in Act One as a symbolic masque within a masque-within-the-play, serving as examples of the military glory that Schahin seeks to encourage in his king, Amurath. Schahin later disguises himself as the ghost of Orchanes, Amurath’s father, and appears to his king in Act Two. In each case, Schahin uses ghostly spectacle to “purge this disease” of Amurath’s lust and encourage him to seek glory once more.

(c. 1625-42) Lodowick Carlell, *The Fool would be a Favourite* (King’s Men): In Act Five, Philanthus disguises himself as his own ghost to convince Lucinda to switch her affections to his friend.

(c. 1626-31) Thomas Randolph, *The Drinking Academy* (university drama?): In Act Five, Shirke pretends to be the ghost of Lady Pecunia to sabotage her other suitors and help him acquire her wealth without even having to marry her.
(c. 1628-38) William Cartwright, *The Siege* (university drama?): In Act Five, Philostratus is tricked into pretending to be dead to win a widow’s love; when he arises from the coffin, wearing a sheet, his friends mock him as a ghost. See also **Fake corpses**.

(c. 1630-42) William Rider, *The Twins* (Salisbury Court): Carolo takes someone dressed in the clothes of Alphonso, whom he thinks he has killed, for Alphonso's ghost.

(c. 1632-39) Alexander Brome, *The Cunning Lovers* (Cockpit): Disguised as a magician, the Duchess’s lover Montecelso (thought dead) promises to cure her mournful madness through spectacle by raising his own ghost, played of course by himself.

(1633) Walter Montagu, *The Shepherd’s Paradise* (court drama): Fidamira pretends to be a ghost to deter a suitor, but the King falls in love with her otherworldly appearance.

(1636) Philip Massinger, *The Bashful Lover* (King’s Men): At her father’s instigation, Maria pretends to be a ghost in Act Four to test her lover’s repentance; they reconcile.

(c. 1637-38) William Berkeley, *The Lost Lady* (court drama): In Act Four, Milesia disguises herself as her own ghost to test her lover Lysicles, but her plot backfires as Lysicles obligingly takes revenge on Acanthe, who is also actually Milesia in disguise.


**Early Modern Statue Plays**

**Enacted statues (9)** (I include both fake disguises and real enacted statues, but exclude prop statues, as in Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger’s *The Virgin Martyr*, or offstage moving statues, as in William Cartwright’s *The Siege.*)

(c. 1599-1604) William Wager, *The History of the Trial of Chivalry* (venue unknown): Ferdinand, thought dead, pretends to be his own memorial statue, eliciting more sympathy from his haughty beloved, Katherine, than his actual self ever did.

(1603) Ben Jonson, *Sejanus* (King’s Men): In Act Five, a statue of Fortuna miraculously rejects an offering by moving; Sejanus angrily blasphemes the statue and soon falls from power.
(1611) William Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale* (King’s Men): In Act Five, a statue of the dead Hermione produces responses of both petrification and emotional softening in its onstage spectators as it comes to life.

(1613) Thomas Campion, *The Lord’s Masque* (court drama): Statues miraculously come to life and bring spectators into the dance as well.

(1614) John Webster, *The Duchess of Malfi* (King’s Men): In Act Four, Ferdinand’s display of the corpses, or rather wax figures, of the Duchess’s family both pain and strengthen her as she resists Ferdinand’s attempts to bring her to despair. I argue that the figures are played by actors, but they could be staged by dummies. See also Real ghosts.

(1624) Thomas Middleton, *A Game at Chess* (King’s Men): In Act Five, allegorical moving statues attempt to sexually entice the White Knight into idolatry.

(1632) Philip Massinger, *The City-Madam* (King’s Men): In Act Five, a spectacle of statues played by wronged men does not affect one guilty spectator, Luke, the way it affects two guilty women whom he has also deceived; he admits his fault only once they reveal themselves as alive.

(c. 1637-1640) John Shirley, *St. Patrick for Ireland* (Dublin): Statue transformations catalyze moral change in statues themselves; Dichu’s miraculous petrification provokes his repentance toward God, and his two sons’ mischievous disguise as idols at first aids their sexual potency and their deceptions of others, but as St. Patrick converts others, the danger of the statue disguise softens the brothers’ hearts with the weakness and humility of exhaustion.

(1632) Thomas Randolph, *The Jealous Lovers* (Trinity, Cambridge): In Act Five, a statue of Hymen miraculously turns away from blessing the marriage of a couple who, unknowingly, are siblings.
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