Exquisite Corpses: Fantasies of Necrophilia in Early Modern English Drama

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Abstract

EXQUISITE CORPSES: FANTASIES OF NECROPHILIA
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA

by

LINDA K. NEIBERG

Adviser: Professor Mario DiGangi

My dissertation examines representations of necrophilia in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama. From the 1580s, when London’s theatres began to flourish, until their closure by Parliament in 1642, necrophilia was deployed as a dramatic device in a remarkable number of plays. Exquisite Corpses analyzes the relationship between the English Reformation’s abolition of the doctrine of Purgatory and obsequies for the dead, and the frequent, often eroticized representations of dead bodies in the commercial theatre. Despite Protestant iconoclasm, “the cult of the cadaver,” as Eamon Duffy refers to it, was not readily relinquished and remained indelible in the cultural imagination. My project expands the definition of necrophilia beyond sexual intercourse with corpses, and builds on current uses of the word by early modern scholars to include all eroticism that occurs within the vicinity of death and dead bodies in English Renaissance drama, all eroticism that cannot be understood without considering the role death plays in its formulation.

During this same period, human dissections were publically performed more frequently and anatomical discoveries were published for lay as well as professional audiences. Outbreaks of the plague and public executions likewise kept the dead in intimate proximity to the living. I argue that the confluence of religious, anatomical, and punitive discourses contributed significantly to the eroticized depictions of corpses in early modern drama. Central to this study is my observation that the sex/death nexus is about the flesh. As theologians and polemicists
argued, lust is born in, expressed through, and ultimately corrupts the flesh; similarly, many discourses concerned with what “dead” meant posited that death was defined by the decay of the flesh. In other words, flesh conjoins the erotic and the thanatotic. Thus, to understand the eroticization of corpses, and the ways in which corpses influenced the shaping of erotic subjectivities, is to better understand how early moderns conceived of eroticism, death, and mortal flesh. To demonstrate my argument, I use a cultural historicist approach underpinned by psychoanalytic and gender theories and analyze plays that illustrate particularly well the conjunctions between sex and death and their relationship to subject formation. My intervention opens promising new models for understanding the reciprocal relationship between death and erotic subjectivity. As the first book-length study on necrophilia in early modern drama, it foregrounds several dramas that interrogate key cultural concerns about intimacies between the living and the dead.
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I also thank Susan Zimmerman, whose book on corpses and Shakespeare’s theatre inspired and underpins my own study. A portion of chapter 5 will appear in Shakespeare Studies in Fall 2013 and Susan’s scrupulous editorial eye sliced through miles of extraneous matter to uncover and reshape material worthy to be published. Under her guidance, I have started to recalibrate how I read and write.

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CHAPTER 1:
The Dead Body Speaks: Or, Cracking Open a Cold One

The Tyrant: How pleasing art thou to us even in death!
I love thee yet, above all women living,
And shall do sev’n year hence.

—Thomas Middleton

Special Agent Prentiss: The victims are just your type: blonde hair, blue skin

Ivan Bakunas: I don’t know these women, OK? You have the wrong—
Detective Fullwood: —the wrong necrophile?!
Ivan: You think I’m the only guy in town who likes to crack open a cold one?

—Criminal Minds

A slender female cadaver with her back muscles sliced in layers and extended heavenward like wings. The corpse of a tall, stout male with sections of his body carved and pulled out to resemble drawers. The cadaver of a well-toned female, arched in yoga bridge pose above a mirrored platform that reflects her genitals (fig. 1). As I studied the full-body plastinates in Gunther von Hagens’s traveling extravaganza, Body Worlds 2, I felt a pronounced kinship between my voyeuristic self and audiences in early modern anatomy theatres, where such spectacles originated. Indeed, the plastinate of a woman, five months pregnant, with her womb cut open to reveal her unborn fetus, recalls the frontispiece to Andreas Vesalius’s landmark anatomical treatise (figs. 2 and 3). I was struck, too, by the viscerality with which lines I often read resonated anew: Vindice’s “Does every proud and self-affecting dame / Camphor her face

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1 Please see The Second Maiden’s Tragedy; (5.2.24-6). The Tyrant speaks these lines as he surveys the disinterred corpse of The Lady, who has just been cosmeticized to give her the illusion of life that The Tyrant seeks, so that he can carry out the sexual consummation she had denied him in life.

2 In episode 14 from season 4 of the procedural crime drama, Criminal Minds, the FBI’s Behavioral Analysis Unit focuses on identifying and apprehending an Unknown Subject (“unsub”), whose victims, the pathologist concludes, are already dead when he has sex with them. In this scene, Detective Fullwood of the local police department and Special Agent Emily Prentiss of the BAU question a suspect who turns out not to be the “unsub,” but nonetheless is a man who practices necrophilia.

3 Plastination is a process of embalming developed by von Hagens whereby, he writes, “all body fluids and soluble fats” are replaced by a mixture of plastinates. A plastinate is the cadaver that has undergone this process. Specimens are obtained from people who have registered in the project’s body donation program.

4 “The Angel Woman,” “The Drawer Man,” “The Yoga Lady,” and “The Pregnant Woman” are among over two dozen specimens in Body Worlds 2. Vesalius’s De Humani Corporis Fabrica was published in Basel 1543 and in England in 1545.
for this, and grieve her maker / In sinful baths of milk…/ …all for this?"\(^5\), and Leontes’s “Oh, thus she stood, / Even with such life of majesty—warm life, / As now it coldly stands—when first I wooed her?"\(^6\) As I exited the crowded exhibition hall, I surveyed once more this


\(^5\) Thomas Middleton (c. 1608), *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (3.5.83-6).
\(^6\) William Shakespeare (c. 1611), *The Winter’s Tale* (5.3.34-6).
Fig. 2. The Pregnant Woman. Gunther von Hagens. 
*Body Worlds* 2. (Heidelberg: The Institute for 
Plastination, 2005; plastinated cadaver). 

Fig. 3. Frontispiece. *De Humani Corporis Fabrica*. Andreas Vesalius. (Basel, 1543; 
congregation of the living and the dead. How odd, it seemed, that, in a culture where we relegate the dying and dead into the hands of physicians and morticians, an exposition like *Body Worlds* could draw capacity crowds.7

Yet, this scene is not incongruous with our death-bed settings and mortuary practices. In fact, it underscores our simultaneous dread and fascination with images that graphically herald our own execrable end. Our society might be opting increasingly for hospice centers, closed-casket funerals, and cremation, but we concurrently are riveted by forensic television dramas such as *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation* and its spinoffs, *Bones*, and *Criminal Minds*, reality programs like *Forensic Files* that feature autopsies, and popular sex-slasher films such as the *Saw* series. It is as if the more we marginalize death from our immediate physical and psychic spheres, the more we crave to see the grotesque materiality we try so hard to push aside. In his important anthropological study, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1957), Georges Bataille explains this imbrication of revulsion and allure as arising from our condition as individuated, “discontinuous beings” who “yearn for our lost continuity” (15). “Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last,” he asserts, “there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is” (15). We can only, however, fully reconnect with continuity through our own deaths, and that compels us to surrender the personhood to which we have become so deeply attached. As Bataille cogently sums up, “[o]n the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates and disturbs us profoundly” (45).

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7 Von Hagens’ first show, *Body Worlds*, debuted in 1995 and has been followed by at least six exhibitions, each with its own theme and phalanx of plastinates. The show unveiled in 2008, *Body Worlds & the Mirror of Time*, features a male and female cadaver copulating (fig. 4), and in May 2010, von Hagens began a mail order service that offers plastinated human or animal body parts (e.g. an organ, or a slice from an appendage). The seventh exhibition, *Body Worlds and the Cycle of Life* opened in Chicago in 2011. According to statistics on the *Body Worlds* website, more than 37 million people worldwide have attended these exhibitions.
Humans discovered very early in their history, though, that erotic desire allows, at least, for a “partial dissolution of the person” (17). Specifically, Bataille argues, erotic desire is the only state outside of death in which the boundaries of discontinuity temporarily rupture into continuity. And while this state can have spiritual as well as emotional expression, these modes most often derive from and are expressed through material sensuality, from the very materiality that marks our individuation (19). Central to his theory is the claim that “[t]he whole business of eroticism is to destroy the self-contained character of the participants as they are in their normal lives” (17). Leo Bersani describes sexual encounters in similar terms when he writes “[i]t is possible to think of the sexual as, precisely, moving between a hyperbolic sense of self and a loss of all consciousness of self” (218). According to Bersani, even as heteronormative patriarchal societies identify sex as a reiteration of stratified power relations that preserve the self (in the roles of an active, dominant partner and a passive, subordinate partner), the sexual encounter as reread through sodomitical sex in the early years of the AIDS crisis reminds us that sex momentarily buries this “proud subjectivity” to which we cling (222). Citing Bataille’s theory,
Bersani argues that the allure society bestows on phallocentric sex, “tempt[s] [us] to deny the perhaps equally strong appeal of powerlessness, of the loss of control” (217). The rectum-as-grave metaphor vividly reminds us of the shattering of the self that is inherent in all human sexual acts (218; 222). Just as the assertion of subjectivity through sexual acts holds allure, so too can its surrender via the most intimate of material human convergences.

As I suggested above, our modern entertainments abound with intertwinings of eroticism and death. Of course, the interplay of eros and thanatos in art and literature is virtually uninterrupted from antiquity through the present, though each period shapes that encounter according to its own particular contexts. The early modern English theatre—a secular enterprise, yet one that routinely engages with theological debates—effusively links contemporaneous anxieties about death and its materiality with the artistic and frequently eroticized representations of dead bodies. And while these eroticized encounters with the dead grow out of a rich tradition of similar representations in medieval poems, romances, and civic religious dramas—and thus bear notable continuities with these predecessors—they also speak in registers keenly attuned to revised religious doctrines, anatomical discoveries and the body’s locus as a site of subject construction, and Tudor-Stuart political strife. My project is concerned specifically with representations in Elizabethan and Jacobean drama of necrophilia. From the 1580s, when early

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8 The 1559 Proclamation Prohibiting Unlicensed Interludes and Plays, Especially on Religion and Policy forbade plays “wherein…matters of religion…shall be handled or treated, being no meet matters to be written or treated upon but by men of authority, learning, and wisdom, nor to be handled before any audience but of grave and discreet persons…” (Kinney 602). In effect, the state established a secular theatre. The last recorded performance of the York cycle was in 1569, and the Chester, Wakefield, and Coventry cycles were officially suppressed in the 1570s (though there is evidence that the Chester plays were performed as late as 1609). Despite the state’s proclamation, early modern playwrights drew religious issues and symbols into their dramas. Moreover, as many of the period’s antitheatricalists inveighed, the theatre’s seductive powers were akin to those of idaltrous Catholic rituals. Religious matters were still palpably and thematically part of drama. Indeed, the theatre, as a commercial enterprise, capitalized on the reconceptualizations of devotion—in part, to build up a paying, loyal audience. Though secular in subject matter and performance space, drama in early modern London was often vigorously engaged with religion. See Jane Hwang Degenhardt and Elizabeth Williamson’s “Introduction,” to their edited collection, Religion and Drama in Early Modern England: The Performance of Religion on the Renaissance Stage (2011).
modern London theatre began to flourish, until Parliament’s closure of the theatres in 1642, necrophilia was deployed as a dramatic device in a remarkable number and range of plays. Indeed, this study’s governing question is why performances of and references to necrophilia appear so frequently on the post-Reformation English stage.

My dissertation examines the relationship between the English Reformation’s abolition of the doctrine of Purgatory and obsequies for the dead, and the frequent, often eroticized representations of dead bodies in the commercial theatre. By nullifying practices that were aimed at remembering and venerating the dead, reformers tried to invalidate traditional beliefs in the communion between the living and the dead. The Church of England abolished Purgatory in 1563, via The Thirty Nine Articles of the Church of England, though Purgatory’s existence had been hotly debated by reformers since the 1530s. The 1552 edition of The Book of Common Prayer revised burial practices so that the minister now was instructed to speak of the corpse in the third-person rather than to it in the second-person, and face away from, rather than towards, the corpse at interment. Likewise abolished were practices such as extreme unction, kissing the corpse, lighting candles around it, and intercessory prayers and masses for the dead. Protestant iconoclasm spurred these efforts to erase the dead from world of the living, and the new religion quickly gained many followers (Duffy 475). However, as Eamon Duffy points out, this “cult of the cadaver” was not readily relinquished and remained indelible to the cultural imagination (307).

I argue that, as the corpse is erased from official liturgies and religious practices, it resurfaces frequently—and often quite spectacularly—on the stage. Of course, the corpse never really went away. Theological debates over the place of the dead were complicated by continued outbreaks of the plague and gruesome public executions, which literally scattered the dead
amongst the living. Moreover, the growing popularity of public anatomical dissections and the publication of medical texts aimed at both the professional and lay public further rendered the corpse a vivid and unforgettable part of everyday life. It is out of this tension between efforts to erase the dead and factors which accentuate the continued presence of the dead that necrophilia becomes such a popular stage device.

The term *necrophilia* first appears in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1892 where it is defined as one of the forms of psychopathic sexuality, and it continues to be interpreted in this pathologizing context. While the term enters the English language as a narrowly-defined attraction to corpses, I broaden our understanding of it to include all eroticism that occurs in the vicinity of death and dead bodies within early modern drama—all eroticism that cannot be understood without considering the role death plays in its formulation. Building on current usages of the term *necrophilia* in early modern scholarship, I demonstrate that early modern notions about the phenomenon of necrophilia are not limited to sexual intercourse with corpses, but include eroticized language about a dying or dead person and seduction scenes in the presence of corpses and in graveyards. Reading necrophilia in these broader manifestations

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9 Dany Nobus remarks that the term is thought to have been coined by Joseph Guislain, “a Belgian alienist,” in his 1850 lecture on diseases of the mind (Nobus 175). Jules Monneret refers to this lecture in his *Treatise on General Pathology* (1861), purportedly the first appearance of the word *necrophilia* in print (Nobus 174-75). Subsequently, psychiatrist Richard von Krafft-Ebing employed this term in his 1886 sexological treatise, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, and, in 1973, psychologist and philosopher Erich Fromm identified two types of necrophilia in his study, *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness.*

10 Insightful articles by Karin S. Coddon, “‘For Show or Useless Property’: Necrophilia and *The Revenger’s Tragedy*” (1994), Scott Dudley, “Conferring with the Dead: Necrophilia and Nostalgia in the Seventeenth Century” (1999), and Richard Grinnell, “‘And Love Thee After’: Necrophilia on the Jacobean Stage” (2002), use the term “necrophilia” to analyze erotic attraction to and interaction with the dead by the living in a few of the period’s major plays, most notably *The Revenger’s Tragedy.*

11 I likewise aim to quell some of the criticism leveled at early modern scholars who appropriate and redeploy this word. For instance, in his essay, “‘I covet your skull’: Death and Desire in *Hamlet,*” Graham Holderness lauds Karin Coddon’s analysis of *The Revenger’s Tragedy,* but contends that describing the Duke’s “desire for the dead as ‘necrophilia’ is potentially misleading,” since the Duke is unaware that the body he tries to have sex with is dead (233). He suggests that Coddon has strayed from a solely *symbolic* interpretation of the term, by reiterating Erich Fromm’s twentieth-century clinical definition. Holderness’s cautionary note may be well-intended, but it underscores how weighted with modernist assumptions the term *necrophilia* is—and therefore how necessary it is to
acknowledges not only the fluid boundaries of Renaissance conceptions of eroticism, but likewise the consonance between theological, erotic, and thanatotic discourses, which becomes so heightened during this particular period in England’s history.

In Petrarch’s poems, which had become popular sources for imitation and inspiration amongst London’s poets and dramatists, the bereft lover imagined the dead Laura to be waiting for him in heaven. Death had interrupted, but not severed their bond and the beloved continued to serve as an object of erotic ardor in anticipation of the couple’s heavenly reunion. However, in post-Reformation England, this conceptual framework was no longer viable because the dead were no longer to be thought of as an absent presence. What remained present, though, was the corpse of the beloved. As many dramas throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods show, erotic love was redirected away from the dead beloved in heaven to the corpse that remained on earth. Plays such as Phillip Massinger’s The Duke of Milan, George Chapman’s The Widow’s Tears, Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker’s The Bloody Banquet, and John Ford’s ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore offer particularly striking examples of the eroticization of the corpse. The dead body, a focal point for reformed rites and doctrines, is also invoked by the theatre where its seductive power symbolizes a refusal of the dead to go away and of the living to completely release them. If reformers sought to establish a clear boundary demarcating the world of the dead from that of the living, the theatre offered ample counternarratives to this effort.

I thank Martin Elsky and Tanya Pollard for suggesting the importance of Petrarchan discourses of the dead beloved to my project. Petrarch’s eroticization of Laura strikes an important cord with post-Reformation erotic dramatizations of the dead, albeit one that is markedly different from them. Genre presents this distinction, in part, because the physicality of acting heightens the erotic elements in a work of literature. Ramie Targoff points out in her essay on posthumous love that post-Reformation imitations of Petrarch’s poems “reflect a profound rethinking of the relationship between love and death” (616-17). She argues that, unlike Petrarch’s examples, which show love transcending death, post-Reformation poems, such as those by Wyatt, illustrate “non-transcendent love,” echoing the theological turn away from the dead (630). Drama, though, shows how sexual love was often imagined to transcend death, specifically in a material sense, as exemplified by the eroticization of corpses in this very physical medium.
Given the prevalence in Londoners’ daily lives of death, corpses, and the promulgation of revisions to how the dead and their corpses were to be regarded by the living, it comes as no surprise that dying and dead bodies figure so significantly in early modern dramatic works. While my chapters elucidate this connection, the deeper concern of my project is to account for some of the specifically erotic ways in which corpses are dramatized on the Elizabethan and Jacobean stage. Of course, the sex/death nexus is common throughout western literature, but during the roughly seventy years that the commercial theatre in London thrived, it appears to have been an especially vivid and often-used feature.13

Valerie Traub’s argument about the construction of desire offers a useful starting point for my analysis of the construction of erotic desire in relationship to corpses. She observes that “sexuality has no inherent meaning [and that] our bodies, our subjectivities, our desires and anxieties, are constituted by social processes…And yet, sexuality is not a mere effect of cultural determinations. Every infant is born with polymorphous ‘desires’—how those desires are organized, regulated, incited, and disciplined is the province of culture” (7, emphases mine).14 In other words, we are all born with some measure of inherent desires, which are significantly added to and shaped by cultural factors. The cultural factors relevant for my project occur at the intersections between the commercial theatre and contemporaneous beliefs and practices about the dead. To Traub’s question, “[w]hat are the modalities of desire available to early modern subjects,” I add the response my own study is concerned with: dead bodies and the period’s

13 In his brilliant study, Death, Desire and Loss in Western Culture, Jonathan Dollimore observes that “[t]he seductiveness of the idea of the death of the self has always been a part of Western individualism,” an idea that resonates with Bataille’s thoughts about continuity versus discontinuity (xxi). In describing the connections Western culture has made between sex and death, Dollimore also notes that “the strange dynamic which, in Western culture, binds death into desire is not the product of a marginal pathological imagination, but crucial in the formation of that culture” (xii). Thus, when he writes that “the Renaissance was…when eros and thanatos began to be associated in disturbing new ways,” he calls attention to the phenomenon that, in the early modern period, the sex/death nexus, always at work in some measure throughout Western history, became especially charged and foregrounded in this period’s written and visual works (62). Indeed, this nexus became an important site for subject formation.
14 Please see Traub’s provocative study, Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama.
shifting discourses about them (5-6). While Traub brilliantly tends to the relationship between early modern conceptions of gender and their relationship to the shaping of erotic identities—and particularly the ways in which male anxieties about female sexuality were marshaled in an effort to fix female sexuality as something onto which male sexual identity could be developed and asserted—her focus is on gender construction as it relates to the fashioning of erotic subjectivity. My analysis also addresses the role gender plays in shaping erotic subjectivities; however, it explores new territory in early modern gender and sexuality studies by examining the role the corpse plays in shaping early modern erotic subjectivities.

Foremost, necrophiliac attachment in the early modern imagination signifies loss; but, as my project shall show, it also signifies production. In their “Introduction” to Dead Lovers: Erotic Bonds and the Study of Premodern Europe, Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken assert that “[t]he dead lover confronts us with the possibility that all desire is founded on lack, that cultural production is always a means of substitution, prosthesis, or fetishization, and that what we call our ‘selves’ is incomprehensible without reference to an other both present and absent, ineluctable and yet lost” (1). The eroticized corpse is indicative of loss of a beloved object and of the subjectivities that had been constructed in relationship to it. We see this response at work in plays such as Tamburlaine the Great II, where Tamburlaine refuses to surrender the corpse of his wife for burial and instead has it embalmed and placed in a portable mausoleum that he takes with him in his remaining military battles, and The Second Maiden’s Tragedy—one of the period’s most flagrantly necrophiliac plays—in which The Tyrant orders The Lady’s corpse exhumed and cosmeticized so that he can perform the consummation she denied him in life. I thus concur with Dufallo and McCracken’s idea that the subject substitutes the dead lover for the vanished living lover in a move that points up the continuation of desire in the face of (and
sometimes despite) death. However, I believe that the corpse also produces desire, which underscores its constitutive capacity alongside, and possibly even because it signifies erasure. Thus, in Chapman’s *The Widow’s Tears* and John Fletcher’s *The Faithful Shepherdess* the (respective) heroines, Cynthia and Clorin, construct erotic agency in response to their husbands’ corpses, objects that initially signified loss, yet became sources for structuring erotic subjectivities. As this project shall elaborate, the corpse is thus dramatized as a site of desire that embodies ideas about loss as well as production and creation.

That this attachment to the dead body takes on an *erotic* form is not surprising when one considers Protestant iconophobia and its relationship to reformers’ efforts to (re)define the meaning of “dead.” In her analysis of the *Homily Against Peril of Idolatry* (1563), in which both religious reformers and the monarchy underscored the sinful and offensive nature of idol worship, Susan Zimmerman notes that the rhetorical thrust of the homily’s message is achieved by explicitly and repeatedly equating the idol with the corpse. Just as the corpse is bereft of animating soul—and thus “dead as stocks and stones”—so too is the idol. Both are “insentient elements,” devoid of spirit and thus divine spirituality (*Early Modern Corpse* 52). To anthropomorphize a religious idol, such as a saint’s image or the crucifix, or the dead body as if it still possessed elements of a person’s soul, violated the second commandment against creating and worshipping false idols. By underscoring the utter deadness of idols and corpses, the homily sought to dispel the central mystery of Christianity: the incarnation of the divine, and “the centrality of [Christ’s] body to the redemptive sacrifice” (Zimmerman 47). Countering Catholic claims that divine mystery became understandable and effective through materiality, the Protestant homilist sought to “harden the distinction between body and spirit in order to emphasize the differences between the Deity and His subjects. Thus the body is described in
virtual opposition to the soul, and the bodily properties that make visual representation possible—de-animated materiality and externality—are ‘dead’” (47). Zimmerman notes, moreover, that “[h]omage to idols was thought to have a strongly erotic dimension as well, and Protestant reformers were quick to exploit the exegetical tradition that connected the worship of false gods to lustful appetite” (26). In other words, since its materiality is the central characteristic of an idol, idolatry places excessive significance on the body and thus invites lustful adoration of corporeality (26). In fact, the homily points out that “the worshipping of Images is numbed amongst the works of the flesh.” That early modern preoccupations with the dead body often had a pronounced erotic dimension appears in part to be a natural response, not only in the Bataillessque quest for lost continuity, but as a condition endemic to a culture that continues to place importance on materiality despite top-down efforts to suppress this impulse.

Additionally, it becomes apparent in many of these plays that the aura of death, notably the presence of a dying person or corpse, can produce and amplify erotic desire. As my study demonstrates, death in early modern plays was often dramatized as elemental to the production of erotic desire. In localizing Bataille’s idea that “the idea of death may play a part in setting sensuality in motion,” I argue that death and dead bodies figure significantly in the production and expression of erotic feeling and that this mortally-inflected eroticism plays a significant role in the shaping of erotic subjectivities (107). In fact, Valerie Traub’s remark that “Desire is always on the move” acquires a somewhat epigrammatic quality for these mortally-centered encounters (Traub “Desire on the Move”). Desire moves through and is moved by death, is kept in perpetual motion via the corpse and its morbid surroundings. In sum, I shall explore how

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15 This quotation is taken from an interview conducted by Christopher Matthews on April 16, 2001 at the University of Michigan with Valerie Traub and Elizabeth Wingrove. Titled “Desire on the Move: A Conversation with Valerie Traub and Elizabeth Wingrove,” the interview can be found online at: http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?cc=mfsfront;c=mfsfront;idno=ark5583.0015.001;rgn=main;view=text;xc=1;g=mfsg.
death and the dead body shape early modern conceptions and depictions of eroticism, and more generally, to see how the stage was a space where polymorphous eroticisms became legible.

**Theorizing the Corpse: a foundation for necro-erotic signification**

“The most violent thing of all for us is death,” Bataille pointedly remarks, “which jerks us out of a tenacious obsession with the lastingness of our discontinuous beings” (16). Hence we regard the corpse—the utmost signifier for death—with fear and revulsion. “That nauseous, rank and heaving matter, frightful to look upon, a ferment of life, teeming with worms, grubs and eggs” is the very image of one’s destiny and therefore abhorrent (Bataille 56-7). At the same time that the corpse is emblematic of the annihilation of individuated identity, it also is the locus of fascination, not least because the consumption and evacuation of necrotic matter by worms is indicative of fecundity and renewal. As death devours life, it simultaneously (re)produces it in a grotesque transgression of the boundaries we have erected to distance ourselves from the horrors of putrefaction. Citing a pronouncement attributed to Augustine that man is born between feces and urine, Bataille explains that the nausea provoked by the corpse is akin to our revulsion at human waste. Specifically, the ability of the corpse to arouse nausea and attraction is predicated on this proximity of sexual organs and egresses of waste: “[t]he sexual channels are also the body’s sewers.” We connect the shamefulness often associated with sensuality with excreta, urine, and menstrual blood—substances that are themselves linked by the feelings of shame, horror, and arousal directed at this bodily region (57-8). Consequently, waste, regeneration, and sexuality, as well as the ways in which the material body is read in all its manifestations, are always already interconnected in our psyches. In his recent study, *Playing Dirty: Sexuality and Waste in Early Modern Comedy* (2011), Will Stockton makes a similar claim. Writing about early modern anal erotics, he notes that “the fundament frequently figure[s] in the Renaissance
and psychoanalytic morphologies as a feminine seat of generation, a seat that is also potentially a threat to life, or a grave” (xix). It is this logic of duality, here associated with the fundament, which I apply to reading the role of the corpse in shaping early modern sexual subjectivities.

In addition to Bataille’s anthropological analysis of the intrinsic relationship between eroticism and death, my project is informed by the psychoanalytic theories of Julia Kristeva and the poststructuralist philosophy of Judith Butler. Kristeva’s theory of abjection is particularly useful and engages productively with Bataille’s work. In *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (1982), Kristeva identifies the abject as that which repels yet fascinates the subject, but which the subject feels compelled to reject because it would destabilize the subject’s identity. To invoke Bataille, the abject can annihilate the subject’s individuated beingness. Abjection is caused by “what disturbs identity, system, order” (Kristeva 4). It is the prediscursive condition that signifies indeterminate being. Moreover, in Kristeva’s formulation, “the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything…[and thus] is the utmost of abjection” (3–4). In words that resonate with one of Bataille’s core ideas, she writes, “refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live” (3). Like Bataille’s discontinuous being, Kristeva’s subject recalls “the want,” the rejection and subsequent deferment of which is necessary to preserve the subject’s existence (5). *Want* signifies a loss, an emptiness that spurs the creation of individuation. In psychoanalytic terms, *want* originates in the infant’s separation from its mother, its violent transition from “a state of indifferentiation to one of discretion (subject/object)” (32). Thenceforth, in the interest of self-preservation, the prior site of indistinction is what the individual tries to repress in order to preserve its self. In other words, “all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded” (5). The abject, even as it is reviled and rejected by the subject, arouses desire in the
subject—a yearning for lost continuity—and is the core of the dialectic between the symbolic space of subjecthood and the pre-symbolic space of originary completeness.

Importantly, Kristeva cites the etymology of the word cadaver, “cadere, to fall” and aptly links it with her thesis on subjectivity and abjection (3). To fall, according to Kristeva’s speculations on abjection, would be to sink back into a pre-linguistic existence—Lacan’s Real—before awareness of a discrete self has developed. The “Real” is a chaotic world because it is not linguistically ordered; instead, it is characterized by inner emotions and physical needs indistinguishable from the outer material world. The linguistic system creates a semblance of order for the subject; yet, the threat of the Real, of being reclaimed by the Real pre-linguistic chaos, remains and the corpse is the foremost reminder of this unindividuated condition (1-8; 12-15). As Kristeva asserts, “from its place of banishment, the abject does not cease challenging its master” (2). The subject yearns for the want, yet banishes it in order to exist. Concurrently, the cadaver, “the image of [human] destiny,” threatens the borders of discontinuity at the same time that its feasting worms suggest life within death—the fecundity inherent to continuity (Bataille 44). This tension between revulsion and fascination, the dead and the living—which is recurrent throughout human history—becomes quite pronounced in English Renaissance culture. Playwrights dramatized these tensions and transformed the commercial theatre, however knowingly or unwittingly, into a space where the abject regularly threatened to move from the margins to center stage.

Judith Butler’s work on bodies and power is likewise illuminating for my dissertation. Central to this project is my claim that the corpse is a site on which contemporaneous discourses of power are inscribed. Indeed, attempts to control the body of the dying or the dead in many of the period’s plays may be read as efforts to assert, thwart, or appropriate agency and subjectivity.
In post-Reformation England, dead bodies are being redefined along theological, cultural, and scientific lines and thus become intensely contested territories. In *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of “Sex,”* Butler offers a useful starting point for thinking about the early modern body, particularly with regard to how cultural forces (re)shaped it. ‘Materiality,’ she writes, “[is] the effect of power, as power’s most productive effect” (2). She provocatively asks, “What are the constraints by which bodies are materialized as ‘sexed’ and how are we to understand the ‘matter’ of sex and of bodies more generally, as the repeated and violent circumscription of cultural intelligibility” (xi-xii)? In early modern England, efforts to define gender, to render it legible according to prescribed top-down definitions, included sumptuary laws that governed sartorial matters not only by class, but by sex, and anatomical descriptions that outlined the equal but distinct roles of males and females in reproduction. However, these efforts to fix gender identity and roles were repeatedly challenged by the all-male cross-dressed theatre, anatomical discoveries that gradually overturned the one-sex model, and a female monarch who very consciously fashioned herself as prince of her realm and refused marriage. Moreover, Reformation ideology attempted to redefine the corpse as utterly and completely dead, which proved rather difficult to do particularly because, via decay, the corpse remained embarrassingly animate. In society’s efforts to firmly define aspects of materiality, materiality itself routinely challenged these constraints.

Also, unlike Bataille and Kristeva, who locate continuity and abjection outside the realm of individuated subjectivity (though always in intimate proximity to it), Butler argues “the abjected outside…is after all, ‘inside’ the subject as its own founding repudiation” (3). As anatomical dissections and the ubiquity of corpses in daily life revealed to early moderns, death is already inside us, waiting to eat its way out. The corpse evaded fixity in cultural lexicons and
became—especially in the theatre—a crucial site on and through which identity (especially as it was linked with the formulation of subject and object positions) could be (re)fashioned. Paradoxically, then, the corpse helps fashion identity.

Of course, in *Bodies that Matter*, Butler’s focus is on the living body; yet, there are places where her speculations about bodies may be opened up to theorizations about the dead body—particularly her assertions that the body becomes materialized through discursive practices and that constructivism does not foreclose agency (3-9). As the examples in the opening section of this chapter point up, the dead body, too, becomes materialized via discursive practices and can either be an agent or the object of an agent. As an agent, it performs its own dematerialization and reconstitution into new matter and does so regardless of how much the living have intervened in the corpse’s material preservation; its activity resists cultural and scientific efforts to conclusively define what it means to be dead; it attracts theatre, museum, television, and cinema audiences and, together with event organizers, is an agent of box office profits. It triggers fear, repugnance, adoration, love, and erotic attachment. As the object of an agent, it is displayed and described in ways that it can neither acquiesce to nor resist; it is materially and psychically marginalized from the domain of the living (though it can never be entirely forgotten by the living). The corpse’s complex, discursive role as both active subject and passive object is underscored by Butler’s contention that:

> [t]he body implies mortality, vulnerability, agency: the skin and the flesh expose us to the gaze of others but also to touch and violence. The body can be the agency and instrument of all these as well, or the site where ‘doing’ and ‘being done to’ become equivocal. Although we struggle for rights over our own bodies, the very bodies for which we struggle are never quite ever only our own. (*Undoing Gender* 21)

There is agency in mutability. Indeed, Butler’s observation emphasizes that agency is always in flux and that the body itself is the site of negotiation over identity and subjectivity. Since
autonomy can neither be assured nor fixed, the contest over agency is always at work through the discursive practices of language, physical and psychic violence. So, even as the corpse is being (re)defined, acted upon, or performed by a subject or group of subjects, it also acts as agent in that it continues to do a variety of things that reiterate its role as corpse and positions the living as those who must grapple with the corpse’s meanings.

In modern western culture, regulatory norms try to fix the dead body; yet the corpse, via putrefaction and regeneration, defies this effort to fix, to contain. As Bataille points out, we contain dead bodies in graves and coffins not because we believe they will actually pursue us, but because we want to hide their grotesque material activity from our eyes and psyches. The corpse thus has the capacity for agency because, first, it is still doing something despite the fact that it is “dead” and, second, because we read putrefaction as ongoing activity and thus have invested the corpse with an agency beyond our control. Like Kristeva, Butler stresses the role of abjection in constructing subjectivity. She describes the abject as signifying “‘unlivable’ and ‘uninhabitable’ zones of social life” (Bodies that Matter 3). “This zone of uninhabitability,” she elaborates, “will constitute the defining limit of the subject’s domain; it will constitute that site of dreaded identification against which—and by virtue of which—the domain of the subject will circumscribe its own claim to autonomy and life” (3). If abject zones were thought to be entirely free of agency, then they would not be perceived as posing a threat to “the subject’s domain.”

The discursive practices used to keep them at bay emphasize the agency always imagined as being ready to burst forth from abjection. Applied to ideas of the corpse, this idea of spreading, encroaching zones becomes a way by which to read necrotic matter as having agency. Butler’s theory, then, offers a useful, reciprocal corollary to Bataille’s and Kristeva’s in my effort to explain the prominence of eroticized corpses on the early modern English stage. My theoretical
apparatus is grounded in poststructuralist approaches, which allows me to analyze the historically-specific responses to the corpse in light of the psychic dimensions of early modern subjectivity. I agree with Butler’s assertion that “[t]he subject who is at once formed and subordinated is already implicated in the scene of psychoanalysis” (Psychic Life 6). My readings of early modern formations of erotic subjectivity and agency in relation to the corpse draw together “the theory of power…with a theory of the psyche” (3). Through this methodology, which imbricates the material and the psychic, I aim to bring the erotics of the early modern dead body into focus and point up its historical contingency.

Medieval and Early Modern Body Worlds

Medieval and early modern conceptions of the body, of course, diverged in many ways, chiefly as a result of Reformation revisions to how the corpse was defined, handled, and remembered, but also because studies in medicine and anatomy, well underway in medieval Europe, produced knowledge that overturned existing theories and generated interest within the public, which had growing access to anatomical exhibitions, as well as to printed medical texts. Yet, while new theories and theologies about the living and dead bodies proliferated in early modern England, there was a continuum of traditional beliefs and preoccupations with the body. My point in this section is not to provide a detailed inquiry into all the ways in which the body was central to medieval thinking, but to offer key examples that build on Paul Binski’s assessment that “the body became a central means by which late-medieval religion articulated many of its most important ideas” (123). The body—the body corrupted by original sin, the crucified body, the resurrected body, the Eucharistic body, the diseased, rotting body, the autopsied, anatomized body—was the chief material signifier by which worlds and concepts were rendered legible in the medieval imagination. Understanding some of these earlier beliefs
enables us to more thoroughly understand how early moderns continued to think about, as well as how they rethought the material body.

Central to medieval conceptions of the body was the belief in the body’s inherent corruption through original sin. This innate corruption accounted for the grotesque decay of the flesh after death. It was punishment, in an utterly debased and humiliating form, for the sinful state humans were born into and carried with them throughout their lives. The soul within this body, however—and ultimately the decayed body itself at the Last Judgment—was redeemable, and ironically so, through another body—the body of Christ, “an incorporated deity, a man/God” (Zimmerman 25). As instructed by Christ during the Last Supper, and interpreted literally by the Church via the doctrine of transubstantiation, the consecrated bread and wine of the Passover feast became the food by which sinners could redeem their corrupted souls. In Susan Zimmerman’s summary, “the Mass, by re-enacting the Crucifixion, and by offering the sacrificed flesh and blood of the Saviour to the faithful as nutrient, paradoxically enabled a spiritual transformation in which death, the inevitable end of bodily process itself, might be obviated” (30). The corpse, the locus of putrefaction and corruption, becomes the site through which transfiguration and salvation are enacted. Zimmerman eloquently describes this process and its attendant conundrum thus:

The relationship between the dead and the transfigured body was figured, finally, by the corpse, an encapsulating emblem for the polar contrasts encompassed by Christianity. The corpse, as a dead body, was paradoxically generative, not static, and in two seemingly opposite directions. On the one hand, putrefaction bore witness to the mortal punishment imposed by God for original sin: in a horrific analogue to Holy Communion, body rot became food for worms, re-incorporated as a debased life form. For man to be reborn, cleansed of the original taint, he must first undergo death and decomposition. But the principal of bodily transfiguration—or re-formation ending in stasis—was implicit in the process of decomposition, because the corpse, whether enfleshed or consumed, did not represent the final destination of the dead body. At the Last Judgement, the body/corpse would be glorified—that is, rendered eternally changeless or incorruptible—in a brilliantly heavenly fusion with the soul. (33-34)
Putrefaction was simultaneously a necessary punishment for sin as well as the means by which transfiguration and salvation were achieved. The flesh of the earthly person had to decompose so that it could be replaced by renewed, uncorrupted flesh before its assumption into heaven. The central means of salvation—the Eucharist—intimately conjoined the living and the dead, materially and spiritually. By eating the Host (the transfigured body of Christ), people essentially ingested dead-flesh-reborn in the hope of procuring redemption. The conundrum of flesh as conduit for both damnation and salvation is obvious. As Zimmerman aptly summarizes, the corpse...foregrounded most dramatically the complexity of the redeemed and the debased bodies in the Christian system. Paradigmatically, the corpse occupied a problematically liminal space. The horror of its putrefaction, a punishment for sin, underscored the corrupt and compromised status of the post-lapsarian body; but the destination of the reconstituted corpse in the eternally changeless subject simultaneously rendered putrefaction as a transformative process, integral to redemption. (27)

The generative potential of the corpse would eventually result in the redeemed material body. The laity was regularly reminded of this phenomenon during Mass, through the celebration of the Eucharist, which culminated with the priest’s elevation of the Host at the moment when the bread-as-flesh-as-salvific food was said to transubstantiate into Christ’s flesh. This mystery was not meant to be literally comprehended, but accepted, venerated, and ingested as the word of god. While the element of mystery constructed around the Eucharist could be said to shield this conundrum from too curious a gaze, it was necessary for the laity to understand the significance

16 Caroline Walker Bynum writes that “[t]he resurrection of the body is [sometimes] described by theologians as the flowering of a dry tree after winter, the donning of new clothes, the rebuilding of a temple, the hatching of an egg, the smelting of ore from clay, the reforging of a statue that has been melted down, the growth of the fetus from a drop of semen, the return of a phoenix from its own ashes, the reassembling of broken potsherds, the vomiting up of bits of shipwrecked bodies by fishes that have consumed them” (Resurrection 6). One could thus argue that descriptions such as these functioned, intentionally or not, to offset the rather clear contradiction inherent in the idea that dead flesh is a precursor and prerequisite for salvation and that a redeemed soul is (re)enfleshed before entry into heaven.

17 Bynum observes that “[t]he materialism of this eschatology expressed not a body-soul dualism but rather a sense of self as psychosomatic unity. The idea of person, bequeathed by the Middle Ages to the modern world, was not a concept of soul escaping body or soul using body; it was a concept of self in which physicality was integrally bound to sensation, emotion, reasoning, identity—and therefore finally to whatever one means by salvation (emphasis mine, Resurrection 11).
of this central sacrament. To this end, “texts were written by leading thinkers in the vernacular
for the express use of the laity” (Rubin 98). In 1357, for instance, Archbishop Thoresby
produced *The Lay Folks’ Catechism* in both Latin and English. Included in his guide to the
Church’s central beliefs and sacraments is the following explication of the materiality and
significance of the Host:

> The ferthe is the sacrament of the auter,
> Cristes owen bodi in likeness of brede,
> Als hale as he toke it of that blessed maiden; …
> For he that takes it worthili, takes his salvation,
> And who-so unworthili, takes his damnation. (lines 316-18; 326-27)\(^\text{18}\)

The catechism clearly emphasizes the Eucharist’s pivotal role in either the salvation or
damnation of one’s soul. Thoresby’s book was one of many produced from the late thirteenth
century onward for the instruction of the laity. As Miri Rubin explains, these texts were rather
prolific:

> Vernacular guidebooks included ready formulations and illustrative tales which could be
immediately applied in teaching....[A]lthough these texts cannot reveal the interpretations
made by the audience,…they do reveal the contents of parochial teaching, of images
which in turn appear in popular lyrics, and even in vernacular art. From the thirteenth
century onwards texts were written by leading thinkers in the vernacular for the express
use of the laity. (98)

The intimate connection between the living and the dead was further drawn together
through the establishment of Purgatory as a specific geographical space between heaven and hell
in which the soul could be cleansed and its path to heaven expedited through the prayers of the
living. Although early Christians had believed in the concept of a state of purgation following
death, it was not until the thirteenth century that the Church amplified this concept with a
doctrinally defined space. In 1254, Pope Innocent IV wrote a letter to Cardinal Eudes of
Châteauroux of the Eastern Church in which he defined Purgatory as “the place [where]…slight
\[^{18}\] Thoresby produced his catechism in both Latin and English in 1357. His aim was to right the waywardness he saw
in both the clergy and laity.
and minor sins…are purged” (qtd. in Le Goff 284). Moreover, he declares that this geographical space ought from herein be officially designated as *purgatory*, “according to the traditions and authority of the Holy Fathers” (qtd. in Le Goff 284). The efficacy of purgation was reiterated in 1274, at the Second Council of Lyons, and the existence of Purgatory was officially sanctioned by the Church in 1438 during the Council of Florence. As Jacques Le Goff summarizes in his seminal work, *The Birth of Purgatory*:

That the early Christians were persuaded of the efficacy of their prayers for the dead we know from funerary inscriptions, liturgical formulas, and the *Passion of Perpetua*, which dates from the early third century and is the first in a long line of spatial representations of what would one day be Purgatory. This belief in the efficacy of prayer began a movement of piety that culminated in the creation of Purgatory. (11)

This territory connecting the living and the dead—traversed with prayers, masses, the tolling of bells and lighting of candles, and other regularly enacted forms of ritual and remembrance—became central to the theological and imaginative geographies of medieval Christendom. The living, in other words, remained deeply connected with the dead. Indeed, “[t]he realms of the living and of the dead in the late medieval imagination were not merely contiguous, but coinciding” (Peter Marshall 12). One state of existence did not merely lead to another, they coexisted and interacted. In fact, not only were they interconnected via liturgical and sacramental practices, these worlds likewise coincided through the visible world, as for example, in the churchyard, which was the site not only of the final “resting-places of the dead,” but “convivial secular activities of the living” (Marshall 13). The sacred and profane, the living and the decomposing co-existed in a seemingly uninterrupted, almost natural fashion.

Lay reception of the doctrine of Purgatory, though it grew out of early Christian beliefs and practices, was neither immediate nor universal. Yet, as Paul Binski points out:

Doubts about its existence were silenced: it became a truth of faith and of the Church. In one form or another, concretely or in varying degrees of abstraction, it was accepted as a
place. It took on an official character. It enriched the meaning of a very old Christian practice, suffrages for the dead. But it was controlled by the theologians and the Church hierarchy, who refused to allow the imagination of the faithful to run riot. (289)

In a period characterized by grueling labor for most of the population, cyclical food shortages, illnesses and epidemics, as well as the perennial dread of death, Purgatory provided a measure of comfort for the living. Not only did it offer an alternative to eternal damnation, but through prayers for the dead—intended to lessen the duration and intensity of torments suffered before the souls’ entry into eternal salvation—the living could feel a sense of empowerment in the face of something inevitable. Through the belief that their prayers were efficacious, they could see themselves as having influence on the welfare of the dead. Moreover, by carrying out good works now for the dead, they could reasonably anticipate that the same might be done for them. Of course, the specific means by which the living engaged this liminal space, and the efficacy attached to specific forms and degrees of remembrance, were strictly controlled by the Church—practices Reformers later would latch on to as evidence that Purgatory was a fiction. Yet, in daily life as well as at key points during the liturgical year, this avenue between the living and the dead remained unobstructed for roughly three centuries.

While the worlds of the living and the dead abutted and overlapped, the question remained as to when, precisely, a person became dead—a question that remained vexing well after the Reformation. Katharine Park has written extensively on the medieval and early modern corpse and how it was perceived. She notes, for instance, “in [the] Italian mental universe, death corresponded not to the gradual decomposition of the corpse but to the instant separation of the body and soul” (“Life” 119). By contrast, “northerners focussed on the gradual fading personhood and vitality of the corpse itself, as expressed in the process of physical decay” (119). And, since northern Europeans tended to see “the flesh-and-blood body as in some sense integral
to the self,” the corpse was endowed with a sense of personhood (119). It was person x who was being ravaged by worms, not merely the mortal remains of person x. This made the assault of vermiculation and decay that much more terrifying and abhorrent because it was so grotesquely personal. Because “northerners treated [the recently dead body] during this liminal period as active, sensitive, or semianimate, possessed of a gradually fading life,” the corpse was feared. It could return as a revenant or vampire and “torment those left behind” (115; 117). The corpse was perceived as a macabre object, something to be feared, something that continued to possess a sense of agency, despite death.

This macabre liminality was given expression in two particularly graphic modes: the transi tomb and the danse macabre. In the late fourteenth century, the preference for tombs that depicted idealized images of the deceased, reposing in anticipation of resurrection, gave way to tombs that depicted the body from above as whole, unmarked by death—but from the side showed its innards being devoured by worms, lizards, and frogs. One goal of this shift was to trigger shock and disgust in the viewer and remind him of his own, inevitable corporeal destiny. What heretofore had been shielded from view, was now grotesquely foregrounded in what Phillippe Ariès refers to as “an iconography of the macabre” (110). 19 This preoccupation with the macabre, spurred as it is during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, is in great measure a response to the plague, which not only ravaged its victims in a gruesome manner, but left their corpses to begin putrefying in the streets, since transporting such vast numbers of dead to burial...
sites was never immediate. The transition from life, to death, to decay, to bones, to dust charted the movement from wholeness to dispersal to erasure.

Similar macabre iconography is also evident in the danse macabre murals that began to flourish, first in early fifteenth-century Paris, and subsequently throughout much of northern Europe. The motif most often featured an anthropomorphized Death figure (or figures) leading living figures in a raucous line dance off to their own deaths. What is striking about these images is that Death not only shows vitality, it exudes sensuality through the very movement of dance. This pairing of the thanatotic and the erotic was sometimes rendered explicit by depicting a male skeleton equipped with a phallus, or a female skeleton with her pelvic bones exposed. Like the transi tomb figures, these images emerged in reaction to the ubiquity and dread of death in the late Middle Ages. They also underscored the idea of death as the great equalizer and perennial victor. The erotic, carnivalesque quality in many of these examples also points up a desire to carouse in life, right up the point of melding with Death—particularly since death could strike at any moment. This dance was also commonly referred to as “the shaking of the sheets,” a phrase derived from a medieval ballad about the dance of death, which begins “Have you danced the shaking of the sheets?” The “shaking of the sheets,” as one might guess, also referred to having sex. As to the popularity of danse macabre murals and paintings, Michael Neill asserts “no motif enjoyed greater popularity, in northern Europe at least, than the Dance of death.” And, “[a]lthough none of the great English murals has been preserved intact, there is no doubt that the Dance enjoyed an extensive currency in England, its most spectacular example being one of the oldest in Europe [Dance of Paul’s in St. Paul’s Cathedral]” (Issues 15; 52). It is a configuration whose familiarity and dramaturgic appeal extend its use to the early modern plays of (among others) Thomas Kyd, Thomas Middleton, William Shakespeare, and Thomas Dekker.
The post-mortal body also became a site of scientific inquiry in the Middle Ages. Though it would not be until the mid-sixteenth century that new evidence would challenge and eventually overturn many of Galen’s theories about human anatomy, from the late thirteenth century, the corpse was autopsied and dissected with the aim of acquiring particular knowledge about a given body. For example, the incorruptibility of the bodies of persons who had led devotional lives was taken as evidence of their saintliness. In 1308, an Umbrian abbess—Chiara of Montefalco—died and, even after five days, her corpse showed no signs of decay. When her body was cut open by the nuns, her heart revealed within it “a cross, or the image of the crucified Christ” (Park “Criminal” 2). Days later, her still-uncorrupted heart contained “the crown of thorns, the whips and column, the rod and sponge, and tiny nails…all formed of flesh” (2). These were taken as signs of “Chiara’s sanctity” (2). Katharine Park points out that such autopsies did not arouse disquiet among Chiara’s contemporaries. On the contrary, Park convincingly argues that this period sees “the emergence of autopsy and dissection as a regular and integral part of both legal practice and medical training in the cities of northern and central Italy, [practices which] lay to rest the persistent misconception that there was in medieval and Renaissance Europe a deep-seated ‘taboo’ connected with corpses and the closure of the body” (4). Well-to-do families who could afford private autopsies often sought them out to determine someone’s precise cause of death, particularly if there was concern that a given illness might be hereditary (Park 9-10). Such practices, though, were not entirely without controversy, as medical professors and students were sometimes found guilty of robbing graves for specimens.

The centrality of the dead body for apprehending the world continued into the early modern period, though this conceptual apparatus was significantly altered by the Reformation, advances in anatomical studies, and the growth—and eventual cultural centrality—of secular
theatre, in both public and private purpose-built playhouses. The foremost corporeal referent remained the Christic body. Zimmerman’s observation about the Christic body finds common ground in Catholic and Protestant perspectives, yet points up the central divide in their respective philosophies:

All early modern Christians, Catholic and Protestant alike, agreed that the *sine qua non* of their religion was the sacrificial death of Christ and his subsequent Resurrection. The body of Christ was thereby deeply imbricated in the Christian mysteries, and its transfiguration and ascension into heaven only reinforced the centrality of the hypostatic union to the Christian redemptive scheme…Fundamentally, then, all the Christian mysteries were about bodily transformations: the generation of life from death, or, as Bataille would put it, the fusion of living forms from disintegration. (7)

Whereas Catholics were focused on the corpse—both Christ’s and, through Christ’s, the sinner’s—as the material essential for transubstantiation and redemption, Protestants saw the corpse as utterly corrupt, hence antithetical to redemption. Indeed, the Catholic fixation on the corporeal, Reformers argued, was idolatrous and thus an impediment to the soul’s salvation. The corpse, therefore, had to be negated as food for worms, and one’s emphasis turned, instead, to the soul, which had departed the body at its last breath. Without the animating matter of the soul, the corpse could be nothing *but* dead. Yet, the visibility of dead bodies continually challenged new theologies and maintained the corpse as a central object of fascination and debate.

**Unruly Matters: Reformation revisions of the dead**

The most significant changes made by Protestant reformers to practices that centered on the dead were the abolition of the doctrine of Purgatory and revisions to traditional burial rites. These changes profoundly affected the ways in which the dead could, officially, be interred and remembered, most notably because the souls of the dead were now defined as beyond any intercessory aid. Their fate, be it salvation or damnation, was entirely up to god. The repudiation
of Purgatory began with the dismantling of the institutions that supported it. From 1535-39, the crown oversaw the dissolution of England’s monasteries, and in 1545 and 1547, Parliament abolished chantries and religious guilds. Likewise significant was the revised burial liturgy in the 1552 Book of Common Prayer, which directs the priest to speak of the dead in the third-person, rather than address the dead directly in the second-person. Whereas the first Prayer Book of 1549 instructs the priest to say “I commende thy soule to God the father almighty, and thy body to the grounde” at the moment of interment, the 1552 “Order for the Burial of the Dead” now read: “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed: we therefore commit his body to the ground” (Cummings 83; Booty 310). Gone too are the words of the prayer in which the priest speaks as intercessor: “Graunte unto this thy servaunt, that the sinnes whiche he committed in this world be not imputed unto him, but that he escaping the gates of hell and paynes of eternall derknes: may ever dwel in the region of lighte” (88). Rather, the emphasis in the revised liturgy is on “giving hearty thanks” for “deliver[ing] this N, our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world” and taking him to heaven (312-13). The 1552 edition of the Book of Common Prayer clearly marked a metaphorical, and literal, turning away from the dead. As Eamon Duffy summarizes:

in the world of the 1552 book the dead were no longer with us. They could neither be spoken to nor even about, in any way that affected their well-being...The service was no longer a rite of intercession on behalf of the dead, but a exhortation to faith on the part of the living. Indeed, it is not too much to say that the oddest feature of the 1552 burial rite is the disappearance of the corpse from it. (475)

The revisions demarcate a clear, unbreachable boundary between the living and the dead.

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Additionally, corresponding practices, such as the *viaticum*, masses, obits, trentals, month’s minds and year’s minds, the lighting of candles around the deceased, the ringing of church bells, and prayers for the dead were dismissed by reformers as superstitious acts lacking any efficacy for the dead and likewise nullified. Historians such as Duffy, Haigh, Cressy, and Marshall have persuasively argued, though, that reforms were neither immediately nor widely accepted by the public. In fact, these changes were accepted gradually and by no means homogenously across the realm. Duffy notes an example where:

> [n]early a century on from the settlement,²¹ [Puritan leader] Richard Baxter complained that the ‘profane, ungodly, presumptuous multitude are as zealous for crosses and surplices, processions and perambulations, reading of a Gospel at a crossways, the observation of holidays and fasting days, the repeating of the Litany or the like forms in the Common Prayer, the bowing at the name of the word Jesus…with a multitude of things which are only the traditions of their fathers.’ (578)

While some of the new reforms were accepted with few quibbles, the example above, illustrating persistent practice, was by no means a rare occurrence. Christopher Haigh’s study similarly shows that “[t]he political Reformation had succeeded in driving Catholic public worship from the churches; but the Protestant Reformation did not destroy essentially Catholic views of Christian life and eternal salvation” (289). In other words, the desire to maintain discourses with the dead continued. And David Cressy cogently observes that “[o]ne of the most profound effects of the protestant elimination of purgatory was to shrink the community of souls and to sever the relationship between the living and the dead”—but he quickly adds that “[p]rayer for the dead was such a deeply engrained practice in mid-Tudor England that it took several decades of preaching and discipline to draw it to a close,” and that, “[f]rom the time of Elizabeth to

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²¹ The Elizabethan Settlement consists of a series of statutes passed by Parliament in 1559 to restore Protestantism to England, and, purportedly, do so in a way that would heal some of the divisions between England’s Catholics and Protestants. The Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity (the principal statutes), respectively, reinstated the monarch as the Supreme Governor of the Church of England and reestablished the *Book of Common Prayer* (revived in 1559, one year into Elizabeth’s reign) as the order of prayer and worship for the realm.
beyond the Restoration, protestant activists continued to object to residual practices that revealed the failure of thoroughgoing reform” (396; 398; 403). Marshall makes a related point that “attitudes toward the dead” took over a century to be transformed (309). Despite reformers’ efforts to decenter the dead from the cultural imagination and practice, “English people of the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries continued to devote significant cultural and material resources to the memorialization of the dead, and to activating them as an instructive social presence in the calculations of the living” (Marshall 312). Marshall’s point is important, in part because it underscores the importance that the dead body, as well as the memory for the deceased, continued to exert in post-Reformation English culture.

Indeed, the corpse remained central to the cultural imagination, which is evident in the very gradual fading of traditional beliefs and practices regarding the dead, the presence of the corpse in many of the period’s plays and poems, and the growing popularity of anatomical treatises and public dissections. Together with the language of humoral theory, there was now the language of natural science to help explain the body’s construction and various functions. In 1543, Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius published his landmark treatise, De Humani Corporis Fabrica, which was translated into English in 1545 and went through several editions thereafter through the seventeenth century. In addition to Vesalius’s text—which was the early modern

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22 In Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), Garrett A. Sullivan argues that early modern memory is much less an individual, cognitive process than a dynamic social engagement (4). His argument supports the idea that the Reformation did not sweep aside the dead from a central communal plane, to the inner recesses of individual minds. Rather, the Reformation changed “the meanings and uses of memory” and it often did so in ways that retained the communal dimensions of memory (4). Thomas Rist points out that revenge tragedy and the sharing of this spectacle amongst actors and audience, functioned as a form of remembering the dead Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008) and Peter Sherlock notes the changes in styles of tomb sculptures and epitaphs as evidence of shared memory and the persistence of the dead in daily life Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2008). Reformation changes in death rites and commemorative rituals were significant, perhaps even “seismic” as some historians have claimed. However, the Reformation did not leave behind a grieving, quivering public, but people who crafted ways of continuing to remember the dead by persisting in some traditional practices as well as creating new forms of remembrance to fill voids created by these theological changes.
equivalent of an expensive coffee table book—there were numerous medical and surgical texts published throughout the period that were aimed not just at physicians and surgeons, but at the lay public as well (as several dedicatory letters affirm). While anatomies were aimed chiefly at medical students, the public likewise was welcome. As Michael Neill describes, posters announcing upcoming anatomies were placed around London and tickets sold. Central to these spectacles was the corpse, which over the course of three to four days was dissected from its outermost skin to its bones. Organs were often passed around and handled by the spectators. Thus, the interior of the body was not only being made viewable, but also touchable. Through relatively available anatomical texts and the spectacles in anatomy theatres, the corpse became more, not less, a part of the fabric of life in post-Reformation England.

One of the most significant impediments to a relatively swift acceptance of Protestant revisions to burial rites and reconceptualizations about the dead was the corpse itself. Specifically, its prevalence in quotidian life and its decaying materiality made it a difficult object to convincingly redefine along reformed, dualistic lines. Zimmerman cogently explains that “[l]ong-standing beliefs in the power of the corpse to generate life from putrefying liquids, to kill by contagion, to bleed, to walk, even to attack the living, remained manifest in resistance to reformist funerary and burial rituals” (“Psychoanalysis” 103). In other words, not only were many early moderns reluctant to surrender long-standing beliefs about and practices centered on the corpse, the corpse itself appeared resistant to such inscriptions and containments. Its material activity—its movement as worms devoured it, its stench as it decomposed, its changing appearance as it rotted to the bones—kept it active, despite the new dogma that asserted the corpse was most assuredly “dead,” devoid of animation. Bodies were prepared for burial at home, corpses were moved through the streets en route to burial, and cadavers hung from gibbets
and were on display in the growing number of public dissections and printed anatomical
treatises. In these ways and many others, the dead body and its stages of dissolution remained in
plain view. The assertion made in the *The First* and *Second Books of Homilies* that the corpse
was “dead as stocks and stones” is difficult to sustain, moreover, when read against
contemporaneous texts in which it is depicted as remarkably animate. Plays often describe dead
and death-like bodies as exerting activity, from Marcelia’s grotesquely cosmeticized corpse in
*The Duke of Milan* to Gloriana’s skull in *The Revenger’s Tragedy* to Juliet’s sleeping body in
*Romeo and Juliet*. The seemingly still active dead body is also evident in sermons that
foreground vermiculation. In “Death’s Duel,” for example, John Donne lavishly describes a
corpse as anything but stone dead: “we breed, and feed, and then kill those worms which we
ourselves produced…[our] dissolution… is an entrance into the death of corruption and
putrefaction, and vermiculation, and incineration, and dispersion in and from the grave, in which
every dead man dies over again” (1307-08). The corpse Donne describes is quite busy not only
producing, but devouring worms—in essence, disposing of itself in a remarkable act of self-
recycling.

It should be apparent by now that there are many texts in light of which one may read the
early modern dead body as resistant to its redefinition as “dead as stocks and stones.” However,*
*The First* and *Second Book of Homilies* are perhaps the most significant because these are the
first texts coming out of the Reformation in England that offer a sustained argument for the
corpse as a lifeless object. *The First Book* of sermons was published in 1547 under Edward VI
and was republished under Elizabeth with the newly written *Second Book* in 1563, which
contained an additional twenty sermons. The political thrust of these books was to provide
uniform sermons for the clergy and, in the process, advance Protestant ideology amongst parishioners.

The homily titled “An Exhortation against Fear of Death, in three parts” reiterates the reformed stance on death, notably that death marks the complete separation between body and soul. The sermon begins by locating one’s fear of death in the abhorrence of decay: “Death [is a] dissolution [of]…the flesh,” and thus provokes revulsion in the possessor of that flesh (Griffiths 91). Yet, death should not be feared, the homilist continues, because “this bodily death [is] a sleep” in which “our souls [have been] separated from our bodies for a season” (93-94). The material left behind by the soul is merely reposing, unfeeling and unaware of decay. The discarding of the body by the soul is, in fact, something that should be desired since “death deliver[s] us from our bodies, doth send us straight home into our own country” (Griffiths 96). The transfiguration necessary for eternal salvation shifts from the grave to heaven, to the soul, which then redeems the reassembled body at resurrection. That the dead body is utterly devoid of life and thus does not require the attention and reverence bestowed upon it via Catholic practices is underscored by the efforts made in “The Homily against Peril of Idolatry” to discredit traditional worship involving “idols”—likenesses of Christ, the Virgin, and the saints as well as saints’ relics. These objects, too, were dead material, devoid of any soul. Like the corpse, which was insentient because it lacked god’s animating spirit, these material objects once used in worship bear “the similitude and likeness of man or woman,” but, like the corpse, “they be dead, have eyes and see not, hands and feel not, feet and cannot go” and thus are “insensible” as well (Griffiths 174; 270). The soul, by contrast, is with god, alive and waiting to be rejoined with the material body, which will have been restored during its deep, senseless slumber. The homilist’s repeated emphasis on the soul as alive and the corpse as dead underscores reformers’ efforts to
“demystify[] the body” by representing it along clear, dualistic lines: “[t]he real business of the homily,” Zimmerman cogently observes, “is to harden the distinction between body and spirit in order to emphasise the differences between the Deity and His subjects” (Corpse 46-47).

Moreover, by equating the deadness of the human body with the deadness of images once used in Catholic worship, the sermons categorize all traditional beliefs, rites, and rituals that focused on the corpse and on “holy” images and relics as idol worship—activities to be avoided since they not only lack efficacy, but are vain and sinful.

The homilies likewise link death and any other degenerating activity with lust. The homilist’s purpose is to depict the flesh, and all flesh-related activity, as inherently prone to corruption. For example, in “The Homily against Gluttony and Drunkenesse,” the homilist instructs his audience:

that ye may perceive how detestable and hateful all excess in eating and drinking is before the face of Almighty God, ye shall call to mind what is written by St. Paul to the Galathians, where he numbereth gluttony and drunkenness among those horrible crimes which (as he saith) no man shall enherit the kingdom of heaven. He reckoneth them among the deeds of the flesh, and coupleth them with idolatry, whoredom, murder, which are the greatest offences that can be named among men. (Griffiths 297-98)

There is no essential distinction, then, amongst these sins since they are all underpinned by lust, which leads the flesh to succumb to its desires, and, ultimately, the death of the soul. The ubiquity of the eros/thanatos connection in early modern culture is underscored by its presence not only in poetry, drama, anatomical texts, but also in these homilies, which were supposed to be read weekly to parishioners, but through their publication, could be regularly read and reread. I firmly believe, then, that the erotic and thanatotic were indelibly etched in the cultural imagination and that it would have been virtually impossible to read one without calling to mind the other.

23 A later homily describes the “deeds of the flesh” as: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, wantonness, idolatry, witchcraft...[etc.]” (Griffiths 458).
The dead body also continued to be a lively focus in the period’s funeral sermons, many of which were published and reissued throughout the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods. On the whole, these sermons emphasized the good works of the deceased, made no effort at interceding on behalf of the soul, and noted the vanity and uselessness of anyone doing so by calling attention to the utter break death had wrought between corpse and soul. Yet, the sermons’ lavish focus on the corpse—and their popularity as printed texts—suggests the centrality it continued to exert on the cultural imagination. From the 1560s through the 1640s, nearly three hundred funeral sermons were published. Among these was *Deaths Advantage Little Regarded* by William Harrison, which was first published in 1602 and, by 1617, was in its fifth edition. Harrison states the reason for publishing his sermon in the preface, and, given the text’s appeal to reformed beliefs, one can readily assume that most funeral sermons were printed for the same reasons as Harrison’s. He argues that “[o]ur Sermons are like an vntimely fruite, which dieth so soone as it is borne, they are forgotten so soone as they as they are heard…so wee neede not be ashamed to write those things which before we preached, that the people may the better vnderst and remember the same” After praising the qualities of the deceased, Harrison states unequivocally that “death…is the separation of soule and body (23). As to the function and fate of the soul, he reiterates the reformed stance that the “soule [is] immortall and cannot perish by any meanes: it can liue out of the bodie, as well as in the bodie. When it leaues the bodie, it goes vnto the Lord” (23).

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24 David Cressy quotes figures from the online English Short-Title Catalog, which places the count of extant sermons for this period at 265 (n. 39, 572).

25 *Deaths Advantage Little Regarded, and the foules folace againft forrow. Preached in two funerall Sermons at Childwal in Lancashire at the buriall of Mistris Katherin Brettergh, the third of Iune. 1601.* London: Felix Kyngston, 1602.
The anonymously published *The Best Choyce. A Funerall Sermon Published at the desire of some of the friends of the Dead* lauds death as “a thing of the godly, to be desired” since it delivers the soul from its mortal confines to eternal salvation (7). The preacher assures, “that which we call death is nothing else but the dissolving of this composition, and the seperating of these two parts, that the soule may be loose and at liberty to return vnto God” (10). Robert Pricke’s 1608 sermon, *A Verie Godlie and Learned Sermon, treating of Mans mortalitie, and of the estate both of his bodie and soule after death*, observes (as many such sermons did) the inevitability of mortality and “estate thereof after [the corpse] is buried, and layd in the earth.”

The sermon reiterates the period’s standard definition of material deadness by describing the corpse as: ly[ing] in the graue senseless, and without motion euyn as a blocke or stone” (D1). It also presents the progress of decay, noting that “the maiestie and beautie of the face and whole bodie departeth: and a pale, deformed, and vglie forme succeedes…the bodie putrifith and roteth: and from thence procedes a most horrible and stinking sauour, and in the ende is wholie turned into dust” (D1). The thrust of the revised burial rites, homilies, and funeral sermons is that the souls of the dead—severed from their mortal bodies and all earthly connections—are beyond the reach of the living. Even if images of the dead Christ were gone, along with the entire intercessory apparatus that had kept the dead central in religious and daily life, the corpse was repeatedly conjured and revitalized. The irony is that in trying to negate the material corpse while exalting the insubstantial soul, reformers upheld the significance of the corpse in the early modern imagination. With the soul declared completely out of reach, what the living in fact were left with was the corpse. Rather than lose value, the dead body gained considerable cultural currency in post-Reformation England.
Enter the Theatre

That dead bodies came to be represented so often in the post-Reformation commercial theatre is not surprising. As the overview in the preceding sections points up, early modern discourses about the corpse fixated on boundaries and liminal spaces—material, spiritual, theological, and empirical. Similarly, the theatre operated at geographical boundaries (as was the case with public theatres), and also took up contemporaneous topics concerned with boundaries and transitions. As Celia Daileader states, “[t]he stage became the primary locus for the playing out of…cultural obsessions, being perfectly designed to serve this function: its very boundedness and visibility made it the most effective medium for exploring questions of specularity and boundary confusion” (11). Early modern drama readily took up many of the period’s controversies and concerns. Thus, issues surrounding the corpse clearly presented playwrights with creative inspiration and consistently proved popular with audiences. On the development of Elizabethan public theatre, Steven Mullaney cogently remarks that it “emerged from and appropriated a place within the fissures and contradictions of the cultural landscape” (143).

Located in Southwark, in the Liberties beyond the jurisdiction of the City Fathers, the public playhouses were outside London proper on the south side of the Thames. Situated amongst taverns, brothels, gaming houses, bear- and bull-baiting pits, and leper colonies, the theatres occupied the liminal spaces of what was considered unclean, morally corrupt, and threatening. Artistically and ideologically, early modern theatre filled a void left by the suppression of medieval cycle dramas and, through performances that regularly featured death and the dead, it

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26 In her essay, “Wrong Side of the River: London’s Disreputable South Bank in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century” (1994), Jessica A. Browner remarks that a 1596 Order by the Privy Council to the Justices of the Peace of Middlesex “touched on [a host of problem]—poverty, vagrancy overcrowding, danger of contagion, crime. One additional point it particularly stresses…is the fear of disorder; if Southwark’s population growth created an overcrowded suburb, the make-up of that population created a disorderly one” (36; 44). For a detailed discussion of Southwark, please see her essay in Essay in History. Web. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/Journals/EH/EH36/browner1.html>. 6 Apr. 2006.
filled a void left by revisions to religious rites and rituals. On this latter connection, Katherine Goodland rightly deduces that “[l]ike Purgatory, the theater is a place where past, present, and future mingle. It is a place of suspended time, where the dead live on, and where the living, if only vicariously, experience death” (27).

As a commercial and artistic enterprise, the theatre brilliantly capitalized on these opportunities. In fact, out of this liminal space, early modern drama produced new ways of seeing and thinking about contemporaneous cultural concerns. In his theory about performance, anthropologist Victor Witter Turner writes, “the dominant genres of performance in societies at all levels of scale and complexity tend to be liminal phenomena” (25). In other words, performance engages with thresholds of being and understanding and, via performance, these phenomena become better understood, or are given new meaning. He explains liminality as a site of generation by comparing it to the subjunctive tense:

Both performances and their settings may be likened to loops in a linear progression, when the social flow bends back on itself, in a way does violence to its own development, meanders, inverts, perhaps lies to itself, and puts everything so to speak into the subjunctive mood as well as the reflexive voice. Just as the subjunctive mood of a verb is used to express supposition, desire, hypothesis, or possibility, rather than stating actual facts, so do liminality and the phenomena of liminality dissolve all factual and common-sense systems into their components and “play” with them in ways never found in nature or in custom. (Turner 25)

If performance is a generative phenomenon—that is, it does not simply *represent* but also *produces*—then the dramatized corpse—a liminal object—similarly generates meaning as well as is generated by existing meanings. The threshold is a site of dissolution, a place where

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27 Additionally, Mullaney observes that “[t]he shift away from the morality tradition and its abstract personification of states-of-being and toward the particular discursive and theatrical embodiment of affective characters demanded and produced new powers of identification, projection, and apprehension in audiences, altering the threshold not only of dramatic representation but also of self-representation, not only of the fictional construction of character but also of the social construction of the self” (144).
subjectivities are disrupted or destabilized, where agency can be asserted, where transformations are possible.

Drama’s generative potential was the subject of robust debate from the inception of public theatre in the 1570s to its closure in 1642. Thomas Heywood, clearly a supporter of the theatre and the vocation of acting, writes in Apology for Actors that “playing is an ornament to the city; which strangers of all nations, repairing hither, report of in their countries” (Pollard 240). The city’s plays and playhouses, Heywood extols, were putting London on the international stage of art and culture. Moreover, he asserts:

> our English tongue, which hath been the most harsh, uneven, and broken language of the world...is now by this secondary means of playing, continually refined, every writer striving in himself to add a new flourish unto it; so that in process, from the most rude and unpolished tongue, it is grown to a most perfect and composed language...that many nations grow enamoured of our tongue (before despised). (Pollard 240)

Playwriting was expanding and elevating the English language. Poet and playwright Thomas Lodge, in A Reply to Stephen Gosson’s School of Abuse, in Defence of Poetry, Music, and Stage Plays, (1579) concedes that performances should not take place on the Sabbath, “[b]ut (of truth)...must confess, with Aristotle, that men are greatly delighted with imitation, and that it were good to bring those things on stage that were altogether tending to virtue” (Pollard 54). Of course, the theatre also was the target of fierce, sometimes vitriolic, detractors who saw playhouses and plays as producers of lust and inducers to assorted nefarious behavior. Anthony Munday (A Second and Third Blast of Retreat from Plays and Theaters, 1580) is one of the first antitheatricalists to sound the warning bell when he writes “[t]he theater I found to be an appointed place of bawdry; I mine own ears have heard honest women allured with abominable speeches. Sometimes I have seen two knaves at once importunate upon one light housewife whereby much quarrel hath grown to the disquieting of many” (Pollard 70). He describes the
theatre as “the chapel of Satan” where one “shall find…no want of young ruffians nor lack of harlots, utterly past shame, who press to the forefront of the scaffolds to the end to show their impudency and to be as an object of all men’s eyes” (Pollard 75). The theatre’s licentiousness, he argues, is not limited to the matter performed on stage, but includes the preening and ogling that takes place amongst the audience. The perception that theatres are sites of sexual incontinence is registered, too, by London’s lord mayor, Nicholas Woodrofe, who wrote that “[s]ome things have doble the ill, both naturarly in spreading the infection and otherwise in drawing God’s wrathe and plage upon us, as the erecting and frequenting of houses very famous for incontinent rule out of our liberties and jurisdiction” (1580).

Many antitheatricalists denounced the theatre as a marketplace for lust, but few as colorfully as Stephen Gosson. In *School of Abuse* (1579), Gosson writes:

For they that lacke customers all the weeke, either because their haunt is unknown, or the constables and officers of their parish watch them so narrowly that they dare not quetche, to celebrate the Sabbath, flocke too theaters, and there keepe a generall market of bawdrie. Not that anye filthinesse, in deede, is committed within the compases of that ground, as was once done in Rome, but that every wanton and his paramour, everye man and his mistresse, every John and his Joane, every knave and his queane are there first acquainted, and cheapen the marchandise in that place, which they pay for else where, as they can agree.” (25)

For Gosson, the theatre is a veritable pool of prospective brothel customers, an assumption similarly expressed by William Goddard in sonnet 64 of his collection *A Neaste of Waspes* (1615). He writes, “Goe to your plaie-howfe you fhall actors haue / Your baude, your gull, your whore, your pandar knaue, / Goe to your bawdie howfe, y’aue actors too / As bawdes, and whores, and gulls: pandars alfo” (1-4). Dramas blur the boundary between real and dramatized bawds and whores. Plays are inducements to lust and to its perceived cousin, idolatry, as Gosson pronounces: “plays are the proceedings and practices of Gentiles in their idolatry” (Pollard 91).

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And, in one of the most impassioned antitheatrical tracts, *Histriomastix: The Player’s Scourge* (1633), William Prynne warns that:

those venomous unchaste, incestuous kisses (as the Fathers style them); those wanton dalliances; those meretricious embracements, compliments: those enchanting, powerful, overcoming solicitations unto lewdness; those immodest gestures, speeches, attires, which inseparably accompany the acting of our stage-plays; especially where the bawd’s, the pander’s, the lover’s, the wooer’s, the adulterer’s, the woman’s or love-sick person’s parts are lively represented

must be regarded as “obscene” and “abominable to Christians” (Pollard 290). The belief in theatre’s animating potential—be it for good or ill—is centered on the fact that “[t]heater, unlike other art forms, uses living bodies as its media; theater literally takes warm flesh as its ‘material’,” and virtually every theatrical polemic makes reference to flesh (Daileader 64). This “warm flesh” is also dramatized as cold flesh when the character is dead (or believed to be dead), which in itself occupies yet another of drama’s liminal states: a living body performing a corpse, inviting the audience to respond as if it were dead; a character, dying or dead, triggering responses from the drama’s fellow characters, the dead drawing the living into the realm of death.

The staging of dead bodies by “warm flesh[ed]” actors pushed against reformed belief in the corpse as dead material, bereft of animating spirit and agency. Thus, whenever a corpse was dramatized, the theatre was challenging key elements of reformed doctrine. As we have seen in theological and anti-theatrical texts, corpses and “deadness” were frequently described in terms that imbricated them with lust and eroticism. There is also an imagined link between corpses and actors, as evidenced in the “The Homily against peril of idolatry,” which compares “dead idols [and] images” to “puppets”—a word that referred to “[a]n idolatrous image, an idol; any material object that is worshipped” (1536) and “[a] model of a person or animal that can be manipulated
to mimic natural movement” (1538). The homilist chides “there is…foolishness and lewdness in decking of our images as great puppets for old fools, like children, to play the wicked play of idolatry” (265). Images, he asserts, are like lifeless puppets and thus should not be venerated because they have no capacity to sense. To underscore the deadness of images and puppets, the homilist invokes the dead body, which Catholics, in their ignorance he says, “bury…farced with spices and odours and clothed with precious vestures [even though the corpses] lack sense and understanding” (264). If we connect these dots, we can see that there is a deep anxiety about flesh and materiality and the ability of supposedly inanimate material to somehow defy this supposition and be animate or be reanimated into a new form.

Following the logic of these texts, it can be argued that the dramatized corpse is both the object of eroticization and a producer of erotic subjectivity, which is precisely what we see in so many early modern plays. The liminal space between life and death traversed by the characters resonates with the liminal space Bataille identifies between continuity and discontinuity. As a new enterprise that attracted creative, energetic playwrights, the early modern theatre astutely identified the corpse as a powerful symbol to use in its plays. Since “in the Renaissance, drama is the dominant mode in which the provisional, the performative, and contingent nature of subjectivity can literally be embodied,” the dead body—an object at the center of the period’s debates over states of being and identity—is repeatedly deployed as a major force in these relational structures (Charnes 9). The early modern corpse—already charged with erotic meaning through prevailing cultural discourses—becomes even more erotically charged in the context of

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29 This definition is drawn from the Oxford English Dictionary.
30 Charles Forker offers a useful overview of the love/death nexus in early modern drama: “[f]or the tragic dramatist…the subject of love or infatuation shadowed by death had its obvious utility. It could be the means of showing the isolation or vulnerability of happiness…It could function to bring incompatible systems of value into poignant or devastating collision, at the same time embodying interior, psychic conflicts of almost every stripe” (214).
the plays’ romantically- and sexually-laced plots, the intimacy created by the circle of characters and audience contemplating the dead or dying character, and the spectacle of a living “warm-flesh[ed]” actor playing (or “puppetting”) a dead body. For the theatre, the eroticized corpse presented an object *par excellence* through which to stage not only many of the period’s controversies surrounding death and corpses, but to push at the boundaries of subjectivity and erotic agency. Early modern drama demonstrates repeatedly that dead bodies are still, very much, bodies that matter.

My contribution follows a rich field of scholarship in early modern death and body studies. Among works that figure centrally to my own is Michael Neill’s magisterial study, *Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy* (1997), which argues that tragedy became one of the most important vehicles for exploring anxieties about death—and he describes in detail how the burgeoning field of anatomical studies was central to this endeavor. Peter Marshall offers a comprehensive, historical overview of ways in which England’s religious schism affected people’s thoughts about and handling of their dead in *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (2002). And in her erudite and eloquent study, *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theatre* (2005), Susan Zimmerman describes how the corpse was revised in the Reformation imagination and how its “performance” on stage complicated ideas about gender, death, and embodiment. While these studies, and many others, expand the field of early modern death studies, none has responded in any sustained measure to the rather conspicuous imbrication of death and eroticism on the Renaissance stage. My study directly addresses the subject of dramatized necrophilia and thus promises to take our current ideas about early modern death in a new direction. Judith Butler’s work on the gendered body, and the processes and consequences of “gendering” and “bodying” something helps guide my ideas
about subjectivity and the creation of erotic agency. Together with Georges Bataille’s study on the erotics of death and the dead, Butler’s work underpins this project.

The title of my dissertation is drawn in part from the Surrealist game, le cadavre exquis, also known as picture consequences, in which players assemble words or images into a collage. The resulting “body” is composed of parts drawn by each player. Early modern plays featuring death drew inspiration from medieval civic dramas, Catholic iconography and Reformation iconophobia, and anatomy—forming, in a sense, a collage for the stage. Also, the term “exquisite” in some early modern usages denotes beauty, perfection, horror, and excruciating pain—notions that infused contemporaneous ideas about death and dead bodies and make abundant references to our own.

My chapters focus on some of the different ways in which early modern dramas deployed conceptions about erotic subjectivity and agency, as figured through the corpse. In order to reflect the range of ways in which necrophilia was dramatized, each chapter in my project concentrates on a particular issue or conundrum raised by Reformation revisions regarding the dead and by contemporaneous discourses about the material body and sexuality. The plays I have chosen to analyze in each chapter are particularly illustrative of the conjunction between mortality and eroticism and reveal in rather striking ways how dramatized corpses functioned as erotic objects and as agents of erotic subjectivity.

Chapter 2, “Liminal Flesh: Erotics of Mourning in Tamburlaine the Great and The Duke of Milan,” examines Tamburlaine and Sforza’s erotic attachment to the corpses of their recently-deceased wives, Zenocrate and Marcelia. Unlike contemporaneous plays, such as The Second Maiden’s Tragedy or Othello, in which the sight of the beloved’s dead body arouses sexual attraction in the lover, these plays dramatize attraction to the corpse as a continuation of the
lustful adoration of the beloved’s living body. Each ruler had fashioned his identity in great part on the possession of these women’s bodies and the reciprocated passion. The deaths of Zenocrine and Marcelia cut Tamburlaine and Sforza off from this vital source of subject formation. In reaction, they turn to embalming and cosmeticizing to create the illusion of continued vitality, and, in effect, challenge D/death for having taken these women from them. As I shall argue, these plays identify an erotic attraction to corpses with the need to retain control over the idolized, desired body the protagonists see as elemental to their masculine subjectivity. Moreover, in suspending their own disbelief when gazing upon the corpses of their wives, Tamburlaine and Sforza invite the audience to do likewise. Thus, these dramas also identify necrophilia with strategies of illusion underpinning pre- and post-Reformation beliefs about the dead and similar strategies deployed by the theatre in staging death, grief, and erotic desire.

In chapter 3, “‘Consummations devoutly to be wish’d’: Feast and Fragment in The Bloody Banquet and 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore,” explores how the language and imagery of the Eucharist is deployed in dramatizing stories about unbridled passion. Middleton and Dekker’s The Bloody Banquet culminates with Thetis (the Young Queen of the usurping Tyrant of Lydia) being forced to publically eat the dismembered corpse and drink the blood of her lover, Tymethes (the son of the deposed king of Lydia) by her husband, the usurping Tyrant. Ford’s 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore climaxes with Giovanni killing his sister Annabella, with whom he had had an incestuous relationship, and bursting into his father’s banquet hall with her still-beating heart skewered on his poniard. Both relationships were borne of intense passion and are described by the lovers throughout with words that evoke the Eucharist. By drawing so heavily—and graphically—on Catholic conceptions of the Eucharist and Christ’s Passion, these plays engage with Reformation debates over Christ’s Real Presence and underscore how, even
well after the Reformation, Christ’s whole and fragmented body remained a potent cultural trope. My chapter shows how two of the period’s most erotically-charged and gore-filled plays pervert the traditional connotation of blood as purifying and salvific. In a culture replete with discourses that emphasized the filth and inherent corruption of the flesh, these tragedies reimagine passion as unrestrained lust, and flesh as the instrument of death rather than redemption.

In Chapter 4, “Love’s ‘stony limits’: Marmorializing the Dead in Romeo and Juliet, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale,” I focus on the references to the heroines’ corpses (or their apparent corpses) as stone or marble, materials frequently associated with imperviousness and immortality. Reformations to rites and rituals for the dead forced a liturgical turning away from the corpse and tried to force a cultural turning away from them as well. By examining the language with which these female characters are marmorialized into their own tombs and mortuary statues, I argue that Shakespeare’s plays participate in the period’s vogue for mortuary art and, in doing so, suggest that this popular trend acts as a displacement strategy for tensions resulting from the effort to see the corpse as entirely emptied of animating soul and the corpse’s insistence, via its own materiality, that it remains unclosed, permeable, and active.

In my last chapter, “Death’s Release: Comedy and the Erotics of the Grave in The Faithful Shepherdess and The Widow’s Tears,” I analyze the eroticism generated around tombs and graveyards and explore how the comic and tragicomic genres engage cultural anxieties surrounding death and erotic subjectivity. Tragedy, in other words, was not the sole dramatic genre to deploy these concerns. George Chapman’s comedy, The Widow’s Tears (1611), depicts the tomb as an erotically-charged space that operates as the proving ground for female chastity. Convinced that his wife Cynthia would quickly remarry were he to die, Lysander stages his death, disguises himself as a graveyard guard, and then is so moved by his widow’s nearly week-
long lamentation over his hearse that he woos her within his own tomb. The grave operates in a similar fashion in John Fletcher’s pastoral tragicomedy The Faithful Shepherdess (1608) where Clorin, the titular shepherdess, consecrates herself to a life of chastity and remembrance over her lover’s grave. Smitten by her vow, one of the forest’s shepherds, Thenot, woos her with words of adulation by her lover’s grave. Both plays initially appear to reproduce prevailing ideologies of the lustful widow and the pure virgin. However, both Cynthia and Clorin ultimately resist the spatial and ideological enclosures to which they had been confined and instead gesture towards a future that is more self-determined than circumscribed by stereotypes of the early modern widow. The widow personifies cultural anxieties about unmastered female subjectivity. While appropriating a chaste subjectivity that is patriarchally-defined, Cynthia and Clorin also try to push that subject position beyond the bounds determined by Protestant patriarchal culture. I shall argue that the grave in each play functions as one point in an erotic triangle, a point through which the erotic and thanatotic converge to reproduce and interrogate patriarchal definitions of chastity and widowhood. I likewise examine how comic genres enable and sustain this teleology. Following Sarah Toulalan’s contention that contemporaneous comic texts are “not just about mocking, debasing, or defiling,” but via laughter and its associations with sexual release, provide catharsis leading to renewal, I posit that the comedic frame can facilitate a release towards erotic subjectivities beyond those made available by the dominant culture (198-99).
CHAPTER 2:
Liminal Flesh: Erotics of Mourning in
*Tamburlaine the Great* and *The Duke of Milan*31

The death of a lover is the loss of a beloved body.
—Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken32

My love is as a fever, longing still
For that which longer nurseth the disease,
Feeding on that which doth preserve the ill,
The uncertain sickly appetite to please.
—William Shakespeare33

Nothing *said* about death by the living can possibly relate to death as it will be experienced by the dying. Nothing *known* about death by the dead can be communicated to the living. Over this appalling chasm tragedy throws a frail bridge of imagination.
—Howard Barker34

Near the end of the fourth act of *Macbeth* (c.1606), Macduff is brought word that his wife and all his children have been killed by assassins sent by Macbeth. His reaction to this news is quite stirring in its expression of grief. At first hesitant to reveal this news, Ross finally tells Macduff, “Your castle is surprised, your wife and babes / Savagely slaughtered” (4.3.206-07). Prompted by Malcolm to “[g]ive sorrow words,” Macduff responds with a series of questions, each iteration pointing up an aspect of the horror and his effort to comprehend its scale (4.3.210):

> My children too? …
> My wife killed too? …
> All my pretty ones?
> Did you say all? O hell-kite! All?
> What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
> At one fell swoop?    (4.3.212; 214; 217-20)

Not only were the murders savage, as Macduff’s questions indicate, the true horror of this act is that *each* member of his family was slaughtered: “children,” “wife,” “*all* my pretty chickens *and* their dam” (emphasis mine). Preparing for battle against Macbeth’s forces, Macduff is at once a

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31 I presented an early version of this chapter in an essay (“Early Modern Body Worlds: The Erotics of Mourning in *Tamburlaine the Great* and *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy*”) for Will Stockton’s 2012 Shakespeare of Association of America seminar, “Is Shakespeare Our Only Contemporary?” I am indebted to Dr. Stockton and my seminar colleagues for their generous feedback.
33 See “Sonnet 147,” *The Norton Shakespeare*.
34 See *Death, the One and the Art of Theatre*. Abington: Routledge, 2005. 1.
soldier in battle gear and a grief-stricken husband and father. To Malcolm’s suggestion that he “Dispute it like a man,” Macduff replies, “I shall do so, / But I must also feel it as a man,” indicating that he shall indeed seek vengeance for this deed, but must first express his intense grief (4.3.221) Although it is often commonly asserted that early moderns equated emotional effluence with women and feminine lack of control over emotions, one gets the impression from Macduff’s response that, in venting emotions, a man did not necessarily sacrifice his “masculinity.” In her study, *Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature*, Jennifer C. Vaught argues that this period saw “gradual shifts in how [people] thought about…complex concepts expressive of interior states of mind” (12). Macduff’s tears are neither “womanish” nor manly, but as he points out himself, necessary. Before he can let this slaughter serve as “the whetstone of [his] sword” or “Dispute [this deed] like a man,” he must “feel” his loss and give expression to that grief (4.3.230; 221). That Macduff has both given vent to his emotions and channeled this sorrow into military strength, is evident in the next act in his victory over Macbeth. Venting grief, in other words, does not debilitate him.

Macduff’s reaction offers a vivid example of mourning that is not erotic, yet is full of love for someone “most precious to me” (4.3.225). I begin with this example of mourning that is expressive of grief over the dead beloved, yet not unbounded in its expressiveness, in order to foreground dramatizations of mourning that are decidedly unbounded, even necrophilic in the lover’s reaction to the death—and dead body—of the beloved object. Christopher Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine the Great* (c.1587-88) and Philip Massinger’s *The Duke of Milan* (c.1623) feature vivid examples of husbands not only expressing erotic desire for their wives’ corpses and

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35 There are also examples in early modern drama of characters whose mourning is quite erotic, even necrophilic, from Romeo and Othello (see my chapter 3) to Antonio in Middleton’s *The Revenger’s Tragedy* and Herod in Carey’s *The Tragedy of Mariam: Fair Queen of Jewry*. Yet even these responses are not as explicitly necrophilic as the two plays that are the focus of this chapter. Indeed, in Marlowe’s and Massinger’s plays, there are explicit and sustained efforts by the husbands to deny that their wives’ bodies are, indeed, dead.
passionately trying to deny to themselves that these bodies are indeed “dead,” but also enacting the desire to stir life in a lifeless body. What is particularly notable about these depictions is that the necrophilic desire for the corpse is a continuation of the intense erotic passion Tamburlaine and Sforza had felt for Zenocrate and Marcelia while they were alive. In this chapter, I analyze the necrophilic dimension of Tamburlaine and Sforza’s grief over the deaths of their wives and how the intensity of this eroticized grief intersects with beliefs about the liminality of the corpse in post-Reformation England. I argue that, in each play, the husband’s necrophilic mourning over the death of his wife (and his refusal to fully acknowledge that the body he so desired in life is now dead) and reformers’ definitions of death, produce a tension that points up the precariousness of the corpse as a signifier for what is considered to be definitively dead. In signifying this precarious fixity, the corpse of the beloved reveals that a component of grief is an anxiety over losing a core part of oneself as well.

Before the dead body in these plays is lusted after, the living body is depicted as a desired object by these male characters. The common thread linking these two bodies (living and dead) is intense desire—indeed, lust in Sforza’s case. As noted in my Introduction to this project, language deployed by Protestant reformers often drew together concepts about lust, idolatry, and dead bodies. According to the Elizabethan homilist behind *The Homily against Gluttony and*

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36 Tanya Pollard begins on a similar note in her superb study, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP), 2005. In her analysis of the effects of poisoned kisses from painted corpses in Middleton’s *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* and *The Duke of Milan,* Pollard argues that “death intensifies rather than diminishes the erotic appeal of [these corpses]” and that “the erotic investment in a corpse that leads to the poisoned kiss is depicted as an extension of a prior obsession with the woman herself” (104; 113). I concur with Pollard’s observations and begin from the same premise that necrophilic desire for the corpses in Marlowe and Massinger’s plays originates in—and acts as a continuation of—erotic desire for the living bodies of these women. Pollard’s focus, though, is on linking the seductive and corrupting power of these corpses with the ways antitheatricalists described the corrupting effects of the theatre on its audience members. My focus goes in a different direction: to show how necrophilic desire for the body signifies the period’s ideological shifts in definitions of “dead” and how these shifts are problematized by the material reality of the corpse and its perceived ongoing “activity.”
Drunkenesse, “[Almighty God] reckoneth [all excess] among the deeds of the flesh,” and coupleth them with idolatry, whoredom, murder, which are the greatest offences that can be named among men (297-98). Further, as the homilist writes in Homily against peril of idolatry, “Wherefore as for a man giuen to lust, to sit downe by a strumpet, is to tempt God: So is it likewise to erect an Idole in this pronenesse of mans nature to Idolatrie, nothing but a tempting.” Lust, in other words, tempts a man to have sex with a whore and give himself over to material flesh; so too does lust tempt man to make idols in the likeness of a fleshly being and, seduced by the similarity of the (stone) idol to a living soul-endowed human being, to mistakenly believe that the idol is not “dead,” but “living.” Indeed, as antitheatricalist John Rainolds warns, “For men can be ravished with loue of stones, of dead stuffe.” Devoid of animating spirit, statues and corpses were perceived as equally dead—and, as was central to reformed thinking—an object without spirit was the key distinguishing feature between a dead and living object. Thus, to imagine the decomposing corpse as still possessing any sentience (as had been the norm for centuries under Catholicism, particularly in northern Europe as Katharine Park has shown), was to be guilty of lust, of failing to distinguish “stock, stones,” etc. from living flesh—and, therefore, to be guilty of mortal sin.

In revising burial practices and nullifying memorial rites for the dead body, reformers tried to divest the corpse of any significance—indeed, of any place—in the early modern spiritual and cultural imagination. Alongside these changes, ways of grieving for the dead were also being rethought. To be sure, reformers in general did not aim to snuff out expressions of mourning, but there were concerns over the degree of such expression. In his magisterial study,

37 A later homily describes the “deeds of the flesh” as: “adultery, fornication, uncleanness, wantonness, idolatry, witchcraft...[etc.]” (458). I first noted this entry in my footnotes in chapter 1.
39 Op. cit. (please see my discussion of Park’s observations in chapter 1 of my project.)
David Cressy observes that “[d]espite the conceit that death entailed release, and despite the powerful hope that the departed had gone ahead to heaven, immediate survivors often experienced convulsions of grief” (393). He further points out that:

[g]rief was both a natural and cultural phenomenon. It was something people felt, but also something they performed. Failure to grieve might be seen as cold and heartless, while excess grief displayed weakness and lack of control. The subject easily lent itself to the Aristotelian discourse of balance and moderation. (393)

In other words, grief was thought to naturally brim up in the bereaved, and while it was expected that some measure of mourning the dead would be expressed, it likewise was expected that this expression would not be excessive. In 1562 John Jewell ordains that “[w]e are not…forbidden to mourn over the dead; but to mourn in such sort as the heathen did [that is, immoderately], we are forbidden. They, as they did neither believe in God nor in Christe, so had they no hope of the life to come” (Jewell 152). Samuel Clarke expresses a similar sentiment in An Antidote against immoderate mourning for the dead. He writes that pagans “were never able to comprehend or believe the resurrection of the bodies, and re-uniting with the souls [thus they were] immoderate in their mourning for the dead (Clarke). Bishop James Pilkington is a bit firmer with his contemporaries: “[m]ourning for the dead [should] be bridled” (Pilkington 319). What reformers most feared regarding mourning was that, in excess, it would (re)position the dead in direct relationship with the living—a relationship that elevated the significance of corporeality over spirituality at best, and resulted in idolatry at worst.

In part 2 of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine the Great, the warrior, conqueror, and self-professed “scourge of god”—who has left a vast trail of dead on his campaigns—is suddenly bereft of his beloved wife, Zenocrates, and consequently, comes face to face with his own mortality as well. Having relished the torture and slaughter of his conquests in parts 1 and 2 of the play,
Tamburlaine cannot accept the death of the woman he had once described as “divine Zenocrate,” my love,” and “bright Zemocrate, the world’s fair eye / Whose beams illuminate the lamps of heaven” (1.5.1.507; 1.5.1.513; 2.1.3.1-2). Indeed, it is as if d/Death has revealed itself as an agent apart from Tamburlaine and, in reaction, he refuses to hand over his beloved object to this ur-conqueror. In his efforts to deny that Zenocrate is dead, Tamburlaine refers to her corpse as if it still possessed life. Indeed, as we see in this play—and even more sensationnally in The Duke of Milan—“[d]eath intensifies rather than diminishes [her] erotic appeal” (Pollard 104).

Sitting by Zenocrate’s death bed (which also is their marriage bed), Tamburlaine conveys his anguish by likening her expiration to the diminishment of the cosmos’ beauty and power. As she loses color, “the beauty of the brightest day” turns “black” (2.4.1). The sun, moreover, “[n]ow wants the fuel that inflamed his beams,” a statement that points up the heat of the passion she once had (especially since the sun was often thought of as masculine), and the grand-scale effect her dying produces on cosmic activity and order (2.4.4). His lengthy speech, which opens act 4 and delivers the sudden news to the audience that she is dying, also includes the phrase “divine Zenocrate”—a phrase he had used earlier—five times in forty lines. Tamburlaine does not convey their passion in explicitly (or even barely-concealed phrases) about the lust they shared, but rather, in the Petrarchan language of a medieval or early modern courtier. That said, their relationship clearly has been consummated, as evidenced by three sons, so she has never simply been a beloved object, admired from afar, but a woman who “inflamed” the sun he had once felt himself to be. Indeed, while he delivers a long speech when she—the spoils of victory garnered in his defeat of her father, the Sultan of Egypt—is crowned Queen of Persia at the end of part 1, he devotes far more lines to speaking of her dying beauty and protesting the onslaught of d/Death.
Although Zenocrate originated in Tamburlaine’s life as a prize from a defeated foe, she nonetheless reciprocates his ardor. She refers to him, for instance, as “Tamburlaine my love, sweet Tamburlaine” very soon after Tamburlaine defeats her father (1.5.1.355). What this suggests is that their ardor for one another is mutual. While Zenocrate is not like Marcelia in *The Duke of Milan*, who reciprocates her husband’s ardor, and likewise encourages his lustful idolatry of her, Zenocrate’s reciprocity of Tamburlaine’s affections positions theirs as a mutual love and makes it clear that—even as a spoil of battle—she is not a passive object, a tabula rasa on which Tamburlaine is the sole writer.

That Tamburlaine’s necrophilic attachment to Zenocrate is built on his love for the living woman is evident in the language with which he speaks of and directly addresses her corpse. Just as he spoke of her as a goddess when she was alive, Tamburlaine continues to refer to her as a “stately queen”—albeit now “of heaven,” and “divine Zenocrate,” the phrase with which he most often describes and addresses her (2.4.108; 2.4.111). That he sees her corpse as semi-animate is evident when he speaks directly to her corpse and implores her soul to “[c]ome down from heaven and live with me again!” (2.4.118). Part of her is here, he imagines, to receive his message, but another part is in heaven, where he fears a “god…holds thee in his / arms. / Giving thee nectar and ambrosia” (2.4.109-10). She is divided matter now, with part of her in an unspecified elsewhere (“Where’er her soul be”) and a corpse still with him. When the doctors confirm that she has died, Tamburlaine refers to her in the third-person; yet, he alternates the third- with direct address in the second-person, in an effort to deny the truth that she is dead—“words [that] do pierce [his] soul”—and effect the semblance of a still-living, still-goddess-like beauty (2.4.125). Immediately after declaring “[t]hough she be dead, yet let me think she lives, / And feed my mind that dies for want of her,” Tamburlaine orders her corpse to be “[e]mbalmed
with cassia, ambergris, and myrrh, / Not lapped in lead, but in a sheet of gold” (2.4.127-28; 2.4.130-31). He wants to preserve her corpse as best as possible; moreover, he wishes to carry it about with him, in an elaborate hearse until his own death, so that they can be interred together and simultaneously, but until then he needs her physically present. It is as if he needs the signifier for his last great conquest (Egypt) and for the sense of masculinity he created for himself beyond that of soldier: of a male who has conquered both battlefield and bed and has sired heirs. His prowess, to his thinking, is evidenced not only in the bodies he has imprisoned, tortured, and killed, but likewise wooed, loved, and been loved by. In this sense, he embodies two types of early modern manhood, as one was giving way to the other. He is both martial and courtly, a warrior and a courtier (Vaught 8). But he ultimately cannot be both, particularly as the former was being supplanted by the latter in cultural significance. Thus, his warrior/courtier persona also underscores the liminal boundaries with which this play is concerned.

Though Tamburlaine’s eroticization of Zenocrate’s corpse is not as overt or salacious as, say, the Tyrant’s in The Second Maiden’s Tragedy or Sforza’s in The Duke of Milan, it is nonetheless striking, in part because of its very duration (Zenocrate dies and is ensconced in her mobile mausoleum by the end of act 2 and Tamburlaine, of course, does not die until act 5) as he travels around with and talks to her corpse. His eroticization of her dead body also signifies and appears to contribute to his decline in power and death. That Tamburlaine feels Zenocrate’s death as a threat to his masculinity is first made plain just after she dies, when he describes himself as “[d]rooping and pining for Zenocrate,” while he follows her effigy and preserved corpse (2.4.142). These words underscore the weight of his grief, but they also imply detumescence. While male grief was not necessarily associated with effeminacy in early modern

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40 See Jennifer Vaught’s Masculinity and Emotion in Early Modern English Literature. During this period in England, there was a “change in profession for many upper-class Englishmen from the militaristic to the civilian arts” (8).
culture—indeed, Vaught’s analysis posits that its expression could actually facilitate the construction of masculine subjectivity—it often was.

In her classic study, *Women, Death, and Literature in Post-Reformation England*, Patricia Phillippy observes that “immoderate grief is commonly associated…with femininity” (11). Impassioned over Zenocrate’s death, Tamburlaine burns the city where she died—precisely because this is where she died. His subsequent acts of savagery in his military campaigns further illustrate how utterly governed—or rather, uncontrolled—by passionate grief he is. Moreover, he sees Zenocrate, not himself, as leading the vanguard in these battles. Indeed, he turns to her corpse and pronounces:

> Thou shalt not beautify Larissa plains,  
> But keep within the circle of mine arms!  
> At every town and castle I besiege  
> Thou shalt be set upon my royal tent,  
> And when I meet an army in the field  
> Those looks will shed such influence in my camp  
> As if Bellona, goddess of the war,  
> Threw naked swords and sulphur balls of fire  
> Upon the heads of all our enemies. (3.2.34-42)

In effect, a beautiful, well-preserved corpse leads the charge in his subsequent battles, underscoring the preeminence he cedes to it. Although he is the one who enters the battles, Zenocrate’s corpse is their symbolic commander—and she is commander in the form of an idol, a goddess of war (Bellona), a virtually deified corpse.

Tamburlaine has, in effect, created two idols of his dead wife: the effigy of the dead queen—the “picture of divine Zenocrate / [that] show[s] her beauty which the world admired”—and the embalmed corpse, wrapped in gold. At the same time that one image reinforces the other, particularly in their proximity to one another (and one might assume, appearance, since the corpse is so well preserved as to be picture-like itself), it is the corpse—the fleshly remains of
Tamburlaine’s beloved—that has primacy for him. He uses erotic language to describe both effigy and corpse, but it is the corpse that leads him into battle. Indeed, he sets her up as (and believes her to be) the de facto leader of all his subsequent military battles. One could say that, perhaps, Tamburlaine only imagines this to be the case. However, since he travels around with her corpse in an elaborate (read: obvious) mausoleum, and moves her corpse (in some manner that, again, would have to be obvious) to his tent before a battle, it is evident that he sees power in her corpse—or, at least, in the presence of it. He derives a sense of sustenance from the corpse of his beautiful wife, and he also uses it to strike awe into his enemies were they to see it staring down upon them as they enter battle (that is, if we take literally Tamburlaine’s choreography of this spectacle).

The strength that Tamburlaine imagines he draws from the corpse proves, on the contrary, to be fleeting. He may be winning battles, but his thirst for blood is now so great that it ultimately kills him. Jerusalem warns Tamburlaine, for instance, that:

Thy victories are grown so violent
That shortly heaven, filled with the meteors
Of blood and fire thy tyrannies have made,
Will pour down blood and fire on thy head,
Whose scalding drops will pierce thy seething brains
And with our bloods revenge our bloods on thee. (4.1.140-45)

From the moment Zenocrate dies, Tamburlaine’s grief gives rise to an intense rage that builds for the rest of the play. It is this rage that drives him into battle and that makes it possible for him to presume he “exercise[s] a greater name / The scourge of God and terror of the world” (4.1.153-55). He sees himself as god’s emissary of violence and conquest—at the vanguard of god’s army sent to “apply myself to fit those terms / In war, in blood, in death, in cruelty” (4.1.155-57). His position here is similar to that of Zenocrate’s corpse, particularly in her role as Bellona looking down at the enemy from the tent. His words thus conflate his body with hers, and point up the
corpse he too will become. It is a way also for him to conjoin his body with her corpse, to remain merged with her and thus create a continuum that links the intimacy they shared as husband and wife and which they will once again share when they are buried together. Indeed, his last gesture in the play foregrounds this path. He dies from an unnamed disease (rather than a battle wound), and thus shares the same cause of death with Zenocrates, for she too died from disease. Moreover, he asks for the hearse containing Zenocrates’s embalmed corpse to be brought by his death-bed and commands his “eyes [to] enjoy your latest benefit”—to “Pierce through the coffin and the sheet of gold / And glut your longings with a heaven of joy” (5.3.225; 227-28). Through the liminal place of his eyes, he “glut[s]” his longings for her one last time.

This liminality, of course, overlaps with the liminality of the corpse in the hearse, which has signified both “dead” and “alive” since Zenocrates’s death. This dual signification is indicated by Tamburlaine’s direct address to her as if she is still sentient and his indirect references about her in the third-person suggesting she is “dead as stocks and stones.” Moreover, the corpse’s liminal state is, I believe, what truly attracts Tamburlaine to this body, what makes him want to trundle it around with him for the rest of his life. As Georges Bataille wrote, “on the one hand the horror of death drives us off, for we prefer life; on the other an element at once solemn and terrifying fascinates and disturbs us profoundly” (45). And that element—foregrounded by the corpse itself—is the prospect of continuity, of melding with all that is, and (re)connecting with an originary wholeness that our discontinuous, discrete states of being do not allow. The corpse signifies this entry point, in a way that resonates with the way the warm, living body signifies this entry point at the moment of orgasm. It is also rather telling that most of Tamburlaine’s words of love and adoration for Zenocrates are spoken after she is dead, rather than while she lives—even though he clearly loves her while she was alive. Thus, her corpse—in its very
precariousness—amplifies her appeal. Indeed, as Judith Butler writes in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, “the…vulnerability of our bodies” is, in part, what constitutes us. “[O]ur bodies,” she continues, are “sites of desire and physical vulnerability.” Thus, by virtue of having bodies, we are always exposed to “loss and vulnerability” (Butler 20). Further, Butler argues that one reason “why aggression sometimes seems so quickly to follow…loss” is because we wish to “reconstitute a ‘self’”(xiv). In suffering the loss of a loved one, she writes, we suddenly ask questions such as “who ‘am’ I without you? When we lose some of these ties by which we are constituted, we do not know who we are or what to do. On one level,” Butler remarks, “I think I have lost ‘you’ only to discover that ‘I’ have gone missing as well” (22). If we apply some of this logic to Tamburlaine’s frenzied military campaigns after Zenocrate’s death, we can see that he is trying to reassert a former self, a more sharply defined version of that former self in the face of losing the beloved object by which he defined himself for so long.

The death of his beloved wife exposes Tamburlaine to the vulnerability of death. Specifically, by extension of the sexual intimacy their bodies once shared with each other, Zenocrate’s death exposes him to the hard fact that he too—the seemingly invincible warlord and empire builder—will die. This makes the presence of the hearse even more fascinating: Tamburlaine brings it wherever he goes, he says, to inspire dread in his enemies. However, he also keeps his wife’s corpse near him so that it might signify the death he brings to his enemies. Via the well-preserved corpse of his beloved wife, Tamburlaine tries to create an illusion of invincibility in the face of death. True, he speaks of his own eventual death and subsequent joint burial with Zenocrate, but the future tense is always future—“and till I die; “Then, in a tomb as rich as Mausolus’ / We both will rest…” (2.4.132; 134, my emphasis). He does not anticipate death around every corner or on every battlefield. Having waged and won many wars,
Tamburlaine believes in the possibility of his own invincibility. Hence, by going into battles now, with more unrelenting fury than ever before Zenocrate’s death, Tamburlaine is challenging death and asserting the notion that he, somehow, may be designed to evade death. The irony here is that in trundling death along with him in the form of a corpse, he signifies not his invincibility to death, but death’s proximity and eventual victory over him. For, if Zenocrate’s embalmed corpse signifies preservation against mortality, her body’s “corpseness”41 (underscored by her bodily immobility and her placement in a hearse) signifies an inescapable vulnerability to death. Michael Neill’s comparison of Zenocrate’s hearse to Death’s pageant wagon is useful here. In his magnificent study, Issues of Death: Mortality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy, Neill writes that, while “[t]he installation of a hearse, containing the embalmed body of Zenocrate...transforms the iconic significance of Tamburlaine’s triumphal progress [into] a ritual of mourning” (98). Neill’s observation about the hearse’s role in shaping this military progress into one, long funeral progress—about its being an extended obsequy in response to his own grief—is astute. However, I disagree that one is “transform[ed]” into the other; rather, these roles coexist, their liminal borders always overlapping and thus pointing up death’s role as the common link, the common denominator for all human life (96-97). Tamburlaine’s final “mighty line,” thus rings feebly in light of this point. After meticulously organizing the scene of his death-bed—final fatherly advice, placement of Zenocrate’s hearse and corpse by his “fatal chair,” etc.—he is “prepared” to die. In his last lines he bids his sons “farewell” and declares “Tamburlaine, the scourge of God, must die” (5.3.249). By contrast, Zenocrate had accepted that death was the natural endpoint of life—something which she had tried to convince her husband to accept in the face of his railing against it being so. Tamburlaine constructs the scene in this

41 While there are no lexical entries for this word, it has been used by scholars to refer to the state of being a corpse (or, of appearing to be one).
manner in order to give the illusion of agency in the face of death—I choose to go...now.

However, he is merely stating the obvious and, in doing so, underscores his own precariousness and vulnerability to as well as at the liminal border.

Philip Massinger’s play, *The Duke of Milan*, also draws together grief and the eroticization of the corpse. In the process, the play demonstrates that the display of ardor towards the dead beloved is an effort by the lover to stave off the threat of annihilation in the face of losing the person most central to one’s sense of subjectivity. However, unlike in *Tamburlaine*, where the bereaved husband vacillates between seeing his wife as dead and not dead, in Massinger’s tragedy the grieving husband forces the belief upon himself that his wife still lives, and does so to the point where he kisses her corpse. Massinger’s play also differs markedly in that the wife does not die of natural causes (as did Zenocrate), but is killed by her husband in retaliation for what he wrongly believed was her infidelity. Analyzing these plays alongside one another allows us to see some of the degrees to which necrophilia was imagined in early modern drama and to better understand ways in which the corpse of the beloved object could signify the indistinction of bodily borders, and consequently, the interplay between necrophilic passion and subjectivity.

Both Susan Zimmerman and Tanya Pollard offer provocative readings of Massinger’s play. In *The Early Modern Corpse and Shakespeare’s Theater*, Zimmerman examines necrophilia in the context of Protestant iconoclasm and its intersection with the subversive elements of theatrical representation. Pollard also concentrates on expressions of lust for the living and dead body, but examines instead parallels between the seductive properties of the corpse and the dangers of the theatre. I likewise focus on the “continuum between the living and the dead” as it is expressed through sexual desire in this play (Pollard *Drugs* 113). However, my
focus is on how this continuum intersects with early modern conceptions of grief and anxieties of annihilation.

As several critics including Zimmerman and Pollard have noted, Massinger based his play on Thomas Middleton’s *The Second Maiden’s Tragedy* (c.1611), which features a similarly lascivious lover unwilling to accept the death of his beloved object and, consequently, being seduced by her seemingly life-like cosmeticized corpse into his own death. The chief difference between Middleton’s play and Massinger’s variation is that, in the former, the Tyrant had made sexual overtures to the Lady, but rather than succumbing, the Lady commits suicide, is buried, and exhumed by the Tyrant’s henchmen. She is subsequently made-up with poisoned cosmetics by the man to whom she was betrothed and who now seeks revenge for her death. By contrast, the latter play features an equally lustful husband and wife, Duke Sforza and Marcelia. Not only is their passion mutual, Sforza is misled to believe that his wife has been unfaithful to him and he thus kills her. Upon learning that his wife was indeed innocent of adultery, he falls into such paroxysms of grief that he begs his courtiers to find some sort of restorative agent that will make his wife appear as if she lives again. That agent likewise comes in the form of poisoned cosmetics, concocted and applied by Sforza’s favorite, Ferdinand, acting on behalf of his sister who had been rejected by Sforza in favor of Marcelia.

Unlike Tamburlaine and Zenocrate, who express their mutual ardor in passionate, albeit courtly romantic terms, Sforza and Marcelia speak their affections in language that clearly conveys the lust that governs their relationship. The play opens with references to drunkenness and intoxication as Gracchio declares, “I am this day the state-drunkard,” and adds that all should “Drink hard; and let the health run through the city” (1.1.2; 1.1.28). Sobriety seems to be antithetical to Sforza’s court, particularly on Marcelia’s birthday, the day “in which the duke is
not his own, but her’s,” a remark that immediately foregrounds the unbounded nature of Sforza and Marcelia’s lust for one another: their passion is so unbridled that Sforza utterly loses himself in her (1.1.101). This is not mere court gossip, as evidenced later when Sforza arrives at Marcelia’s birthday festivities, looks at her and fawns “thou art indeed / So absolute in body, and in mind” (1.3.33-34). Her reply is equally effusive: her only concern each day is “how to appear / worthy in your favour; and that my embraces / Might yield a fruitful harvest of content” (1.3.64-66). Such verbal exchanges and public kisses between them prompt Sforza’s sister, Mariana, to say in an aside: “How she winds herself / Into his soul!” (1.3.75-76). She likens Marcelia to a serpent encircling the Duke and mortally endangering his soul with her lust. That they idolize each other is clear; that their lust is (and is apprehended by others to be) so intense it melds their very beings likewise is plain. As his mother, Isabella, prepares for the festivities, she sniffs, “let us to the banquet; / But not to serve his idol”; even Sforza himself observes “I might have fall’n into idolatry” (1.3.35-36; 4.3.50). Clearly, Sforza and Marcelia have transgressed socially and humorally acceptable boundaries with their passion—they love each other immoderately, which not only was perceived in early modern culture as lascivious behavior (even if the couple was married), but also mortal to one’s soul according to many Protestant polemicists who, repeatedly, equated lust with idolatry and proclaimed it among the filthiest of sins.⁴²

When the Duke is suddenly (and reluctantly) called away in the midst of these festivities on a matter of urgent state business, he asks his favorite, Francisco, to kill Marcelia in the event that he himself is killed. The degree of their lust is again underscored, this time in Sforza’s casting aside the letter announcing the urgent state matter: “Out of my sight! / And all thoughts that may strangle mirth forsake me” (1.3.122-23). He lives solely for pleasure, at the expense of state security—and, perhaps even—of his own soul. When another letter arrives, he cannot

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⁴² Please see chapter 1 of my project for a discussion of some of these examples.
ignore the matter and calls an end to the banquet. As Sforza and Marcelia part from each other, Sforza extols her “sweet lips, yielding immortal nectar” and orders that they not be “touch’d by any but myself” (1.3.205; 206), to which she assures, “I was born only yours, and I will die so” (1.3.215). Their lust is so great that all other people, all other matters are, at best, secondary to the expression of their passion. Indeed, that passion is so great that it stirs jealousy in Sforza, which Francisco stokes with lies indicating Marcelia has committed adultery. Sforza is so jealous—so ready to be governed by his passions—that he stabs her and declares “justice” has been done. Before Marcelia dies, Sforza learns the truth and declares, “Then I believe thee” (5.1.304). Marcelia forgives him, but he is so overcome with grief he cries out, “O my heart-strings!” (5.1.316).

His subsequent grief is described by Pescara as a “madness” (5.2.14). Indeed, so overcome with guilt and grief is Sforza that:

> Forgetting his own greatness, he fell prostrate  
> At the doctors’ feet, implor’d their aid, and swore,  
> Provided they recover’d her, he would live  
> A private man, and they should share his dukedom. (5.2.38-41)

That he seems to “forget” himself underscores the degree of his grief, particularly since he is willing to share his kingdom and falls at the feet of underlings (albeit underlings who may possess the knowledge of how to effect a semblance of restoration). As Garrett A. Sullivan aptly puts it, “self-forgetting in all of its forms represents self-alienation, the failure to know oneself” (14). This evidently is what is happening to Sforza. That lust had the power to make one “forget” oneself was a common concept in the early modern imagination and this cause/effect was incorporated into plays, sermons, and poems. Sullivan cites, for example, a passage from Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis*: “And careless lust stirs up a desperate courage, / Planting oblivion, beating reason back, / Forgetting shame’s pure blush and honor’s wrack” (qtd. in
Sullivan, 1). The presence of lust is possible only if oblivion takes hold; or more precisely, lust forces reason back, and the mind becomes blank as physical passions overtake it. And it is through lust that Sforza and Marcelia knew each other. Thus, it is imperative for Sforza to see her as she once was, so that her body might have the same effect on him that it did in life. In being able to once again signify as a desirable body, Marcelia’s corpse would resume its role as Sforza’s idol—thereby reconnecting him with the subjectivity he is suddenly bereft of.

In fact, it is through forgetting that Sforza is able to read Marcelia’s corpse as if it signified a living, rather than a dead body. As the servants move her wounded corpse, Sforza asks that they do so “Carefully… / The gentlest touch torments her” (5.2. 47-48). Not unlike Tamburlaine, Sforza at times picks up on corporeal signs that indicate death and he seems to be able to read these signs as indicative of “dead.” As he surveys her body, he remarks:

How pale and wan she looks!
…this snow-white hand, How cold it is!
This was once Cupid’s fire-brand, and still
’Tis so to me. How slow her pulses beat too!  (5.2.60; 63; 64-65)

The present tense “is” and the past tense, “was,” suggest temporal awareness of what was and no longer is “functioning.” Yet, his reference to her beating pulse suggests he may be imagining a pulse, or may simply indicate that her pulse is ebbing. It is important to note, too, the parts of the body Sforza is drawn to: with her hands she caressed his body and held his hand; and her pulse was indicative of blood flow, which made life possible, and which beat more rapidly when the body was sexually aroused. With a cold hand and an ebbing pulse, her body is pulling away from his. He is told by the doctors that she has been given “a sleepy potion,” which would account for her unresponsiveness. Sforza hopes that in this state she is able to dream; however, he only refers to her in the third-person and never addresses her directly in the second person, as he did when she lived.
In his superb study, *The Rest Is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*, Robert N. Watson argues that liturgical and doctrinal changes enacted during the Reformation stirred the fear that death led not to heaven or hell, but to annihilation—not only of one’s body, but of oneself. In his analysis of poems by John Donne, which conjoin images of love and death, Watson observes that “Donne typically fears that parting from his lover will mean parting from an essential part of him forever” (188). Sforza is a bit like Donne in this sense. Without Marcelia, on whom he had bestowed and likewise was the recipient of erotically charged language, Sforza himself has become a bit cold. Indeed, without “his idol,” he has become humorally and rhetorically cool.

Moreover, Sforza’s reference to Cupid points up the conjunction of eros and thanatos, as registered in her body: he recalls how hot her now-cold hand was and likens it to Cupid’s arrow. Indeed the reference to Cupid (in the context of her dead body) foregrounds the imbrication of love and death: Cupid was not “a cute little putto” in the early modern imagination. In fact, to be hit with this “fire-brand…was no laughing matter” to early moderns (MacKenzie 25). We know already that lust was considered a mortal sin, so to draw a comparison between Marcelia’s hand and Cupid’s arrow makes sense. Both are instruments that can be deployed in the service of lust, a mortal sin. However, once Marcelia’s decomposing body has been beautified with cosmetics, these material distinctions seem once again difficult to ascertain. For example, Sforza refers once more to Marcelia’s hand just before he kisses her corpse: “This hand seems as it was when I first kiss’d it” (5.2.209). That Hamletian verb “seems” conjures its near-corollary, “is,” and suggests that *this* hand of Marcelia’s may or may not convey sentience. Yet, as part of her freshly-cosmeticized body intended to signify “life,” *this* hand—which could very well be the same (left or right) one as earlier—registers in Sforza’s own hand as at least sort-of-warm. In other words,
it “passes” as living because the recently-modified, “enlivened” corpse deploys it as such—which foregrounds again the liminal dead body—a body simultaneously still and devoid of animating spirit, yet producing odors or changing color in ways that suggest its difference from its lived version. Indeed, that Sforza chooses to read Marcelia’s dead hand as akin to her living hand points up the effort he is using to convince himself that this is not a dead hand. It also foregrounds the (contested) semi-animate status of the corpse, which here appears to be moderately warm.

The moment Sforza kisses Marcelia’s lips is both the moment when her corpse’s seeming viability comes to the fore and the moment when the illusion of its animation begins to dissolve. Just after Francisco has applied the cosmetics to Marcelia’s corpse to render it life-like, the Duke and some of his courtiers enter the room. That there is something stirring about the spectacle of her painted corpse is articulated not only by Sforza, who exclaims, “I live again,” but also by Pescara—who has no vested interest or need in apprehending her body as animate, yet effuses, “‘Tis wonderous strange!” to underscore the marked transformation in her appearance (5.3.203; 207). Marcelia’s cheeks, lips, and hands have been painted and it is when Sforza kisses “those lips”—the most liminal of the painted parts—whose rosy color invites him to lean forward to kiss them—that the illusion is broken. Graccho enters at this very moment with a guard to apprehend Francisco. However, the poison that Francisco applied to the corpse’s lips was drunk by Sforza when he kissed them. The part of her body that was most enticing was her lips, which is the portal—the limen—that also marked hers as a rank and contaminating body. In drinking the nectar/poison from them, Sforza has also symbolically drunk corpse fluid, thereby infecting his own body via his lust for the corpse. Indeed, by touching her lips with his and drinking in their poison, he points up his own imminent “corpseness.”
Although the play makes references to souls and heaven, it is not clear what sort of hereafter exists, or even if one does. Of course, the play is set in Italy and thus is inflected with references to Catholic beliefs, including purgatory, as when the dying Sforza asks his sister to pray for his “poor soul” (5.2.263). Not surprisingly, the last words of the man who could not get enough of Marcelia’s body in life are: “Bury me with Marcelia, / And let our epitaphs be—” (5.2.264). On the one hand, joint burial was a common enough request during this period in England so it is not surprising that such a request makes it into a play; on the other hand, Sforza’s request underscores the popular motif conflating bed and grave. The unfinished epitaph suggests that Sforza does not have a clear idea as to what sort of legacy he envisions for them. In not having had the chance to compose an epitaph, Sforza faces the possibility of having one written by others for their grave—or of not having one composed at all. Moreover, the importance of epitaphs in early seventeenth-century English culture would have made this cutting-off mid-sentence rather apparent to the audience. As Peter Sherlock writes, in *Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England*, “inscriptions [are] crucial to an understanding of the precise intentions of tombs, their subject, and patrons” (13). In dying mid-sentence, Sforza leaves open questions regarding his “intentions.” Are they to be consigned to oblivion, or annihilation, as alluded to by Sforza’s reference to his “ashes?” Does it matter to people who feasted so very much in the present if they even have a legacy? The blank space at the end of Sforza’s half-sentence likewise leaves open the opportunity for audience members today and in the future to fill in this space. Its blankness, though, is what is significant. It, too, is a liminal space in a play that has been deeply concerned about transitional spaces.

As we see, both Tamburlaine and Sforza are stricken with the sudden loss of beloved objects and are so beset with grief that they preserve their wives’ corpses and keep them in
intimate proximity. The fleshly bodies of these female characters signified the shared love between these couples. Consequently, preserving this flesh and keeping it close enough for an embrace, becomes a key feature of the husbands’ mourning, and an emblem of their efforts to deny to themselves that their wives are, indeed, dead. At the same time that their rituals of mourning suggest idolization of the dead, which was associated with Catholic practice, their rituals also emblematize, and eroticize, the intense grief that both Tamburlaine and Sforza feel.
CHAPTER 3:
“Consummations devoutly to be wish’d”:
Feast and Fragment in *The Bloody Banquet* and ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore

And he toke the cup, and gaue thankes, and said, Take this, and devide it among you;…
And he toke the bread, and when he had giuen thankes, he broke it, and gaue to them, saying this is my bodie, which is giuen for you: do this in remembrance of me.
—*The Holy Gospel of Jesus Christ, according to Luke*

...the disappearance of the sacrificial rites coincides with the disappearance of the difference between impure violence and purifying violence. When this difference has been effaced, purification is no longer possible and impure, contagious, reciprocal violence spreads throughout the community.

--René Girard

*The Bloody Banquet* is dinner theater.
—Gary Taylor

In act 3 of Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (1611), Alonso, Sebastian, Antonio, and Gonzalo are wandering the island, hungry and exhausted, when suddenly “several strange shapes” appear with an elaborate banquet and gesture for the shipwrecked travelers to partake of the repast. However, just as they are about to do so, Ariel appears and, in a great show of thunder and lightening, causes the banquet to vanish. By staging the magical appearance and disappearance of a communal feast, at the behest of the magus Prospero, and whilst denouncing Alonso, Antonio, and Sebastian as “you three men of sin,” Ariel not only formally charges these usurpers with their crimes, but invokes ongoing controversies surrounding the Eucharist in early modern England (3.3.53). Indeed, this spectacle, as well as those in many other dramas where banquets figure centrally, takes up what Stephen Greenblatt has referred to as “the problem of the leftover,’ that is the status of the material remainder” (“Mousetrap” 141). As Robert Lanier Reid

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44 See Girard’s study, *Violence and the Sacred*.
45 Gary Taylor’s essay, “Gender, Hunger, Horror: The History and Significance of *The Bloody Banquet*,” makes an important intervention in scholarship on this play—not least because it draws Middleton and Dekker’s play from the outskirts of early modern studies and creates a foundation for further discussion.
observes, Ariel has denied communion to these co-conspirators—Antonio who twelve years earlier usurped the dukedom of Milan from his brother Prospero with the support of Alonso, the King of Naples, and who now with Alonso’s brother, Sebastian, is plotting Alonso’s overthrow—because they lack contrition for their sins and therefore have not earned a place at this communal, restorative table (498). The suggestion is that this is no ordinary meal for stomach alone, but one meant likewise for “moral health” (Reid 498)—thus conjuring associations with the Eucharist, or Last Supper. As Greenblatt argues, the bread and wine of the Catholic Mass continued to signify deeply and pervasively, well after Protestant reformers gave new definitions to this sacrament. The “leftover” to which he refers is not only the proverbial crumb from the consecrated Host, fallen to the floor where it is eaten by a mouse, but the debated status of the bread and wine, ranging from the transubstantiated flesh and blood of the resurrected and transfigured Christ to symbols of his one-time sacrifice for the redemption of humankind.

Banquet, in early modern culture, referred specifically to the conclusion of a meal, “an elaborate dessert…often served in a separate room as a spectacular and self-indulgent display of spiced and sweetmeats,” though it could also be “a small, private affair or tryst, the ‘dainties’ and sweetmeats deemed aphrodisiacal” (Meads 2). Thus, a banquet carried ideas of ritualized, often indulgent consumption in the cultural imagination. Produced, moreover, amidst the context of ongoing Eucharistic debates, banquets on the early modern stage also invoked the ritualized consumption of Christ’s body and blood. In his impressive study, Chris Meads states that “[f]or many dramatists the banquet and its associations proved an enduring and attractive setting in which to play out crucial sections of a large number of plays between 1585 and 1642” (1).

46 See Chris Meads, Banquets Set Forth: Banqueting in English Renaissance Drama (Manchester: U of Manchester P), 2001. Meads notes, for instance, that there are “[a] total of ninety-nine [surviving] plays, containing 114 scenes for which banquets provide the setting,” a count that underscores “the dramatic potential” of this topos (2).
Playwrights used banquets—with their focus on eating, drinking, serving, and sharing—to call attention to a range of subjects, from ceremony to hospitality to erotic and sexual indulgence (Meads 1-3).

In this chapter, I turn my attention to two revenge tragedies in which the language of consumption and consummation foregrounds lust and death in terms that are particularly visceral and bloody. Middleton and Dekker’s *The Bloody Banquet* (c.1609) culminates with Thetis, the Young Queen of the usurping Tyrant of Lydia, being forced by him to publically eat the dismembered corpse and drink the blood of her lover, Tymethes, the son of the deposed king of Lydia. John Ford’s *'Tis Pity She’s a Whore* (c.1630) culminates with Giovanni eviscerating his sister Annabella, with whom he has had an incestuous affair, and bursting into his father’s banquet hall with her still-beating heart skewered upon his dagger—which he then uses to mortally wound Annabella’s husband, Soranzo. What is particularly striking about these plays—in addition to their sensational butchery—is the use of Eucharistic language and iconography to dramatize the plays’ unbridled erotic passions and their consequences. By invoking the Eucharist’s associations with corporeal fragmentation and cannibalism, these plays, I argue, reimagine passion as unrestrained lust, and flesh as the instrument of death rather than redemption. What becomes visible in the tragedies’ mutilated corpses, moreover, is their capacity to evade definition by those who attempt to assert authority over them and to expose the belief in redemption-through-bodily-sacrifice as a twisted fantasy.

Deborah Kuller Shuger has observed, in her analysis of the connections between medieval Christic iconography and early modern subjectivities, that “[t]he figure of the crucified Jesus slips to the margins of English Protestantism” (89). Though there were, as Shuger documents, “only a handful of passion narratives…from the mid-sixteenth century through the
Civil Wars,” the iconography of the passion was not so much pushed to the margins as it was amplified by theological debates and dispersed amongst more secular discourses (89). Thus, even though traditional ideas about Christ’s passion and the Eucharist were decentered in Protestant practices, they remained quite central in the post-Reformation imagination. In order to understand how some of these ideas underpin the dramas I examine in this chapter, it is important to have a sense of the range and content of these Eucharistic debates and how they overlap with other discourses about the mutilated and cannibalized corpse. I shall first explore the key ways in which the Eucharist was reconceptualized during the Reformation and then link these ideas with related controversies about the dead body, corporeal corruption, and redemption. As we shall see, Eucharistic controversies offered a rich and compelling narrative through which to dramatize anxieties about the desired dead body. Central to debates about the Eucharist were questions regarding the body that was present in the communion meal. Similarly, characters in The Bloody Banquet and ’Tis Pity She’s a Whore struggle to identify the nature of the body located in the bloody fragments onstage. Rather than clarity and knowledge, the fragmented, anatomized bodies in these banqueting scenes offer obscurity and confusion.

As I detail below, Protestant reformers agreed that traditional conceptions of the Eucharist needed to be revised. However, they did not concur on one clear redefinition. Indeed, a range of new definitions filled the landscape. While this lack of consensus did not produce wholesale confusion, it did foreground the capriciousness of Christ’s body as a cultural object, and its susceptibility to multiple interpretations. The theatre, with its eyes and ears open to its milieux, mines these myriad revisions and amplifies them from the stage. In their effort to achieve clarity on what the Eucharist “really” means, reformers themselves revealed the ambiguity of the Host—and the theatre refuses such efforts at clarity, which we see in the last
scenes of *The Bloody Banquet* and *'Tis Pity*, where guests and onlookers are perplexed over how to interpret the bloody feasts before them.

At the heart of Christian discourses about eternal salvation is the conjunction of flesh and spirit in the form of Christ, the son of God who assumed mortal flesh, so that via his sacrifice he could take on the sins of humankind and, through the resurrection of his incorruptible body, offer Christians the hope of transcending their own mortality. The central sacrament affirming this process (and this promise) was the Mass, which reenacted Christ’s sacrifice.\(^47\) By eating and drinking the transubstantiated foods, the faithful and the divine became one—god enters the human worshipper just as he had at one time himself entered the human form. Moreover, by believing that the divine had once again assumed material form in the bread and wine—and by ingesting these substances—the worshipper could believe in his own transcendent materiality and eternal salvation. Miri Rubin underscores the significance of eating food to Christian redemption when she writes:

> [i]n the eucharist there was a powerful assimilation of eating, the most common of human functions, into the economy of the supernatural. The offer of oneness with God through physical assimilation was combined with the promise of all that was beneficial in this life and the next, and gave the eucharist enormous appeal. (26)

“Eating and food, vessels and nourishment,” she notes, “were essential parts of eucharistic symbolism. The eucharist [thus] developed into something good to eat, it could be experienced directly and assimilated into one’s own body” (27-28). In Catholic eschatology, moreover, the putrefying corpse assumed the status of regenerative material. As Susan Zimmerman points out,

\(^47\) In 1215, the Fourth Lateran council set out the doctrine of transubstantiation: “There is one Universal Church of the faithful, outside of which there is absolutely no salvation. In which there is the same priest and sacrifice, Jesus Christ, whose body and blood are truly contained in the sacrament of the altar under the forms of bread and wine; the bread being changed (*transubstantiatus*) by divine power into the body, and the wine into the blood, so that to realize the mystery of unity we may receive of Him what He has received of us. And this sacrament no one can effect except the priest who has been duly ordained in accordance with the keys of the Church, which Jesus Christ Himself gave to the Apostles and their successors” (H.J. Schroeder, *Decrees of the General Councils: Text, Translation and Commentary* in Bryan P. Stone, *A Reader in Ecclesiology*. Farnham: Ashgate Publishing, 2012), 64.
in her characteristically insightful way, “[t]he horror of putrefaction, a punishment for original sin, underscored the corrupt and compromised status of the post-lapsarian body; but the destination of the reconstituted corpse in the eternally changeless subject simultaneously rendered putrefaction as a transformative process, integral to redemption” (Corpse 27). And “the body of Christ…figured as the central emblem for [this] redemptive process [in which] the transformative functions of the body itself were seen as deeply imbricated in Christ’s redemptive act” (29). Sacrifice, food, fragmentation, and redemption were thus intimately connected in Catholic doctrine and the Christian imagination.

However, during the Reformation and for several decades after, the sacrament of the Mass provoked intense debates between Catholics and Protestants and amongst reformers themselves as to what constituted its very essence. Of course, the notion that redeemable flesh could emerge from essentially corrupt flesh had caused anxiety as well in premodern Christendom, but it was with the Reformation that these anxieties resulted in doctrinal changes and the fragmentation of the Church itself. Reformers, for instance, were troubled by the reverence given the Eucharist because they saw it as idolatrous. They likewise found it problematic that one could be literally eating and drinking flesh and blood—not only because this rendered the Mass a cannibalistic ritual to their thinking, but because it elevated the materiality of god over his divinity. In refigurations of the Eucharist, reformers therefore tried to emphasize the dualism between body and soul and argued that flesh—which was inherently corrupt—was antithetical to redemption.

48 The association between the Eucharist and cannibalism had originated well before any reformation movements had begun. Caroline Walker Bynum writes that the belief that one was ingesting real flesh and blood provoked the idea that “eucharistic reception [was] symbolic cannibalism: devotees consumed and thus incorporated…the power of the tortured god” (Fragmentation 185). This anxiety grew during the Middle Ages and became a cornerstone of reformation concerns.
Protestants, in fact, posited several alternatives to the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation. In 1528, Martin Luther declared that the communion meal signifies consubstantiation. That is, when the priest utters the words, “this is my body,…the word this points to the bread,” and signifies “there has taken place a union between two objects, which [are called] a sacramental union” (Luther 325). Thus, Christ becomes present in the bread and wine, but does not literally become the bread and wine. Luther’s position, however, was still pretty close to transubstantiation since he believed unequivocally “whenever any one takes the bread, that he takes the body of Christ; when he eats the bread, that he eats the body; when he presses this bread with his teeth and tongue, that he presses the body of Christ with his teeth and tongue” (326). By contrast, the Swiss theologian Ulrich Zwingli argued that Christ “is presente at the eyes and contemplacion of our fayth,” and negated co-materiality of any sort. In fact, the idea:

that the very naturall bodye of Christe eyther shulde be essencially corporally and really in the supper, as eaten with our mouthes & teeth in the forme of breade as the papistes dreame or in the breade as somme imagen [is something] we do not onely deny, but we affyrme it constantly to be an errour whiche is playne against the word of God.

Zwingli stressed symbolic rather than real presence and declared that both transubstantiation and consubstantiation were foolish beliefs at best, and idolatrous at worst. Indeed, his stance erased Christ’s carnality in favor of his spiritualism. For many theologians and the faithful, however, Zwingli’s memorialism was too spare. Calvin’s theory of virtualism (virtus, or strength) attempted a “via media” between the concepts of real versus symbolic presence. As Huston Diehl remarks, Calvin believed the Eucharist “invites its worshippers to remember, receive, and rise up to a transcendent God who cannot be seen, eaten, or touched” (103). Christ himself may not have been materially present in the Eucharist, Calvin argued, but “the faithful receive[d] the
power (virtus) of the Body and Blood of Christ” (178). Calvin deemed the sacrament a divine gift that facilitated conjunction between the faithful on earth and Christ’s material body in heaven. For the Church of England, this via media underpinned its redefinition of the Eucharist. Article 28 of The Thirty-Nine Articles (1563) declares that “[t]ransubstantiation…in the supper of the Lord, cannot be proved by holy writ, but is repugnant to the plain words of scripture, overthroweth the nature of a sacrament, and hath given occasion to many superstitions” (67).

“[T]he Anglican view,” as Anthony Dawson summarizes, “insists on both presence and representation”; it acknowledges Christ’s real presence, but insists that, since we cannot know precisely where his actual body is located, the efficacy of the Eucharist resides in the body of “the receiver of the sacrament” (25-26).

Disagreement over the nature of the Eucharist was unabated, though, for over a century following the Reformation. In fact, at the Council of Trent (1545-63) in 1551, the Catholic Church reaffirmed the doctrine of transubstantiation: “by the consecration of the bread and wine a change takes place in which the entire substance of the bread becomes the substance of the body of Christ our Lord, and the whole substance of wine becomes the substance of his blood” (McGrath 164). What all this points up is not only the pervasiveness of the issue, but the passions that often guided the debates. In the preface to his polemic against the Catholic Mass, Reverend Robert Abbott refers to the glut of these debates: “these matters of controversy betwixt the Church of Rome and vs, haue bene so thoroughly sifted and debated to the full by diuers men of singular learning and iudgement in this age”—an apology, of sorts, for the contribution he is

50 David Cressy and Lori Anne Ferrell’s, Religion and Society in Early Modern England: A Sourcebook, compiles a number of very useful and representative primary sources (New York: Routledge), 1996.
about to make, yet one he insists is necessary.\textsuperscript{51} Another mid-sixteenth century pamphlet inveighing against transubstantiation declares that Christ “hath geuen his bodie, his soule, his life and his blood, for a full, and perfecte Sacrifice for our sanctification: the which sacrifice maie not, nor ought neuer to bee made againe, by any sacrifice visible…If [Christ’s sacrifice] be perfect, wherefore then must it bee doen againe.”\textsuperscript{52} There remained, of course, support for the traditional definition of the Mass. Robert Smith, for example, states that “Chrift gaue [the] rite to make sacrifice of his very tru & naturall flesh and bloud at their masses, which thynge he hym self had…before done, at his last supper.”\textsuperscript{53} In other words, Christ himself has authorized the repetition of his original sacrifice in the ritual of the transubstantiated bread and wine, so who are we to call Christ’s directive into question. While one would be hard-pressed to imagine people in early modern England staggering under the weight of these debates, one can well allow that the proliferation of these debates in the public sphere kept these issues at the forefront of many minds.

Images of the sacrificed body, bloodshed, and the consumption of flesh—be it living or dead—are strikingly widespread in early modern English culture, not only because of Eucharistic controversies, but also because of the spectacle of public executions and growing interest in anatomical dissections. The spectacle of the criminal body subjected to torture and execution, the heads and limbs of drawn and quartered corpses impaled on spikes lining the city’s walls and London Bridge, the flayed cadavers in anatomy theatres and anatomical books contributed to this culture of the cadaver.\textsuperscript{54} Not surprisingly, the language used to describe these scenes often drew

\textsuperscript{51} See \textit{A Mirrour of Popish Svbtilties}. London, 1594.  
\textsuperscript{52} See \textit{Against the detestable Masse, and more then Popishe heresie}, 1566.  
\textsuperscript{53} See \textit{A Defence of the Blessed Masse, and the sacrifice thereof}, 1546.  
\textsuperscript{54} In her illuminating study, \textit{Staging Anatomies: Dissection and Spectacle in Early Stuart England}, Hillary M. Nunn points out that “[t]he citizens of early modern London and the suburbs that grew around it were no strangers to the sight of blood. The city’s residents constantly encountered evidence in the streets of the body’s susceptibility to
on language surrounding the Mass, given its emphasis on bloody partitioning. As many scholars have observed, John Foxe’s *Actes and Monuments* (1563) amplifies the gorier aspects of Christ’s sacrifice (even if in the case of Foxe’s subjects, they are burned rather than crucified). The execution of Bishop John Hooper, for example, culminates with Hooper commending his soul to god:

> [These] were the last wordes he was herd to sound…he did knocke his brest with his hands vntill one of his armes fel of, and knocked still with the other, what time the fat, water, and blood dropped out at his fingers endes…Thus was he thre quarters of an hower or more in the fire…neither mouing forwards, backwards, or to any of the sides but hauing his nether parts burned, and his bowels fallen out, he died as quietly as a child in his bed…

(qtd. in Zimmerman 64)

Additionally, the trend in anatomical illustrations to pose partially-dissected cadavers as if they were actively revealing their innards to the viewer resonates with Christ’s self-partitioning at the Last Supper. Jonathan Sawday observes that “prior to the crucifixion, Christ partitioned his own symbolic body, offering it to the surrounding disciples” (118). By depicting the anatomized subject in the liminal state of being both dead and alive, these illustrations also reflect the conundrum reformers faced in defining what “dead” meant. As I detailed in my introductory chapter, Protestant polemicists saw the flesh as vulnerable to all forms of sin. The flesh of a deceased person therefore was justly devoured by worms and obliterated, while its soul had gone directly either to heaven or hell. Inherently filthy matter, flesh could not serve as regenerative, let alone redemptive material—which is one reason reformers found the idea of transubstantiation so abhorrent. Yet, the corpse was also an object of fascination and allure, whether on the scaffold, the dissecting table, or the stage. As Jonathan Sawday keenly remarks, “to peer into the body was to undertake a journey into a corrupt world of mortality and decay; it became a voyage into the very heart of the principle of spiritual dissolution” (21).

mortal mutilation, whether stemming from diseases like the plague, from the violent actions of their fellow citizens, or from executioners who acted on behalf of the state” (63).
The Bloody Banquet: Flesh as Feast in the Theatre of Desire

In the gruesome last scene of Middleton and Dekker’s play, the Young Queen of the usurping Tyrant of Lydia is forced by him to eat and drink the flesh and blood of her lover, Tymethes. He stages his punishment of the illicit affair as a cannibalistic public banquet in which the Queen is the sole guest and her lover is the feast. The horror of this scene is foregrounded by the sight of Tymethes’ freshly hewn limbs brought onstage and strung up by a retinue of servants. The stage directions indicate that the Queen then enters to “soft music” and “makes a curtsy to the table.” On the one hand, this decorum offers a striking contrast to the brutality of the setting; on the other hand, it points up the adoration the Queen feels towards her dead lover whom she is about to consume. Once she has politely seated herself, another servant brings portions of Tymethes’ butchered flesh and his blood-filled skull and lays them in front of her. She then begins to eat and drink this fare as a bewildered—and, one assumes, utterly sickened—audience looks on. While these body parts may have been cleverly molded and painted props, given the frequent use by actors of pigs’ and sheep’s bladders to simulate a bloody human organ, or to produce blood where a character has been stabbed, it is quite possible that these “props” were the limbs of a butchered animal. Even amongst a crowd that:

ate every part of the animals that came their way: eyes, snouts, brains, lungs, and feet, the noses, lips, and palates of calves and steers, ox cheeks, the udders and tongues of young cattle, and lambs’ stones,


the sight of a freshly-butchered body would have been nauseating and the smell formidable, thus compounding the brutality of the punishment, but also the link between lust, corporality, and death that the play aims to convey (Fitzpatrick 12).

Gary Taylor work on this play calls our attention to its co-mingling of horror with the domestic comforts of food preparation and consumption. The resulting dishes originate, he notes, with ingredients from the larder, notably butchered animals. He points out that hunger had afflicted much of England form 1608-09 due to inflated prices of corn and the dearth of other grains—staples in the average diet of most early moderns. Hunger led to food riots, which called attention to the greed of those who controlled the sale of crops in the marketplace. Taylor argues that Middleton and Dekker drew this topical issue to the fore by linking “hunger to lust” and frenzied eating in this play (“Gender” 14). The basic bodily need to eat morphs into carnal lust, cannibalism, and leads eventually to death. I concur with Taylor’s assessment of the play’s amplification of these topical issues through the lens of horror. My reading differs from his, though, in my emphasis on the banquets’ melding of Eucharistic controversies with polemicists’ concerns about lust—an excessive need of the flesh for other flesh. The body is thus shown to be the source of its own damnation.

Though the eponymous banquet occurs at the end of this tragedy, the association between lust and banqueting builds from the start of the play. Because of this, it is virtually impossible to experience the drama without thinking about sexual desire every time food or wine are mentioned, or about abundant, delicious fare whenever sexual desire is expressed or referred to. The first time the young Queen and Tymethes see each other, they are immediately aroused and

57 Gary Taylor astutely connects the food/props in this scene with the items found in early modern larders. “[E]very substantial home,” he notes, “had a larder, in which were hung, on hooks, pieces of freshly butchered, smoked or salted carcasses” (“Gender” 1). The bloody banquet thus takes familiar, everyday food items, renders them human, and moves them from the home larder to the public stage, which would have made this scene that much more jarring.
the awkwardness—and potential danger—of this moment are conveyed in the game of aloofness and wine consumption that ensues. Both the Queen and Tymethes try to appear indifferent to one another, yet betray their mutual attraction in a series of asides. Moreover, by refusing to drink to Tymethes when wine is brought in, the Queen stirs both his ire and passion—which he likewise prompts in her when he initially refuses to drink to the Queen. When he finally proposes, “You shall rule me.—Unto that beauteous majesty!” she declines to reciprocate—“I’ll pledge you anon, sir” (1.4.70; 1.4.73). In shunning hospitality (she as hostess, he as guest and subject), they suggest a willingness to shun other rules of decorum. The Queen also rightly apprehends Tymethes’ boastful and self-absorbed nature, which he later demonstrates when he exults about his tryst to Zenarchus and when he fatally disregards her insistence to remain anonymous:

The fears and dangers that most threaten me
Live in the party that I must enjoy,
And that’s Tymethes. Men are apt to boast.
He may in full cups blaze and vaunt himself
Unto some meaner mistress, make my shame
The politic engine to beat down her name,
And from thence force a way to the King’s ears. (1.4.93-99)

Wine, a substance that traditionally draws people into communion, has in this case drawn them together by first provoking discord—and, for the Queen, distrust as well. Her words “blaze” and “vaunt” also point up the intoxicating and un-bounding effects of wine and link these effects with the headiness of sexual consummation.

The play deftly imbricates the sensual, pleasurable effects of food and wine on the body with their disturbing effects, some of which can prove lethal. Through this juxtaposition, the play points up the duality inherent in food (it can nourish and kill) and invokes ideas about the Eucharist, which, as transubstantiated substances, were seen by reformers as toxic to body and soul. That is to say, since reformers equated all dead material as corrupt, they believed Catholics
ingested their own mortal corruption during communion. To partake of the Mass is to literally eat and drink one’s way into damnation. The initial banquet in *The Bloody Banquet* is arranged by the Queen to feed sensual desire and thus facilitate her consummation with Tymethes. Having bribed Roxano, the man assigned by her husband to guard his wife’s chastity, and a small group of other servants to stage their clandestine meeting (and protect the disguised Queen’s identity), the Queen has Tymethes fêted with wine and assorted dishes. Coming as it does before the Queen’s entrance, the banquet acts as an aphrodisiac and foreplay (Taylor 15). (The disguised) Roxano is sure to emphasize these points when he tells Tymethes that:

> This banquet from her own hand received grace,  
> Herself prepared it for you—as appears  
> By the choice sweets it yields, able to move  
> A man past sense to the delights of love.  
> I bid you welcome as her most prized guest,  
> First to this banquet, next to her pleasure’s feast. (3.3.37-42)

This meal has transformative properties. It can enter the body and pique sexual desire. And since it has been created and handled by the Queen herself, the food acts as an extension of her own body, which Tymethes begins consuming as he waits to be summoned.

As the sensual effects of the meal take hold, the lethal ones are likewise drawn in. For instance, Tymethes asks a servant to send the Queen “my faith, my reverence, my respect. / And tell her this, which courteously I find: / She hides her face, but lets me see her mind” (3.3.67-69). He clearly understands the message of this meal as he takes it into his body. But while he is savoring the erotic feast, the Tyrant’s favorite, (the disguised) Mazeres, poisons the cup of wine the Queen has sent to Tymethes. The aspirational Mazeres wants to marry the Tyrant’s daughter, Amphridote, but she has refused to break her engagement to Tymethes, despite the recent political twists. Roxano himself lusts after the Queen, and is viciously jealous that Tymethes is favored by her. “I do envy this fellow’s happiness now,” he fumes, “and could cut his throat at
pleasure” (3.1.4-6). Realizing his closest sexual alliance with the Queen will be as her “pander,” he turns his attention to maximizing this role to destroy her chosen lover (2.1.219). He thus brings Mazeres along to this banquet, as a like-minded accomplice. Tymethes, however, spills the poisoned wine, which is quickly replaced by another cup the Queen has sent. The thwarted Mazeres vows to “pursue [his] ruin” while Roxano quietly observes, “I would not taste of such a banquet to feel that which follows it for the love of an empress…Yet how securely he munches!...He dreams little of his destruction, / His horrid fearful ruin, which cannot be withstood” (3.3.65; 70-71; 73; 75-76). The speech’s shift midway from prose to formal verse underscores the serious tenor of Roxano’s words and calls attention to the consequences associated with gastronomic and sexual indulgence.

As Joan Fitzpatrick points out, “[t]he glutton is primarily a sinner and his intemperance regarding food and drink…leave him more vulnerable than his fellow-man to other sins such as lust and idolatry” (18). Indeed, the Homilie Against Gluttony and Drunkenesse ranks these offenses:

among the deedes of the flesh, and coupleth them with idolatrie, whoredome, and murder, which are the greatest offences that can bee named among men. For the first spoyleth God of his honour, the second defileth his holy Temple, that is to wit, our owne bodies, the third maketh vs companions of Cayne in the slaughter of our brethren, and who so committeth them, as Saint Paul saith, cannot inherite the kingdome of God.

The emphasis here is on corporeal corruption and its link to damnation. Consumed in moderation, food nourishes; but, in excess, it corrupts both body and soul. Overindulgent eating and drinking were believed to stimulate the appetite for even greater sins—a connection which Middleton and Dekker’s play vividly and viscerally depicts. The homilist, in fact, states that “all kinde of excesse offendeth the maiestie of almightie God.” Thus, Roxano’s words “The end of
venery is disease and blood” (3.3.77)—in fact, the whole bloody spectacle—would have resonated in the audience’s mind with the homilist’s warning:

Oft commeth sodaine death by banqueting, sometime the members are dissolued, and so the whole body is brought into a miserable state. Hee that eateth and drinketh vnmeasurably, kindleth oft times such an vnnaturall heate in his body, that his appetite is prouoked thereby to desire more then it should, or else it overcommeth his stomacke, and filleth all the body full of sluggishnesse, makes it vnable and vnfit to serue either God or man, not nourishing the body, but hurting it.

Gluttonous behavior of any sort was a mortal threat not only to the individual body and soul, but the larger community as well and therefore had to be relentlessly fought against. It is important to note that, throughout the brief affair, the Queen has deep reservations, even dread, about it. That she risks indulging her desires in the face of these fears points up the force with which lust in this drama “rises against all objections” (1.4.134).

The play also observes that gluttony and lust are at the root of original sin. By calling attention to this connection, Middleton and Dekker underscore the mortal danger of these sins and the base material from which we are all made. As the story goes, Eve ate the forbidden fruit and then seduced Adam into eating it as well. In post-Reformation England, the carnal dimension of original sin was emphasized to drive home the idea that all flesh, in any state, is inherently corrupt. Of course, early and medieval Christians had believed in the body’s elemental sinfulness, but this anxiety was (to varying degrees) offset by Catholic emphasis on Christ’s corporeality, the redemption resulting from his bodily sacrifice, and its celebration in the transubstantiated bread and wine. Reformers, by contrast, emphasized Christ’s divinity over his materiality and thus saw all flesh as ultimately unredeemable. The Homily Against Gluttony and Drunkenness reminds churchgoers that “[i]f our first parents Adam and Eve had not obeyed their greedy appetite in eating the forbidden fruit, neither had they lost the fruition of Gods benefites which they then enjoyed in paradise, neither had they brought so many mischiefs both
to themselves, and to all their posteritie.” The culture’s interest in gluttony and lust is conspicuous in much of the period’s poetry and drama, from Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* and Marlowe’s *Doctor Faustus* through Caroline plays such as Ford’s *’Tis Pity She’s a Whore* and Milton’s masque, *Comus*. In *The Bloody Banquet*, the link to original sin is explicitly set forth in the transition from the scene in which the Queen has just laid out the details of her banquet, to the scene in which the shepherds set a trap to catch wolves. On stage there is “a tree with fruit…and a trapdoor.” To a modern audience this reference may only barely suggest Eden, but to post-Reformation spectators the fruit tree amongst shepherds—following, as it does, the scene in which the Queen states her need to satisfy her lust—may well have echoed the Garden of Eden and temptation. The scene itself furthers this idea with the Clown’s argument that she-wolves have greater appetites than he-wolves (not unlike Eve having a stronger appetite than Adam). Roxano also alludes to the fall from paradise when he remarks “Corrupt is nature; she loves nothing more / Than what she most should hate. There’s nothing springs / Apace in man but grey hairs, cares, and sins” (4.2.72-74). In other words, what ought to be abhorrent and forbidden is often what one runs headlong towards rather than away from. As Julia Kristeva argues, the abject is both repugnant and alluring in its repugnance. Christian abjection is also, in Kristeva’s formulation, an “abjection that is no longer exterior. It is permanent and comes from within,” like original sin born of surfeiting (113).

Juxtaposed against the scenes of chewing and quaffing are those in which the Old Queen, wife of the deposed King of Lydia, wanders in exile, with her two infant children. She evades rape, but is at the mercy of hunger. She describes herself as a “miserable queen” who, “with these babes [suffers a] lingering death” (1.3.34; 39). One of her children dies from starvation and the other barely clings to life. Through a dumb show we learn that the aforementioned shepherds
come upon the surviving child, whom the Old Queen abandoned, believing it to be at death’s door. They return the child to the Old Queen and give her money after (as the stage directions note) “she points to her breasts, as meaning she should nurse it” (653). This gesture, the Chorus informs us, “snatched the child out of the arms of death” and renders the Old Queen a wet nurse to her own child (2.5.7). In a play overflowing with references to food, wine, and lust, this subplot contrasts the hunger of an empty belly with the hunger borne of lust. Audiences in the first decade of the seventeenth century would have been able to recollect the food riots of the 1590s and the hunger that precipitated them. The death of the Old Queen’s child could have been designed to elicit compassion from an audience that understood hunger and prompt criticism of characters who glut themselves on food and sex in the face of starvation. This subplot also starkly reminds the audience of the plot’s political context—the Old Queen is the rightful queen, and has lost a child as a direct consequence of the Tyrant’s usurpation of the King of Lydia’s throne. Just as the Young Queen hungers for sex, her husband hungers for political power and breaks trust to attain it.

The grisly final banquet is designed as public punishment for the lust privately shared by the Young Queen and Tymethes. Both the eater and the eaten are situated in this punitive framework, which draws together the spectacles of execution and penal dissection and collapses them with banqueting and allusions to Holy Communion. Middleton and Dekker play upon the audience’s fears about mortality and its fascination with the corpse-as-spectacle and prompt them to wonder, what would it feel like to eat a human body? Imagining answers to this question lead one to likewise think about the lust that provoked this scene and how this lust now factors into the grotesquely literalized act of consumption.
The Queen’s murder of Tymethes is vengeance for his defiance of her demand for anonymity and, as Gary Taylor rightly observes, an act of self-defense against a vengeful husband (13). However, her bid to frame Tymethes as a random assailant fails because her husband already has the details of their affair. Tymethes’ murder precipitates the bloody banquet because it has precluded the Tyrant from exacting “living wrath” on him (4.3.220). As the Tyrant later explains to the onlookers, “[t]hough his trunk were cold, / My wrath was flaming, and I exercised / New vengeance on his carcass” (5.1.176-78). Standing over the corpse near the Queen’s bed, the Tyrant unfolds his punishment: “Thou shalt not die as long as this is meat. / Thou killd’st a buck which thou thyself shalt eat” (4.3.213-14). She will have to carry her hunt full through, to the total consumption of her prey—and, by having her devour the flesh of her lover, the Tyrant is able to carry out vengeance on both bodies. In a gruesome parallel to the Queen’s whetting of Tymethes’ appetite with an array of viands, the Tyrant whets her appetite by setting out Tymethes’ quartered body and describing it in succulent terms. In a prelude to the banquet, he has his servants “[b]efore her eyes lay the divided limbs / Of her desired paramour” and then tells her this is “fine flesh, course fare / …no other food thy taste shall have, / Till in thy bowels those corpse find a grave” (4.3.274-75; 4.3.277-79). His words materialize lust into dead flesh and transform her alimentary tract into a grave, both for Tymethes’ corpse and their shared lust. Moreover, by referring to her bowels as the destination for the flesh, the Tyrant’s words explicitly link “sexual deviation with bodily excess,” a connection we have seen repeatedly emphasized by reformers and polemicists (Whigham 333). As Frank Whigham observes:

[t]he combination of the alimentary focus and the fascination with deep-seated improper hungers chimes harmonically with a repeated and widely distributed emphasis in [many] plays on obscure interiorities, often involving sex, violence, humiliation, abjection, and death—in short, perhaps, some portmanteau of fundamental desires. (341)
In describing the human body as both waste and a receptacle for waste, the Tyrant’s words foreground beliefs about the corruptness of the human body and the imbrication of lust and mortality.

In staging this banquet, the Tyrant also assumes the role of anatomist, first by taking possession of the corpse after its execution and then revealing it, part by part, to the spectators—gestures that paralleled actual dissections. Public executions and public dissections became materially linked in early modern England when anatomists were granted acquisition of the corpse. Criminals were hanged, drawn, and quartered, and their remains displayed on spikes along the city’s walls and bridges. Cadavers of criminals could also be subjected to anatomization. With the growing popularity of dissections, this became one way to supply the anatomy theatres as well as to extend the criminal’s punishment beyond the scaffold (Sawday 55). Even if people had not themselves attended anatomies, the growing number of published medical texts, and word from travelers to the continent where anatomies were more often staged, stirred interest in the body’s internal composition. This is evidenced, in part, by the growing number of printed books available for both laypersons and physicians. The human body was a key site for discovery, both materially and morally, and this popularity eventually led to the construction (in 1636) of London’s first purpose-built anatomy theatre:

What was once simply a convenient space in which to bring together a corpse, an audience, and an anatomist was redesigned to emerge as a *theatricum anatomicorum*—a purpose-built structure dedicated to a single use…The anatomy theatre as a ‘temple of mortality’ was a unique creation of the late Renaissance, one that hints at a complete culture which was to spread into all forms of human endeavor in the period.

(Sawday 65-66)

Thus, on the scaffold and in the dissection theatre, human bodies were gibbeted, drawn, dismembered, cut, flayed, displayed, and explored, while in performance theatres they additionally were baked, devoured, and vomited, as in Kyd’s *The Spanish Tragedy* and
Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*. *The Bloody Banquet* pushes existing boundaries by showing not only the freshly quartered corpse over the course of an entire act—“[w]her’er [one] look[s], these limbs are in [one’s] eye”—but spending fifty-four lines *showing* that corpse being methodically eaten and drunk (5.1.153). Not unlike an anatomy theatre, the space in this play, and the theatre in which the play is staged, function as a site in which to extend the punishment on the criminal’s body. It was also common practice to serve an elaborate banquet at the conclusion of the anatomy, which had typically lasted about three days until the cadaver was stripped to its bones.

*Titus Andronicus* also concludes with a banquet so repugnant that one can imagine an audience feeling the desire to wretch alongside Tamora. Though the dishes served at both banquets are similarly disgusting, Titus’s banquet differs considerably from the Tyrant’s. Tamora, for instance, is fed “two pasties” into which the flesh and bones of her sons Chiron and Demetrius have been ground, whereas the Queen in *The Bloody Banquet* dines on her lover. Moreover, Tamora has no idea she is eating her children until Titus springs the truth on her, while the Queen is fully aware of what she consumes—and why. The numerous classical models—retold most notably by Herodotus and Seneca—for this cannibalistic feast share the common features of a father, who is a king, being deceived into consuming his children’s flesh, a model that *Titus* follows, except it shifts the eater from father to mother (Gaspar 637). While Middleton and Dekker drew on Seneca’s example, their immediate source was likely William Warner’s prose romance, *Pan His Syrinx* (1584), which features the eating of the lover. In drawing out the banquet over nearly an entire act, Middleton and Dekker brilliantly exploit the

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58 Gary Taylor, in his essay, “Gender, Hunger, Horror,” cites “fifty-four lines of dialogue” (30). Taylor also notes that actor playing the Queen is probably eating—first, it would be odd to stage the climactic banquet if eating and drinking were not really taking place. If this were to have been the case, I that suggest that the sight of an actor eating meat and drinking a blood red beverage during this scene would have stirred the audience (those who weren’t already munching on something) to think about food. Actor and audience would effectively be drawn together in shared acts of consumption.
grotesque elements of Senecan-inspired revenge tragedy and compel the audience to experience a range of emotions, from horror to compassion, while having to see the bloody, quartered limbs for the duration of the act (Gaspar 637-39).

As the Young Queen masticates the trunk and drinks blood from the skull, the Tyrant states “[t]he lecher must be swallowed rib by rib, / His flesh is sweet, it melts, and goes down merrily” (5.1.204-06). His narration of the ingestion emphasizes specific parts of the body and the gustatory aspect of their consumption. That the Queen must consume Tymethes “rib by rib” further underscores the lust that the Tyrant puts on display for public consumption. The ribs notably enclose the body, so to pull apart the trunk in this manner approximates a peeling away to reveal the core of the body, and presumably the core of one’s being. Eating the ribs also suggests she consumes herself, since woman originates from Adam’s rib. The intimate connection between cannibalizing the flesh of others and consuming oneself is also described by Montaigne in his essay, “Of Cannibals.” In it, he recounts the story of a prisoner in the New World who was awaiting slaughter and cannibalism at the hands of his enemies. “‘[T]hese muscles,’ the prisoner taunts his captor, ‘this flesh, and these veins are your own, poor fools that you are; you do not recognise that the substance of your ancestors’ limbs still clings to them. Taste them carefully, and you will find in them the flavour of your own flesh’” (285-86). As someone who had cannibalized his own captives, this prisoner points out that his body has incorporated them, and that by eating his flesh, his captors will likewise be eating their own forebears, and thus parts of themselves. This dead flesh, moreover, is “sweet,” an adjective Roxano had used to describe the Young Queen’s flesh to Tymethes, as well as the delectable fare from their initial banquet (5.1.205). This scene thus conflates living and dead flesh as identical in their capacity to produce sweetness within the framework of lust. Ribs also resemble a phallus,
so if one envisions the Queen chewing the flesh from them, and sucking the bones clean, she figuratively performs oral sex on the corpse.

The necrophilia in this scene is also heightened by the Queen’s drinking blood from Tymethes’ skull. “Since Renaissance medicine conceived of semen as a distillation and purification of the blood,” the substance the Queen swallows at the table may be read as one that Tymethes has already filled her with (Halpern 16). In fact, the skull itself may be read as a phallus. In her remarkable study of the symbolism of decapitation, Julia Kristeva describes the currency of the head-as-phallus: “[t]he intense proprioception of the erect head in the standing posture, likened to penile arousal in an erection, could only enhance the value of the capital organ” (Severed Head 13). Severed from its body, the head is akin to the glans dismembered from the shaft. In severing Tymethes’ head, the Tyrant has symbolically castrated the man who cuckolded him. Yet, brimming with blood, the head also still brims with masculine vitality, even as it is being drained of this substance with each sip.\(^5\) Indeed, if we read the head as a “capital organ,” it is clear that each time the Young Queen raises the skull-as-goblet to her lips, and drinks its blood, she is symbolically performing fellatio on Tymethes’ corpse. Drinking blood from Tymethes’ skull is also an intensely personal assault on him because of the very significance of the skull as an identifying marker of his personhood. Sarah Tarlow explains that the head is “the most highly individuated and recognizable part of the body, thus contributing further to its humiliation”; moreover, “the head had particular symbolic meaning as the seat of

\(^5\) The quickness with which virility was seen as giving way to emasculation during sex is eloquently described by Mark Breitenberg in *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996): “But the paradox in this cultural and anatomical code is that if the generation of semen (heated blood) is the most quintessentially masculine moment, it is also, finally, just a moment. The ejaculation represents the supreme moment of masculine disempowerment and vulnerability—a literal and figurative ‘emptying out’ of the masculine principle. Put simply, masculine erotic desire generates the material of masculinity but also destroys it” (50).
consciousness, and thus was a good signifier for the body as a whole.” (148). In misusing their bodies to pursue lust, Tymethes and the Queen demonstrated a lack of governance over their bodies and now pay in kind through this mutual, mortal consumption.

The consumption of the flesh and blood of a dead person in a formal banquet setting also resonates with the crucifixion and Holy Communion. In its extravagance, the play’s final banquet parodies the Last Supper and the belief that it could be perpetually reenacted. Reformers argued that Christ’s sacrifice was unique, hence unrepeatable. In other words, as the ultimate sacrifice, it was meant to nullify all sacrifices henceforth. The nullification of bodily sacrifice, reformers argued, was a turning point marking the separation of Christianity from other religions. Thus, to reenact rather than commemorate the Passion in Holy Communion was to engage in idolatrous, pre-Christian and Catholic practices that valorized the body, as well as to presume the crucifixion could be repeatable. However, the bloody cannibalistic banquet also underscores the significance the body retained in post-Reformation English culture. While Reformers aimed to redirect believers’ attention from matters of the body to those of the soul and the word, their arguments, as we have seen, repeatedly used vivid corporeal references—in effect, upholding rather than renouncing the “incarnational structure of late-medieval religion” (O’Connell 50). This play draws attention to the bodies of the eater and the eaten in ways that

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60 In this passage, Tarlow is discussing severed heads in the context of executed bodies and their disposal. Part of the punishment was aimed at denying the body “normal rituals of deposition” (148). One such way to humiliate the corpse of the criminal was to remove its head, which “destroyed the integrity of the body” and was believed to “compromise bodily resurrection.” Further, in some cultures, Tarlow points out, “the removal of the head [of an enemy] transferred the power of its former possessor to the person who removed it” (148). While it is not clear if the Tyrant is trying to reassert his masculinity by having Tymethes beheaded, the dismemberment and beheading destroy Tymethes’ integrity and, in doing so, signify his humiliation at the hands of the Tyrant.

61 Michael O’Connell’s phrase refers to the system targeted by reformers, which includes “images, relics, the cult of the saints, liturgical ceremony, sacraments, the real presence in the Eucharist, and religious theater,” all of which speak to “the diverse manifestations of incarnationalism of medieval religion” (50). See also Beatrice Groves’ illuminating study, Texts and Traditions: Religion and Shakespeare 1592-1604, especially chapter 2, “Shakespeare’s Incarnational Aesthetic: The Mystery Plays and Catholicism,” (26-59). Groves convincingly argues that early modern drama embodied the incarnational aesthetic of medieval drama at the same time that it was keyed into contemporary debates “about the truth of presentation” (59). And Caroline Walker Bynum writes “wherever we turn
emphasize connections between Eucharistic traditions and post-Reformation ideas about somatic efficacy.

When the Queen eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her lover, she signifies the consumption of the Mass and its symbologies. She is, for instance, integrating Tymethes’ body into her own. However, this integration does not imply redemption or suggest reintegration into the community. Indeed, the community of which she is a part is already fragmented, most notably in its status as a usurped realm, whose players view each other with suspicion more than with trust. In post-Reformation systems of signification, the fragmented political, religious, and corporeal bodies were similarly viewed with suspicion, and often revulsion. Medieval Christian communities had been organized around the image of Christ’s tortured, suffering body and the belief that this body led to redemption and salvation. Suffering had purpose. In post-Reformation England, though, “the tortured body could no longer be assimilated to the sacred body: violence no longer presaged redemption” (Owens 19). The body continued to signify, but it signified differently than it had in pre-Reformation contexts where the tortured, fragmented body was reintegrated into the collective corpus, materially and spiritually (Owens 53). Though often shown as fragmented in medieval devotional pictures, Christ’s body was ultimately pointed towards wholeness. As Caroline Walker Bynum writes, “in such paintings, pars clearly stands pro toto; each fragment of Christ’s body—like each fragment of the eucharistic bread—is the whole of God” (Fragmentation 280). The Corpus Christi dramas had emphasized this point, thematically and dramaturgically by integrating the community into the performances as actors, spectators, and witnesses to the biblical events. The consumable, efficacious body of the Catholic

in the later Middle Ages we seem to find the theme of body—and of body in all its aspects, pleasures as well as pains” (Holy Feast, 253; qtd. in O’Connell, 65). Early modern plays engage with “the theme of the body,” but even when the body is not an overt theme, most plays in this seventy-year history speak their themes through bodily references and metaphors—and, of course, always through the bodies of the actors.
Mass became, in post-Reformation culture, something to be reviled and rejected because of its base materiality. In fact, it stoked “anxieties about purity and pollution.” Since the tortured, partitioned body was no longer seen as something that could be reintegrated, it came to be viewed as excessive, something that could corrupt the community rather than purify or save it (Owens 83). The Queen’s integration of Tymethes’ flesh is thus an example of excessive eating—which, as a form of punishment designed by her betrayed husband, is meant to signify the excesses of lust exchanged in her affair.

When the Queen eats, she commemorates the passion she shared with Tymethes. Yet, this meal is not a commemoration that celebrates sacrifice and redemption, but one designed to break open the lustful body for visual and gustatory consumption. Tymethes’ fragmented body, as narrated by the Tyrant, ought to be sweet and delectable fare. Its material state, however, suggests it isn’t. What spectators see is a bloody, quartered human cadaver, which had earlier been inscribed with individuated personhood. So many plays during this period—most notably Hamlet—express horror over the destiny of the human body for decay and the erasure of this individuation; thus, it would seem almost impossible not to recoil at the sight of this feast, let alone assume for a moment that this flesh could be tasty. Further complicating our ability to read this flesh is the Queen’s response to it: she “eat[s] and eat[s] and eat[s],” gives no pause to her eating and drinking; in fact, gives no sign of revulsion, nor does “she [ever] speak” (Taylor 30; 35). If one hopes to be able to read Tymethes’ body through the Queen’s actions at the table, one encounters much frustration. The Tyrant tells the onstage audience—which includes the deposed King of Lydia and his loyal retinue disguised as pilgrims—that this consumption is the Queen’s penance to which he has “enjoined her” (5.1.180). Yet, there is no indication that the Tyrant will forgive her once the penance is complete. What the play turns into lurid spectacle is the intimate
relationship between attraction and repulsion, and it points up the complicity of both onstage and
theatre audiences in the production of this relationship.

As the Tyrant pointed out earlier, the conclusion of the penance will instead be marked
by the burial of this flesh in the Queen’s bowels. In the absence of any cosmic validation, this
sacrificed and swallowed body is destined to be a waste product. The Queen’s bowels will loosen
their contents, which will signify not only the decay to which Tymethes is destined, but also the
Queen, since the conclusion of her meal marks the end of her life and the onset of her own
decay. The Tyrant’s punishment is thus akin to the one Piero Sforza envisions for Mellida in
John Marston’s tragedy, *Antonio’s Revenge* (1601), the sequel to his romantic comedy *Antonio
and Mellida* (1599). Unlike the Tyrant’s accusation, which is true, Piero falsely accuses his
daughter Mellida of being unfaithful with Feliche, friend to Mellida’s betrothed, Antonio, who is
despised by Piero. The play opens with the blood-soaked Piero standing over the body of Feliche
whom he has just murdered. To signify and punish the lust with which he is about to falsely
accuse Feliche, he orders his accomplice to “bind Feliche’s trunk / Unto the panting side of
Mellida” (1.1.1-2). Though this “bind[ing]” is never literalized, and becomes instead a binding
via false accusation, the spectacle is heavily charged with early modern anxieties about death
(Thompson 83). This image readily calls to mind Geoffrey Whitney’s emblem (1586) depicting
Mezentius’ favorite punishment: binding the living body of the accused to a corpse, conjoining
both in death. While Whitney’s emblem accompanies a poem that “link[s]…unhappy marriage
and binding to a corpse,” the image itself (fig. 5) graphically illustrates the horror of death,
decay, and annihilation and how this material process is brought about through the intimate
connection to another person (Thompson 84).
Whitney’s emblem also speaks to the bloody banquet in Middleton and Dekker’s play: as the Queen ingests Tymethes, she draws her own death ever closer; moreover, both bodies are here destined to moulder together. This bloody banquet is also a macabre celebration of Golgotha, the place of skulls where Christ—and many others—were tortured and crucified. The skull on the table signifies “the skull beneath the skin” of everyone gathered at the banquet and in the theatre and is a synecdochic reminder of everyone’s material destiny. Indeed, when the tragedy ends with its heap of corpses, the stage itself approximates a collective charnel house or mass grave, comingling the dead.

As the play concludes, the “pilgrims” reveal themselves to the Tyrant and kill him, though not before he kills the Queen, who is still dining. Tymethes’ body thus remains only

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62 These words, “the skull beneath the skin,” originate in T.S. Eliot’s poem, “Whispers of Immortality,” in which he writes, “Webster was much possessed by death / And saw the skull beneath the skin.” Charles R Forker draws on this line for the title of his illuminating study, Skull Beneath the Skin: The Achievement of John Webster (Carbondale: SIU Press, 1986).
partially consumed, indicating that the revenge is only partially complete. The Tyrant tries to claim success just before he is killed by exulting that he is a “happy man” who has “killed [his] jealousy” and by stabbing his wife so as not to “[leave] her to [their] lust” (5.1.211-212; 215).

Yet, Tymethes’ remaining flesh suggests otherwise. The Tyrant had, after all, instructed the Queen to eat him “rib by rib” until the flesh is entirely consumed. The “problem of the leftover” in this play is that it bespeaks the body’s refusal—living and dead—to be contained. In his study of the tension between the body as an increasingly closed domain and the notion of its openness, David Hillman writes that “at one level [early modern theatre] push[ed] somatic closure further than it had ever been, at another level [it] provided a kind of safety-valve to relieve the pressure placed upon the body to be shut” (43). The Tyrant hopes that, by consuming Tymethes’ corpse, the Queen will make it go away and thus relieve him of the spectacle of his humiliation and the material evidence of his own (well-founded) jealousy. As the digested flesh makes it way towards the Queen’s gut, it will not come to rest in her bowels-as-grave but pass through her bowels and be evacuated as excrement. Just as Hamlet’s consumed king “may go a progress through the guts of beggar” to emerge as recycled consumable matter, so too will the consumed Tymethes materially reappear in some new form, only to reenter the consummation cycle (4.3.30-31). The horror of this reemergence of devoured flesh—into what and where?—is at the heart of Middleton and Dekker’s play. Indeed, the “somatic transitionality” signified by the monarchic and scientific changes of the early Jacobean years, and again by the seismic political shifts and radical developments in anatomy in the late Caroline period,63 renders The Bloody Banquet a drama that very much rehearses the anxieties of its times (Hillman 45). The

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63 Gary Taylor has done extensive research on Middleton’s career and has found evidence that The Bloody Banquet was composed around 1609, and was first published in 1639. Given that many Jacobean plays were revived during the Caroline years, it is likely, he notes, especially given this play’s sensational content, that it enjoyed a resurgence during the 1620s and 1630s (“Gender, Hunger, Horror,” pp. 2-5).
necrophilic and cannibalistic banquet dramatizes the sexually and mortally excessive body and, in doing so, points up the body’s seeming proclivity to move beyond its boundaries at virtually every turn. And to do so, over and over and over again.

'Tis Pity She’s a Whore: The Heart as Necrophilic Organ

The idea of feasting is deployed in a similarly brutal manner in John Ford’s tragedy, 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore, in which Annabella’s excised heart is elevated as the central element of an elaborate banquet. Whereas The Bloody Banquet is preoccupied with the fragmented, devoured corpse and its symbologies, Ford’s revenge tragedy, written and staged roughly twenty years later, concentrates almost exclusively on this specific organ. Like Middleton and Dekker’s play, 'Tis Pity She’s a Whore draws upon the charged associations of the Eucharist with cannibalism, along with burgeoning interest in human dissection to examine the consummation of lust and its ramifications. As numerous critics of the play have observed, what begins as a series of metaphors, culminates in bloody literalization.64 This “most outrageous instance of unmetaphoring to appear” on the early modern stage is preceded, though, by the scene in which Giovanni stabs his sister and by his offstage evisceration of her reproductive organs, heart, and their unborn child (Owens 219). When he bursts into the banquet hall with her skewered heart, he announces that he has “digged for food / In a much richer mine than gold or stone”—in other

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64 In his seminal article, “The Heart and the Banquet: Imagery in Ford’s 'Tis Pity and The Broken Heart,” Donald K. Anderson, Jr. traced the progression of heart imagery in 'Tis Pity from pure metaphor to grotesque literalness. Though his work set a new course for analysis of this play, Anderson does not delve into the significance of this progression, or of the heart’s interconnections with religious and scientific signifiers. Michael Neill details some of the “bewildering variety of competing interpretations” of hearts made in the play: ‘a bizarre erotic parody of the eucharist,’ ‘profundely ambivalent symbol,’ ‘a symbol of profane sacrifice,’ and ‘the newly delivered offspring’ among others (“Strange” 161). In his provocative assessment, Neill writes “[i]n the absence of any controlling ritual context, no one of these [competing definitions and explanations] can be confirmed; so that the heart always threatens to become nothing more than itself, a grisly tautology—a piece of offal en brochette, brutally stripped of all vestiges of metaphor” (Neill “Strange” 161). The heart, literalized, Neill argues, can only ever be a messy organ.
words, although he comes “to feast,” he has already begun to dine (5.6.24-25; 5.6.23). I argue that, in the play’s last two scenes, lust dovetails with necrophilia, which becomes a vehicle for reading the intense desires to expose and read the heart. Indeed, via the eviscerated offstage cadaver and the bleeding onstage organ, Ford’s play foregrounds the dialectic of fragmentation and wholeness, which results in the concluding scene’s spectacular synecdochal failure. In what follows, I take into account the myriad ways in which characters repeatedly refer to hearts in this play. I weave these examples into an historical tapestry of the heart as literary trope and juxtapose them with anatomical discourses that altered the ways in which the heart could be written about and dramatized. One of the unique things about Ford’s play is the way it vividly draws the metaphorical and material organ together only to brutally sever them.

Christ’s sacrifice is often symbolized by images of his skewered heart, the fifth wound he suffers on the cross, and by the consecrated wine, transubstantiated into the blood he shed for humanity’s redemption. In Ford’s play, this organ is mangled in an act of impassioned rage and, detached from its body, is unrecognizable as anything but a severed organ. Further, Christ’s blood is replaced in this play by Giovanni and Annabella’s blood, a substance replete with their heated passion for one another. In other words, the Passion symbolized by Christ’s blood is replaced by the lust symbolized through the siblings’ blood. Via the deformation of blood sacrifice, Ford posits the excesses of carnal lust through the iconography of the Passion. In doing so, his play foregrounds controversies surrounding beliefs in salvation-through-flesh. And, through the vivid anatomical imagery in his play, Ford also underscores the culture’s shifting

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Giovanni’s description of the insides of Annabella’s corpse as a treasure trove resonates with John Donne’s, who writes that the value of one person’s death for another person “may lie in his bowels, as gold in a Mine.” In other words, the death of “[a]nother man” acquires value (becomes a treasure) only if another person understands the value of that death—this value must be “dig[ed] out” and “applied” by the living person to himself. See “Seventeenth Meditation” in John Donne: Devotions upon Emergent Occasions. Ed. Anthony Raspa (Oxford: Oxford UP), 1987.
beliefs about the heart, not as a seat of divine love, but of corporeal vitality—and of carnal drives rather than spiritual reflection and contrition.

From its opening scene between Giovanni and the Friar, Ford’s play is rather crowded with heart references, which include the heart as a storehouse, a revealer of truth, an emblem of redemption, and an organ vital to circulation. These varied references operate as both loci of legibility and ambiguity—how easy it supposedly is to read something via the heart, yet how obscured in secrecy the heart appears to be. The play’s first scene between Giovanni and the Friar, which opens just after Giovanni has confessed his incestuous passion for his sister, Annabella, marks out a disputation on incest using two of these distinct references to the heart. In seeking validation from the Friar to consummate his lust, Giovanni notes that he has “unclasped my burdened soul, / Emptied the storehouse of my thoughts and heart, / Made myself poor of secrets” (1.1.14-16). He accompanies his confession with words that invoke natural law: in having “one father” and having shared “one womb,” he and Annabella are linked by “nature,” “blood,” and “reason” and so, his argument goes, should be able to pursue an incestuous relationship (1.1.28; 31; 32). Giovanni believes, moreover, that through a full disclosure to his tutor and confessor of his feelings for Annabella, and the deployment of logical reasoning he learned from the Friar, he will receive the Friar’s blessing. While the Friar seems to concede that, in the context of natural law, Giovanni “may love,” he emphasizes that, according to divine law, incest is sin. The Friar thus instructs him to:

lock thee fast
   Alone within thy chamber, then fall down
On both thy knees, and grovel on the ground.
Cry to thy heart, wash every word thou utter’st
In tears (and if possible) of blood

(1.1.70-73)
In the Friar’s example, the heart is the site of redemption. Its blood is likewise the blood sacrificed by Christ and celebrated in the Eucharist, and it is redemption, he urges, that Giovanni must instead seek, from within the “chamber” of his heart and through tears of contrition.

According to Catholic belief, individuated persons are one with the divine through Christ, specifically through his incarnation, bloodshed and death, and resurrection. Additionally, if one wept “tears of blood” one was thought to weep “tears of great sorrow” (Lomax 344). “Tears [were also read] as a medium of self-consciousness,” a substance that offered cleansing, clarifying properties, and, if borne of sincere contrition, they would “effect a miraculous conflation of [the penitent person and the] savior” (Murray 59).

The Friar’s reference to blood also points to the practice of bloodletting (a fairly common treatment whereby a vein was opened to release plethora) that was used to rebalance the humors—in this case, “an excess of…sanguine humors” (Belling 116). Bloodletting, however, could also refer to “the more specific release of blood already concocted and concentrated as semen” (116). Of course, the Friar is hardly recommending consummation, even though this is precisely what Giovanni chooses. In all these examples, we see that the sanguine heart was central to one’s salvation or moral and eternal ruin. It is the soul’s bloody moral compass.

Blood references were also “synonymous with the passions, which were understood as powerful urges of the soul as it responded to internal or external stimuli” (Belling 116). Although William Harvey’s landmark treatise, *De motu cordis*, had only recently been published (1628)—and would not appear in English until 1653—Harvey had been conducting dissections for well over a decade. Few in Ford’s audience likely had read the Latin treatise, but it is likely that the London coterie audience would have been aware of Harvey and developments in anatomy. From his observations that blood circulated through the heart, Harvey wrote that “all the parts are
nourished, cherished, and quickned with blood” (Harvey 46). He concludes that the heart is “the fountain or dwelling-house of the body…the Microcosm: into which and out of which blood flows” (47). His view, despite his landmark discovery, is still largely humoral, linking emotions with specific corporeal functions. Soranzo links Annabella’s heart, which he is convinced holds the name of her lover, to the fruition of her lust—her pregnant womb—when he refers to her “lust-belepered body” (4.3.61). His threat to “hew [her] flesh to shreds” may thus be read not only as an allusion to the violence of dissection (and the secrets it could reveal), but also as an extreme example of bloodletting to purge her body of its “leprosy” (4.3.58).

Soranzo’s rage also illustrates the contemporary belief that disease could lodge itself in the heart—that the heart was a major gateway for a range of ills to throw the body out of balance. For example, his words to Vasques, “I carry Hell about me; all my blood / Is fired in swift revenge” echoes Sir Thomas Browne’s thoughts in Religio Medici: “The heart of man is the place the devill dwels in; I feele sometimes a hell within my selfe, Lucifer keeps his court in my brest” (Ford 4.3.148-49; Browne 58). Soranzo’s words also resonate with Thomas Adams’ observation in his sermon that “[t]here is roome enough in one heart for many sins…The heart is so small a piece of flesh, that it will scarce give a kite her breakfast; yet, behold how capacious and roomy it is, to give house-room to seven devils” (64).

Harvey’s discovery “offered proof for the circulation of blood through the body, granting the heart new anatomical importance as the center of [the body’s] complex system” (Marshall Shattering 147). In demonstrating the importance of the heart to vital functions, it appears also to have amplified long-held metaphors about the heart and blood and their connections to selfhood, sin, and redemption.

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Clearly, then, the heart in early modern culture signified across an expansive terrain of meaning—terrain that was rich with references originating in the Bible and in medieval European cultures. In both the Old and the New Testaments, for instance, the heart is often depicted as an object that signifies sincere devotion to God as well as a metaphor for truth, whether it’s the truth one claims to speak, or the truth—be it righteous or treacherous—about a person’s soul. In Chronicles, for instance, we read David’s exhortation to Solomon to “knowe thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfit hearte, and with a willing minde: for the Lorde searcheth all hearts” (I Chronicles 28:9). This divine window into the human heart also takes the form “of the epistle of Christ, ministered by vs, and written, not with yncke, but with the Spirit of the liuing God, not in tables of stone, but in fleshlie tables of the heart” (II Corinthians 3:3). Whatever one’s outward actions, all God needs to do is read the heart to know the person because the heart is animated by the “[Holy] Spirit.” Additionally, medieval and early modern writers invested the heart with amatory values in which the heart suffers and rejoices. In “Canzoniere 112,” Petrarch recalls “here with her lovely eyes she pierced my heart” (11). One look from Laura is like the proverbial amatory arrow, which penetrated his heart and filled his entire being with love for her. Chaucer’s Troilus suffers a similar cardiac attack when his eyes alight on Criseyde: “And of hire look in him ther gan to quyken / So gret desir and such affeccioun, / That in his herte botme gan to stiken / Of hir his fixe and depe impressioun” (295-98). The intensity of love at first sight is registered in the heart, which feels that love filling it from the bottom up. And so it is with Giovanni, whom Annabella observes, “”Wrapped all in grief, some shadow of a man / …he beats his breast, and wipes his eyes / Drowned all in tears” (1.2.127-29). He is replete with unrequited desire, as evidenced by his overflowing tears, and beats upon his heart like a Petrarchan lover pining for his beloved. Love is apprehended by the
heart, is felt through the heart, and the heart is often depicted as a synecdoche for one’s entire being. As these examples collectively indicate, “[t]he heart was regarded from ancient times as the repository of feeling” and as the organ that best apprehended “moral and spiritual truths” (Karant-Nunn 248; Slights 9). For Giovanni, though, the Petrarchan role is insufficient. As he makes clear to the Friar, he seeks physical consummation, which in turn makes clear the lust driving his passions.

That the heart had become so readily associated with passion is explained by Thomas Wright in his treatise The Passions of the Mind (1601):

> the verie seate of all Passions, is the heart, both of men and beasts…the affections and passions…must haue some corporall organ and instrument, and what more conuenient than the heart? for, as the brayne fitteth best for the softnesse and moysture, to receiue the formes and prints of obiects for vnderstanding; euen so the heart endued with most fierie spirites fitteth best for affecting. (61; 62)

Wright invokes humoral theory to describe the porous body and vividly underscore the connection between the body and its material and emotional universe, a conceptual framework within which most of the period’s written works were produced. More than any other organ, the heart was constructed as a bridge between the body’s external and internal worlds. It was imagined both to receive and perceive and thus “was more than the receptor of passions” (Stevens 271).

By the end of the thirteenth century, the human body was literally being cut open and studied, which radically transformed ways in which corporeality was imagined and written about (Siraisi 86). In her insightful essay, “The Criminal and the Saintly Body: Autopsy and Dissection in Renaissance Italy,” Katharine Park describes how autopsy and dissection were

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67 Please see Nancy G. Siraisi, Medieval & Early Renaissance Medicine: An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice. (Chicago: U of Chicago P), 1990. Galen and his successors had been prohibited from anatomizing the human body and had relied instead on the bodies of apes. Beginning in the late thirteenth century, these prohibitions began (very gradually) to be eased, though the practice of partitioning a human body was still regarded by authorities and the general public with suspicion, sometimes even outright opprobrium.
used by ecclesiastical authorities in medieval and early modern Europe in claims to sainthood,
and, increasingly, “as part of both legal practice and medical training” (2-3). Park cites a case
from 1308 of a recently-deceased nun, Chiara of Montefalco, whose corpse was being
eviscerated according to contemporary burial traditions by her fellow nuns. Not only had
Chiara’s corpse acquired “the odor of sanctity” despite the scorching August weather, her heart
had yielded a trove of stigmata (1). When Francesca of Foligno sliced into Chiara’s heart, she
found not only “a cross, or the image of the crucified Christ,” she also discovered “the crown of
thorns, the whip and column, the rod and sponge, and tiny nails,” all of which were taken as
proof of Chiara’s sanctity (2). 68 Evisceration in preparation for burial was no longer the only way
human corpses were opened and divided. Autopsies became more common (for families who
could afford them) to determine someone’s cause of death. What was not readily apparent on the
body’s surface could be determined by cutting into it. And universities at Padua, Bologna, and
Leiden began conducting human anatomies. These “dissections had a pedagogical end” to
educate not only medical school students, but a public that was increasingly interested in the
appearance and function of the entire human body (Park 14). Partly to satisfy the demand for
more cadavers for these dissections (as would be the case in early modern England), the state
joined up with academia by providing it with bodies of executed criminals. While “[t]here is no
evidence…that dissection itself…was considered part of the criminal’s penalty—a way, as it
became in England, of intensifying the ultimate sentence,” it is quite plain that the lengthened

68 Although the Sacred Heart would not become “a specific object of popular devotion with a liturgy of it own” until
the late seventeenth century, veneration of Christ’s heart had been part of devotional practice since the early Middle
Ages (Stevens 263-64). The Cistercian abbot, Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, underscored the significance of
Christ’s heart to devotional practice: “The secret of his heart is laid open through the clefts of his body; that mighty
mystery of loving is laid open” (73). These clefts are Christ’s five wounds, with the wound on his side imagined as
offering access to his heart (qtd. in Rosalyn Voaden, “All Girls Together: Community, Gender, and Vision at
“public exposure of the naked body” would have intensified the spectacle of public execution, probably even added a degree of titillation if the cadaver were female (Park 20; 13).

The year 1543 marked a significant shift in the practice of anatomy and dissection. Belgian anatomist Andreas Vesalius published his landmark treatise, *De humani corporis fabrica*, which marked a significant move away from the Galenic view of the human body that had prevailed for well over a millennium. This shift is announced on the famous frontispiece, in which the cadaver is now the object for investigation led by the anatomist, and no longer simply a prop used by the anatomist to illustrate the text from which he read during an anatomy lesson (fig. 3). That the corpse featured on this page was female doubtless added to the sense of discovery and control over the human body. Heretofore, the corpse had been a supplement to a written text and not the site of discovery it was becoming. In his analysis of Vesalius’s title page, Jonathan Sawday brilliantly calls attention to the idealization of the scene of dissection—from the basilica-like setting that lends a sacred aura to the undertaking, to the seemingly orderly dismantling of the cadaver, to the star status of the anatomist himself—but also points out that, through this image, “we can begin to comprehend something of the contradictory emotions of desire and horror which anatomization seems to have engendered within early modern culture” (66). In the process of making legible the structure of the human body and its workings,

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69 Vesalius was not the only anatomist to laud the anatomist’s new role. In his preface to *Mikrokosmographia: A Description of the Body of Man*, Helkiah Crooke states that “[i]t is no doubt an excellent thing for a man to attaine to the knowledge of himselfe, which thing Anatomy and dissection of bodies doth teach vs, and as it were point out vnto vs with the finger; but there is another farre more Diuine and usefull profit of Anatomy then the former, proper and peculiar to vs whom the light of the Gospell hath shined, namely the knowledge of the immortal God” (14). And in his preface to *Anatomical Exercises*, William Harvey declares he has published the results of his anatomical studies “not onely that posterity may thence discern the certain and apparent truth; but also, and that chiefly too, that (by revealing the Method I use in searching into things) I might propose to studious men, a new, and (if I mistake not) a surer path to the attainment of knowledge.” While it’s possible that some measure of vanity guided their words, it’s more likely the case that anatomists were pushing back at the opprobrium of the general public. Even though public dissections became increasingly popular during this period, anatomists were ill regarded. First, given that many cadavers sent to anatomy halls came from the gallows, anatomists were seen akin to executioners. Also, because of ongoing debates regarding the corpse’s liminality (just when *does* death occur?), dissection could be interpreted as a form of vivisection.
dissection thrust the dead body onto center stage and, in doing so, summoned anxieties about death and being dead and the conditions of corporeality relative to damnation or resurrection. In a culture where the dead body had been largely erased from rites and rituals, anatomy and dissection also offered a way to be present again with the dead.

Of course, what is now often referred to amongst early modern scholars as the “culture of dissection” extended well beyond anatomical halls to become one of the most common tropes in the period’s poems and plays. One reason that seems to account for this anatomical preoccupation in literature is that the verbal and visual lexicon of anatomy offered new ways of cutting through surface appearances to discover truths and understand mysteries. For instance, when GiovANNi reveals his desire to Annabella, he counters her charge that he is merely flirting by offering himself as her anatomical object, in which she may discover the truth: “Here,” he says, offering her his dagger, “And here’s my breast, strike home. / Rip up my bosom: there thou shalt behold / A heart, in which is writ the truth I speak” (1.2.198; 199-201). He insists on the legibility of his passion, even though the surface upon which this “truth” is written remains hidden from everyone’s view. His words also make clear the gendered subject positions he assigns to his sister and himself. In making Annabella his anatomist, and commander of his heart, Giovanni invests her with the masculine role. In his treatise, William Harvey describes the heart in terms that are erotic and that also gender the heart as masculine:

and that it might not bee broken or rent in his strong motions continuall dilation and constriction...the heart is erected, and...it raises itself upwards into a point, insomuch that it beats the breast at that time, so as the pulsation is felt outwardly. (5)

Harvey writes further that “the heart being grasp’d in ones hand whilst it is in motion, feels harder” and in “the motion of the heart was a kind of tention in every part of it... it appeared that in all its motions, it was erected, received vigour, grew lesser, and harder” (5-6). Robert A.
Erickson rightly sums up this “erectile-contractile” description of the heart as “phallic” (76). However, the heart—at once “erected” and “hard”—is also replete with liquid, and resembles a clitoris. The heart appears, then, to be both masculine and feminine, a bi-gendered organ. In this sense, one can argue it embodies both Giovanni and Annabella—“One soul, one flesh, one love, one heart, one all” (1.1.34). While this observation does not justify Giovanni’s argument in favor of incest, it does resonate with his fantasy at the end of the play that his heart is “entombed” in Annabella’s.

Soranzo similarly likens Annabella’s heart to an object holding secrets as he rages to discover the identity of the man by whom she is pregnant. When she refuses to reveal this information, he shouts, “I’ll rip up thy heart, / And find it there” (4.3.52-53). Susan J. Wiseman notes that, since “the body of the woman did not reveal the child’s father, pregnant women could be subjected to mental and physical torture to elicit a confession of paternity,” and it is by threatening Annabella with such violence that Soranzo tries to get her to talk (185). The idea of accessing an imagined truth by violating the integrity of the heart is depicted likewise in John Webster’s The Duchess of Malfi. When Antonio aims his pistol at Cariola’s breast, questioning her loyalty to the Duchess, she replies “when / That you have cleft my heart, you shall read there / Mine innocence” (3.2.114-16). And, in denouncing his daughter’s treachery, King Lear declares, “Then let them anatomize Regan; see what breeds about her heart” (3.6.70-71). These images are significant because they combine traditional ideas of the heart as “the organ of affection and truth” with visceral, even violent, images coming out of anatomical dissections, which were practiced with greater and greater frequency (Slights 97).

What is especially noteworthy about these images of the heart is that the subject in whose body the heart resides must be dead in order for the heart to be readable. Annabella says as much
when Soranzo woos her. To his amorous plea, “Did you but see my heart, then you would swear—,” she replies “That you were dead” (3.2.21; 22). She effectively rips through the blithe image of Soranzo peeling back his doublet for a gaze into his innermost being and points up that, in fact, he would have to be dead for such a sight to be possible. What the anatomized heart reveals is not the authenticity of desire, but, quite starkly, the death of the material body claiming this desire. When Annabella finally frees her heart—gives freely of its contents on her own terms—it is in the form of a letter to Giovanni. Though no one in the audience or onstage (save for Giovanni) is privy to its contents, the letter nonetheless offers the clearest insight we have to her innermost thoughts. As Annabella holds her letter, she says “Pleasures farewell, and all ye thriftless minutes / Wherein false joys have spun a weary life / To these my fortunes now I take my leave” (5.1.1-3). If we take these words as a continuation of those written in the letter—which seems entirely plausible given that they are spoken in soliloquy while the blood with which she wrote the letter dries—we surmise that she is abjuring her lust and, via abjuration, acknowledging (giving “depositions” to) the onetime existence of that lust. That this letter is written in blood is especially significant. In her illuminating article, “‘Red Incke’: Reading the Bleeding on the Early Modern Page,” Bianca F.C. Calabresi argues that “[i]n presenting red ink as blood, the early modern text sought in its own way to create the impression of depth upon the surface of the text [and] to generate the imagined insides of subjects” (238). Via her blood-as-ink, Annabella materializes her thoughts onto paper and, in the process, performs a self-anatomy. John Donne made a practice of doing so in works such as “Ninth Meditation”: “I have cut up mine own Anatomy, dissected myselfe, and they are gon to read upon me.” The key difference, of course, is that Donne did not literally slice open a vein in producing his self-anatomy. As incredibly vivid as Donne’s literary anatomies are, the spectacle of Annabella’s self-anatomy
performed onstage—by an actor, a body—materializes somatic partition for the audience and visually conjoins the play’s iconographical and medical registers.

Furthermore, as author of this letter, Annabella stakes a position as gatekeeper of her emotions—only she can reveal them, no matter how urgently or violently someone else pleads for access. The value of doing so is underscored by the missive having been “charactered in guilt,” with “guilt” connoting her confession of sin and its homonym, “gilt,” indicating the value of the coveted contents as well as the cost to her of doing so. In cleansing herself, Annabella recalls her mock-wedding vows with Giovanni—to “Love me, or kill me, brother” (1.2.246). She suspects (rightly) that, in renouncing him, she will pay with her life—but not with her mortal soul. Indeed, she can declare, “Now I can welcome death,” because she has renounced and repented her sin (5.1.41). Her contrition is further evidenced by the “tears” that, with her blood, “double-line” the letter (5.1.34). These substances, as noted earlier, signify contrition, with tears being a “medium of self-consciousness” that wash clean one’s vision and blood underscoring the image of Christ’s bloodshed and the Eucharist (Murray 59).

Ford refers to blood at least as often as the heart and in doing so presents the heart as an anatomical organ as much as he renders it a metaphor for passion and interiority. The bloodbath that saturates the conclusion of the play is a grisly show of science and sexual ecstasy that foregrounds the fetishization to which the heart has been subjected throughout the play and points up the failure of trying to read the part for the whole. When Giovanni runs into the banquet hall, “trimmed in reeking blood,” he proclaims not only that he has just murdered his sister, he tells the gathered crowd of his sexual relationship with her. That he is covered in

70 Denis Gauer counts at least thirty-eight instances of “blood” and thirty-seven of “heart” in his essay, “Heart and Blood: Nature and Culture in *Tis Pity She’s a Whore.*” Cahiers Elisabéthains, No. 31 (April 1987): 45-57.
71 Carla Mazzio pursues this line of reasoning in her study of somatic and metaphorical examples of touch in early modern drama. She summarize that “it is Tacitus in this drama [Lingua] who most powerfully represents the failure of pars pro toto” because the very nature of touch disperses it throughout the entire body (164).
Annabella’s blood amplifies the eroticism of this scene—even his choice of the adjective “reeking,” which the OED defines as “emit[ing] water or steam, esp. under the influence of heat” and “Of freshly shed blood, or of things stained or soaked with this,” conjures the lust underpinning their relationship. This orgiastically triumphant scene resonates powerfully with an example from Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon* in which the fervor of vengeance collapses into sexual ecstasy. In this scene, Clytemnestra has just slain her husband Agamemnon in revenge for his sacrifice of her daughter, Iphigenia, and she reveals these details to the Chorus thus:

I pushed the blade into him. Once, twice.  
Twice he screamed. You heard him.  
Then his eyes stared elsewhere.  
His body arched like a bow being strung,  
Every muscle straining for life.  
I placed the point for a third and final time  
And drove the blade clean through him.  
That was my thanks to God  
For fulfilling my prayers.  
I offered this murder up  
To God—protector of the dead.  
Then the blood belched from him with a strange  
barking sound.  
A foaming jet that showered the walls  
And showered me, like a warm spring rain  
That makes the new-sown corn swell with joy  
And the buds split into blossom.  
I felt my whole body exult. (69)

Though the circumstances surrounding their quests for revenge differ, both Clytemnestra and Giovanni are transported by a *jouissance* as they recount penetrating and killing their lovers, and the sense of comingled subjectivities felt therein. The necrophilia with which *'Tis Pity* concludes also suggests that part of the erotic appeal of the heart arises from imagining the anatomized subjects as broken open, and therefore dead.

Despite the references male characters make to their own hearts, it is Annabella’s heart that is grotesquely held up for inspection in the end. Giovanni’s display of it to the guests is not
unlike the way it might have been passed around during a dissection. As Hillary M. Nunn describes, “[a]natomists…often circulated dissected organs among audience members, thereby perpetuating the tendency to marvel at bodies in segments, rather than as complicated organic entities made of interdependent parts” (67). As he brandishes the extracted heart before everyone’s eyes, and perversely urges them to guess whose it is, he is also flashing Annabella’s most intimate part to the public gaze. That no one can guess whose heart it is exposes a disturbing aspect of mortality and materiality—disconnected from any recognizable external markers of individuation, the heart is an organ, a muscle, a pump—but nothing that bears traces of personhood. Michael Neill calls attention to this anxiety and expresses his own frustration over the play’s perplexing conclusion. He writes that Giovanni “forces open the heart of [Annabella’s] mystery to find there is nothing there; the frenzy of physical sensationalism announces a psychological ‘horror vacui’” (“Strange” 241). Neill concludes that “[i]n the absence of any controlling context, no one [competing definition or explanation] can be confirmed; so that the heart always threatens to become nothing more than itself, a grisly tautology—a piece of offal en brochette, brutally stripped of all vestiges of metaphor” (239).

Neill is right about the divestment of metaphor, as the unrecognizability of the heart indicates. Moreover, he rightly links this absence of metaphoric meaning to the heart’s untethering from systems of meaning (religious, amatory, etc.). I do not agree, though, that this heart becomes nothing more than a piece of skewered meat (even though it is also that). It is, after all, an organ and, as an amputated part, it will always—even in the most clinical of settings—signify the body in which it once functioned. And the body this heart signifies is notably an offstage eviscerated female cadaver.
Annabella’s offstage corpse reminds us of what we did not see in the play: we did not see Giovanni and Annabella have sex, we did not see Annabella cut her vein and write her letter, we did not see Giovanni handle her corpse while he eviscerated her. In her insightful analysis of offstage spaces and acts, Celia Daileader theorizes the unseen in _Othello_: “[t]he fictive lovemaking of the Moor and Desdemona is most menacing in the fact that it is offstage, that it is uncontained, that it has escaped surveillance…this transgressive union,” she concludes, “seems to loom in the dark” (37). The “offstage” Annabella operates as the “locus of fascination and disgust” but it is still a body that escapes surveillance, a body whose transgressive acts are left largely to the imagination (Daileader 20). Her anatomized corpse is an offstage theatrical counterpart to Vesalius’s famous subject. Giovanni tells us (and Vasques confirms) that her open offstage cadaver is an unseamed, unbounded body. It is also a sexualized corpse in that its death resulted from being “ploughed up,” while evidence of its sexual activity (the fetus) is lying gored in the grave that had just been its cradle (5.6.31). Because it is beyond the bounds of legibility, Annabella’s is a menacing corpse. Her body thus continues to be disruptive because it evades control.

The severance of heart and body—and their mangled condition—also signify Christ’s body and the passion he suffered. Yet, while Christ’s body, broken into the infinite pieces of the Eucharist, continued to signify as whole—and united its partakers into a whole Christian community—Annabella’s body, dismembered into fragments, fails to signify as a whole. Giovanni seeks such unity via the heart: by elevating it in a Host-like manner, he draws the guests’ eyes toward a common point. However, unlike the Eucharist, which is recognizable as the body of Christ even in its status as a mystery, Annabella’s heart produces bafflement and splits the community even further apart. Vasques verifies that the part onstage belongs to the
eviscerated body offstage. However, Annabella cannot be put back together again. Her fate is nothing like Amoret’s in Spenser’s *The Faerie Queene* (1590), who is discovered by the chaste female knight Britomart as the prisoner of the sorcerer Busirane. Amoret is tied to a pillar, alive, with a wound in her breast and “At that wide orifice her trembling hart / Was drawne forth, and in siluer basin layd,” where Busirane plans to torture it. Britomart breaks Busirane’s spell, and restores Amoret to her former state so that “Her bleeding brest, and riuen bowels gor’d, / Was closed vp, as it had not bene bor’d, / And euery part to safety full sound, / As she were neuer hurt, was soone restor’d” (38). In Spenser’s allegory, Amoret is restored because she renounces lust in favor of chaste love. However, the ideal world of Spenser’s allegory is utterly different from the worlds being explored in Caroline theatrical culture. The unity Giovanni seeks, he undoes by, first, having claimed the choicest cut of flesh at this banquet for himself. He continues to glut himself on Annabella’s flesh. Then, when he does share the heart, it is to mortally wound Soranzo; Giovanni, in turn, is mortally wounded by Vasques. The object signifying love now has become the object that kills. Unbounded passion signifies the rupturing of bodies in which that lust is born and expressed—and the logical end of corporeal unboundedness is, of course, death. In a last effort to claim Annabella’s body for himself, Giovanni declares that hers is the heart “in which is mine entombed” (5.6.27). But there is no proof that that is the case. All that is visible is the bloody organ and its ruptured arteries. If metaphors had not been destabilized as they have, one could say that Annabella’s heart “is Golgotha, grave for the dead” Giovanni and Soranzo (4.4.23).²² If the play’s desirable end is to be entombed with one’s lover, the bleeding onstage corpses and heart and the gutted offstage body are an obstacle to this fantasy. That in the constellation of corpses at the play’s conclusion Annabella’s—the most desired of bodies throughout the plot—is the one that is offstage and

unseen points up the ephemerality of the corpse and its refusal to both yield meaning and to allow itself to be inscribed.
CHAPTER 4:
Love’s “stony limits”: Marmorializing the Dead in
*Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *The Winter’s Tale*

With love’s light wings did I o’er perch these walls,
For stony limits cannot hold love out.
—*Romeo and Juliet* (2.1.108-09)

There’s very little suggestion that any kind of postmortal paradise, be it for lovers or not, actually exists.
—Clayton D. MacKenzie

What the statue stands for, what it both conceals and fixes in place is the dying, entropic, and violable human body.
—Kenneth Gross

In the balcony scene in Shakespeare’s *Romeo and Juliet* (c.1595), Romeo attributes his ability to scale the Capulets’ high orchard walls to his unbounded love for Juliet: “With love’s light wings did I o’er perch these walls / For stony limits cannot hold love out” (2.1.108-09).

However, the play’s tragic conclusion—set in the “stony limits” of the Capulets’ ancestral tomb—suggests that “stony limits” do, in the end, hold love out. Romeo and Juliet die, restating their mutual love with their last words, but—tellingly—remaining mute on any sort of shared hereafter. Walls and tombs, however, are not the only significant stone enclosures in the play. Notably, Juliet’s (apparently) dead body is described by Romeo as sculpture-like and seemingly resistant to mortal corruption. This chapter analyzes Juliet’s marmorialized body—as well as the similarly marmorialized bodies of Desdemona in *Othello* (c.1603-04) and Hermione in *The Winter’s Tale* (c.1609-11)—in the context of post-Reformation attitudes toward revised burial

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73 I presented an early version of this chapter on April 25, 2012 at the New York Public Library’s “Shakespeare Week” lectures. I am grateful to Jay Barksdale, Study Rooms Liaison at the NYPL’s Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, General Research Division, for inviting me to speak while I was a reader in the Wertheim Study.

74 Quotations from *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello* are taken from *The Norton Shakespeare* (Greenblatt, et al).

75 For an illuminating discussion of the sex/death nexus in *Romeo and Juliet*, please see MacKenzie’s essay, “Love, Sex, and Death in *Romeo and Juliet*,” (31).


77 In his illuminating essay, “Love, Sex, and Death in *Romeo and Juliet*,” Clayton G. MacKenzie calls attention to Shakespeare’s negation of earthly love transcending death, notably in a “world where the prospect of a spiritual afterlife is mutely marginalized or even expunged” (29). I build on MacKenzie’s idea in my exploration of marmorialized bodies in the context of the negation of postmortal love.
practices, the open corpse, and postmortal love. I argue that the abolition of Catholic rites and rituals—particularly Purgatory and obsequies for the dead—produced resistance to corporeal transitional spaces. Indeed, Protestantism’s turning away from the corpse—the ultimate symbol of annihilation and corporeal non-closure and non-integrity—contributes to a growing focus on the architectural and artistic symbols of death. I argue that, the turn away from open bodies—and decomposing bodies are arguably the most open ones—the late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century vogue for mortuary statues and monumental tombs may be read as a displacement activity in a post-Reformation culture that remained intensely fixated on the corpse and its material and spiritual afterlives. The marmorialized bodies of Juliet, Desdemona, and Hermione are symbolic of this displacement activity and its resonance with perceptions of the body as an increasingly closed system, and of transcendent erotic love as something unavailable—and perhaps even undesirable.

It is an overstatement, of course, that the Renaissance and post-Reformation “gave birth” to a discrete subject, private unto itself. However, given the shifts in theological doctrine and religious practice in early modern England, and landmark discourses about human anatomy (not to mention the general interest in anatomy), it logically follows that these realms of thought and practice would undergo shifts and recalibrations. David Hillman summarizes this phenomenon as follows: the period saw a “transition from a porous humoral model of the body to the circulatory one which displaced—and indeed finally eviscerated—it” (7). Specifically, the physician William Harvey’s numerous experiments on blood flow and his discovery that blood circulated

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78 There are several noteworthy studies that delve into the details of these changes, including Peter Marshall’s Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England, Eamon Duffy’s landmark study, The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, c. 1400–1580, and Michael Neill’s Issues of Death: Morality and Identity in English Renaissance Tragedy.

79 I am indebted to David Hillman’s generous feedback on my essay (“Kisses, Corpses and Maimed Rites in Titus Andronicus”) for his 2009 Shakespeare Association of America seminar, “Shakespeare and the Bounded Self.” His responses—and his superb study, Shakespeare’s Entrails: Belief, Scepticism, and the Interior of the Body (2006)—have helped me enormously in shaping my ideas for this chapter.
through the heart and proceeded through the body in one direction was central to “the new ideology of somatic closure.” This “circulatory body,” Hillman argues, “represents a radically new image of the body as a closed system—more self-contained, less permeable than its Galenic predecessor” (7). Hillman is right to underscore the centrality of Harvey’s discovery (and the physiological and metaphorical “circle” it draws within and around the body), but it is important to note too that, while his experiments had been conducted publically for much of the early-mid Jacobean years, his landmark treatise, De motu cordus, was not published until 1628 in Latin and was not translated into English until over two decades later. That said, even without initial widespread access by the lay public to Harvey’s written and diagrammatic explication, the popularity of public anatomical dissections would quite likely have made many experiments and their conclusions known to the public.

Indeed, as described by Thomas Wright in his recent study of Harvey, fellow anatomists were generally “enthusiastic about Harvey’s theory [which] appeared to them to be ‘elegant’ and ‘neat’…‘simple, uniform, constant, harmonious’ [even] ‘beautiful’ (191). Further, “[h]is theory seemed orderly, graceful, and comprehensible…precisely because it relied so heavily on common cultural ideas and metaphors”—terms which resonate with notions of the body as individuated, rather than endlessly interconnected with other bodies. “The attractiveness,” Wright continues, “was further enhanced by the fact that, deriving from the various languages of its culture (those of poetry, economics, politics, astronomy), it could be effortlessly translated

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80 See Thomas Wright’s study, William Harvey: A Life in Circulation. Wright carefully points out that, while Harvey’s discovery enjoyed considerable endorsement, it also provoked criticism for the audacity it presupposed in “unseating” Galen’s long-held theory that the liver produced venous blood and the heart created arterial blood. In other words, whether hailed or derided, Harvey’s thesis was clearly provocative. It is interesting to note, too, that some of the words used to describe Harvey’s work—such as “neat,” “uniform,” and “harmonious”—suggest the neated division between bodily interiors and exteriors his discovery helped shape—the homo clausus that Norbert Elias argued emerged out of this period. David Hillman develops Elias’s term, though I believe that Elias waxes a bit too conventionally humanistic in pronouncing that one’s “true identity [is] locked away inside them”—inside a body, which thenceforward was seen as “the vessel which holds the true self” (qtd. in Michael Neill, Issues of Death, 158; from Elias’s The Civilizing Process, 259).
back into those languages. This ensured its wider public dissemination” (191). My brief focus on Harvey is not meant to suggest any sort of ubiquity of Harvey and his discovery in the early modern English mindset. It is, however, intended to point up that his theory of circulation (and the closed body it implied) was likely not to have been exclusive to the medical elite (on the continent, or in England). Of course, Harvey’s dissections and anatomical treatise were not the first to put forth this idea of a bounded somatic being. A perusal of the illustrations in Andreas Vesalius’s landmark anatomical treatise, De humani corporis fabrica (1543), offers example after example of human cadavers in various stages of revealing their muscular, vascular, or skeletal makeup. One of the things that is particularly intriguing about Vesalius’s images is that, even as the stylized cadavers open themselves for public gazing, there often are distinct boundaries between the interior and exterior body, best demonstrated by the boundary between the layer(s) of skin being peeled back and the matter which is revealed beneath.

The language of somatic closure, of delineated interiors and exteriors, was evident likewise in poetry and plays. Edmund Spenser conveys an orderliness and logic in his description of the Castle of Alma, which Helkiah Crooke borrows for his Praeface to Book II of Mikrocosmographia, in his overview of the human body: “The Frame thereof seemed partly circulare, / And part triangulare… / These two the first and last proportions are, / And twixt them both a quadrate was the base, / All which compacted made a goodly diapase” (Canto 9, verse 22). The mathematical and architectural precision noted in these lines suggests a solid structure, in both Spenser and Crooke’s use of Spenser. In using this quotation from The Faerie Queene, Crooke creates the image of a body with solid “frame” housing innards—an image that foregrounds a discrete exterior and interior. Crooke also refers to the body as a “Sepulchre,” further underscoring the idea of a demarcated exterior and interior—an internal space with a
bounded wall or frame (*Mikrocosmographia* 60). In Shakespeare’s *Othello*, Iago famously tells Othello—in response to the latter’s insistence, “By heaven, I’ll know thy thoughts”—“You cannot, if my heart were in your hand; / Nor shall not whilst ’tis in my custody” (3.3.167-69). In other words, Iago makes clear that his thoughts are his own, as is the heart that contains them, so long as it is *within* the circumscribed boundary (his body) that demarcates his individuation. Hamlet similarly emphasizes the idea of bounded subjectivity when he declares, “I have that within which passeth show” (1.2.85). The body, of course, continued to be regarded by many early moderns as an open, porous vessel, as illustrated by Hamlet’s vivid discourses on vermiculation, the Young Queen’s consumption of her lover’s corpse in Middleton’s tragedy, *The Bloody Banquet*, and Puritan diatribes against the corrupting influences of the theatre—rather colorfully exemplified by John Rainolds in *The Overthrow of Stage-Plays* (1599), where he argues that actors’ kissing one another onstage leads to the moral corruption of actors and audiences alike: “beautiful boys by kissing do sting and pour secretly in a kind of poison, the poison of incontinency…experience showeth…that men are made adulterers and enemies of all chastity by coming to such plays” (Pollard 174). Further, Gail Kern Paster offers an in-depth study of “the porous, penetrable, and above all labile subject of early modern humoralism” (245). But, as David Hillman has persuasively observed, there were noticeable shifts towards seeing the body as enclosed, even while it continued to be viewed as materially porous and interconnected with its environments.

In addition to anatomical discoveries that contributed to new ideas about the somatic self—and of one’s self as a discrete bodily entity—the abolition of traditional Catholic rituals

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81 See also Tanya Pollard’s fascinating study, *Drugs and Theater in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2005) for a fuller discussion of the somatic (and potentially corrupting) effects on playgoers, which antitheatricalists believed transpired within the space of the theater.

82 Stephen Greenblatt points out that “the continued outpouring of polemical literature [in the face of reformed practices] suggests that the boundary between the living and the dead was not so decisively closed” (245 *Purgatory*).
and changes in burial rites and remembrances of the dead, furthered the idea of bodies as closed, discrete spaces. I described these aspects of the Reformation in detail in Chapter 1, but will here reiterate points salient for this chapter. For instance, Purgatory had been officially abolished in the early years of the English Reformation, thus eliminating the space and primary avenue by which the living and the dead remained connected. In effect, a wall had been erected between the temporal and eternal realms. Moreover, through its virtual erasure of the centrality of the corpse at burial, the 1552 edition of the Book of Common Prayer effectively created another boundary between the living and the dead. Also eliminated was the sacrament of Extreme Unction—one of the last rites administered to a dying person, in which sacred oil is applied by the priest to the organs of the senses (lips, eyes, ears, nostrils, and hands). This holy oil was meant to cleanse away any sins associated with that organ, but the substance of the oil itself also softened the dying body. Thus, the elimination of this practice symbolically hardened the body’s exterior by closing off its key liminal points. Further, the abrogation of the viaticum—the final Eucharist given to strengthen the dying for their journey—did away with the last opportunity they had to take the body and blood of Christ into their own. This was, of course, a logical outcome of the negation of transubstantiation. Taken together, the abolition of these practices may be read as Reformers’ efforts to nullify transitional spaces—“to resituate faith from a transcending of the somatic division between the inside and the outside to an (increasingly ‘excarnated’) interior self” (Hillman 39).

Likewise contributing to the idea of cessation of erotic love at death’s threshold—of nullification of the idea that there is such a thing as posthumous love—are the words of Protestant theologians and religious thinkers. John Calvin firmly stated, for example, that “[m]en and women united in this world in marriage ‘will be torn apart from each other’” (qtd. in
McDannell and Lang 155). Puritan clergyman Robert Bolton opined that, in heaven, we would have “familiar acquaintance,” but that fixating on the nature of such acquaintance caused “the curious Quaere of carnall people…feeding falsly their presumptuous conceipts with golden dreames, and vaine hopes of many future imaginary felicities in the world to come” (qtd. in Marshall 218). The preacher Edward Vaughan wrote, in *A divine discoverie of death directing all people to a triumphant resurrection, and ever-lasting saluation* (1612), that upon death, we shall “change…the company of husband or wife, for the company of Iesus Christ himself” (qtd. in Peter Marshall 217). This line of thinking was also evident in early modern poetry. As Ramie Targoff has shown, “when Thomas Wyatt translated Petrarch’s poems, he stripped from them one of their most fundamental features: the idea that erotic love could transcend the beloved’s death” (615). Absent from the Protestant poet’s translations were any images of heavenly reunion between the lovers, or of a continuation of love between the pair that transcended death’s threshold. Alongside works that negated posthumous love are numerous works that seem to affirm it. For example, in his letter to the widowed Lady Kingsmill (26 October 1624), John Donne wrote:

> Those things that God dissolves *at once* [emphasis mine], as he shall do the sun and moon and those bodies at the last conflagration, he never intends to unite again. *But* [emphasis mine] in those things which he takes in pieces as he does man and wife in these divorces by death and in single persons by the divorce of body and soul, God hath another purpose to make them up again. (101)83

He appears to suggest, in other words, that reunion will take place in heaven; however, it will not be as spouses or lovers, but to “another purpose,” whatever is deemed fit by god. Similarly, in his poem, “The Anniversary,” Donne imagines that “we / …Must leave at last in death these eyes and ears / Oft fed with true oaths and sweet salt tears” (*Poetry* 13; 15-16). This image of cessation of love is fleetingly offset by the notion of souls removed “from their graves,” reunited

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83 This letter is also referred to by Peter Marshall in *Beliefs and the Dead in Reformation England* (214).
“where nothing dwells but love” (20; 17). I say fleetingly because Donne concludes the poem with hope for “Years and years unto years” together on earth—before death rips the lovers asunder (29).

It is in this cultural context of anatomical discoveries, outbreaks of the plague, Reformed burial rites, and the abrogation of key Catholic rituals that the closing off of the body and postmortal love proliferated. In the marmorialization of the bodies of Juliet, Desdemona, and Hermione we detect the symbolic hardening of bodies, of boundaries between bodies. Valerie Traub offers a persuasive explanation for what she terms the “monumentalizing” of female bodies into “jewels, statues, and corpses” in Shakespeare’s dramas. She argues that, in Hamlet, Othello, and The Winter’s Tale, the male characters perceive the erotic power of Gertrude, Ophelia, Desdemona, and Hermione as threatening to masculine subjectivity. This anxiety, Traub writes, “is channeled into a strategy of containment; the erotic threat of the female body is psychically contained by means of a metaphoric and dramatic transformation of women into jewels, statues, and corpses” (Desire 26). In seeking “a reprieve from the excitations and anxieties of erotic life…[Hamlet, Othello, and Leontes] displace their desire for stasis onto the women with whom they are most intimate” (27-28). Traub’s reading is astute and introduces a new way of understanding these vivid corporeal depictions. My chapter likewise explores the significance of these characters’ seemingly hardened bodies—and thus will draw on some of Traub’s observations; however, my analysis differs notably from hers in its focus on how this phenomenon relates specifically to the eroticization of the corpse and the abjection aroused by a body’s “corpseness.”

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84 Traub’s chapter, “Jewels, Statues and Corpses: Containment of Female Erotic Power” (in Desire and Anxiety) looks at the figures of Ophelia, Desdemona, and Hermione.
Well before the final scene in the Capulets’ mausoleum, there have been vivid references in the play to boundaries and surfaces, particularly in ways that can be interpreted as related to the body. There is the juxtaposition, first, of settings: they alternate between the open streets of Verona and enclosed spaces, such as the Capulet’s house, Friar Laurence’s cell, the walled orchard in which Romeo and Juliet pledge their love, and, finally, the Capulet family tomb. Of course, most plays’ settings vary between the indoors and outdoors so this unto itself is nothing noteworthy, but like any such pairings or juxtapositions (the forest and the city, for instance, in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*), they mean something. In *Romeo and Juliet*, these interplays between open and closed (often tightly so) geographical and architectural spaces, point up—indeed are intimately connected with—the boundary between a body’s interior and exterior, which is so central to this play. For instance, the opening scene in which servingmen from the Capulet and Montague households cross paths in town, draw swords, and instigate a large-scale brawl that is broken up only when the exasperated and infuriated Prince of Verona intervenes and issues a penalty of death should these families ever “disturb our streets again,” contrasts with a scene that soon follows in Juliet’s house, when her mother approaches her about County Paris’s suit (1.1.89). The wild outdoor scene seems keenly offset by the scene of apparent calm—talk of a marriage proposal in one’s own home, with one’s mother and nurse. The boundary seems to separate violence from order. A key element at stake in this latter scene, though, is Juliet’s body as it relates to the marriage market. As her mother notes, she has entered her child-bearing years and must procreate. Her father had recently told Paris that his (the father’s) “will is but a part” in the betrothal, suggesting that his child has a say in this matter (1.2.15). Yet, his words that Juliet’s consent is valid “within her scope of choice,” emphasizes that Juliet’s so-called “choice” is tightly circumscribed by her family’s expectations (1.2.16). It is when Juliet assumes authority
over this choice (marital and bodily) that the play’s juxtaposition of exterior and interior becomes vividly—and viscerally—associated with the body, particularly in the body’s metamorphosis into a corpse.

The scene in the Capulet’s orchard is the play’s first reference to marmorialization and it keenly foregrounds the divide erected by architectural walls and the ones imagined to exist between one’s self and other person(s), as well as the one imagined to exist between one’s own exterior and interior. Further, Juliet’s reference to the “orchard walls [that] are high and hard to climb” and Romeo’s response that “With love’s light wings did I o’erperch these walls, / For stony limits cannot hold love out” (2.1.105; 109-10) sets up the play’s interplay between the marmoreal and the mortal. On the one hand, this exchange exudes the effervescence of Romeo’s infatuation and blossoming love. On the other, as Juliet points out, the space within these walls—Capulet territory—is “the place [of] death,” if the young Montague were to be caught by her kinsmen (2.1.106). This Veronese garden of Eden, with its temptations, negotiations, and violations of patriarchal laws, has death at its heart, and both Juliet and Romeo are right in the midst of it. It is here they make their initial vows to one another and where Juliet proclaims to Romeo that he is “the god of my idolatry” (2.1.156). As I pointed out in my introductory chapter, Protestant reformers relentlessly equated idolatry with lust, and lust with death. Shakespeare brilliantly appropriates this language to heighten the effects of his drama’s tragic consequences. Additionally, Juliet makes it perfectly clear to Romeo and the audience that she guides the direction of their relationship: it is she who draws the line and declares that if Romeo wants her, he must marry her, it is she who schedules their meeting time for the following day, and it is she who decides to give her body to Romeo. Thus, just as Romeo has broken through the boundary of the orchard, Juliet has broken the boundary established by the ancient family feud and her
parents’ desires regarding marriage and motherhood. At this moment in the play, it seems possible to believe in “transitional possibilities,” of the inner and outer (bodies, familial territories, etc.) co-mingling to produce these new possibilities (Hillman 95). Yet, the play itself it tightly bracketed by the Prince’s epilogue-like words lamenting the deaths of the lovers and the Prologue-spoiler—replete with references to death, blood, and burial—announcing their deaths before the action even begins.

This emphasis on borders, notably on the closing off of bodily borders, is vividly highlighted in Friar Laurence’s explanation to Juliet of the effects his sleeping potion will have on her body and Juliet’s ruminations on what she might subsequently experience in her family’s crypt. Very quickly, the Friar notes, the vial’s contents will permeate her entire body and, “through all [her] veins” produce:

A cold and drowsy humour; for no pulse
Shall keep his native progress, but surcease.
No warmth, no breath shall testify thou livest.
The roses in thy lips and cheeks shall fade
To wanny ashes, thy eyes’ windows fall
Like death when he shuts up the day of life.
Each part, deprived of supple government,
Shall, stiff and stark and cold, appear like death. (4.2.95 ; 96-103)

The Friar’s words strikingly describe not only the workings of his concoction on the interior of Juliet’s body, but the visual effects on its surface. While this is to be only a feigned death, in order to be convincing to those who read her body, that body must give every impression that it is dead. Thus, we can read the Friar’s words as an accurate catalogue of what the onset of death looks like. Juliet’s once-rosy lips will lose their color, her nostrils will no longer exhale breath, her once-supple skin will become “stiff and stark and cold.” What is particularly striking in this image of the body’s closing borders is its focus on the liminal places of the body—mouth, eyes,
nostrils, skin—places that once registered life and also marked the body as an open entity. Her corpse-like body has been rendered closed.

Juliet takes this image of “corpsely closure” further when she visualizes what horrors might await her in the tomb. She imagines, for instance, awaking before Romeo arrives and being “stifled in the vault, / To whose foul mouth no healthsome air breathes in, / And there die strangled [suffocated]” (4.3.32-34). The tomb is described here as an airless enclosure, shut off entirely from the world outside. Like Juliet’s mouth that will give no evidence of the breath of life, the tomb’s mouth also is cut off from air. The corpse(-like) body within the tomb becomes like the body of the tomb itself. Indeed, she describes the “vault [as] an ancient receptacle / Where for this many hundred years the bones / Of all my buried ancestors are packed” (4.3.38-40). The Capulet tomb is so replete with centuries of corpses that is has become corpse-like itself.85 The tomb confines death and, in its process of enclosing death and suffocating life, becomes a cold, dead object as well, emblematic and coextensive of the human remains it contains.

It is useful here to examine Shakespeare’s creation of the image of the corpse as having a distinct boundary between its exterior and interior by comparing these descriptions with those he uses to render the ghost of Hamlet’s father. When the Ghost informs Hamlet how Claudius’s poison killed him he recounts:

That swift as quicksilver it courses through  
The natural gates and alleys of the body,  
And with a sudden vigour it doth posset [curdle]  
And curd, like eager droppings into milk,  
The thin and wholesome blood. So did it mine;  
And a most instant tetter barked about,  
Most lazar-like, with vile and loathsome crust,  
All my smooth body. (1.5.66-73)

85 The words of Kenneth Gross resonate aptly here: “a tomb we must read as the metonymic double for the decaying corpse sealed within it” (Dream 20).
The surface of his body becomes encrusted, scabbed-over like a leper’s, while beneath the surface life shuts down as blood coagulates and ceases to flow. Like Juliet’s death-like body, Hamlet Sr.’s body is signified as dead because its portals have been closed. David Hillman states that “the founding moment of modern subjectivity is the moment the body is shut up, confined in solitude” (89). My concern here is not so much with the development of “modern subjectivity” as it is with the signification of the corpse in post-Reformation England as a closed object, specifically the corpse as the signifier for death. In being rendered a closed object, the corpse signifies efforts to close off the living from the dead, to “bark[ ] about” the dead from the living for fear of the deads’ corrupting effects—for instance, the “loathsome smells,” which as Juliet describes, could drive one mad enough to take a “kinsman’s bone / As with a club dash out [one’s] desp’rate brains” (4.3.45; 52-53). Indeed, this closing-off not only signifies the hardening of the boundary between exterior and interior, between dead and living, it also underscores the horror and nausea that “rises in the gorge” in reaction to the sight of the corpse. More to the point, the marmorializing of dead bodies is a reaction to this horror and nausea.

In his fascinating study, The Dream of the Moving Statue, Kenneth Gross links statues and corpses in a way that is particularly illuminating for my analysis of marmorialization in these plays. Gross writes that:

All statues…take on the look of a boîte noire, a black box concealing not a soul, not a god or a demon, but a corpse…it conceals what is revealed by the fact of a corpse, our decaying materiality, our being’s entanglement with alien, apparently inhuman processes or substances, our bondage to a lifelessness we inhabit or once inhabited. (21)

Juliet hints at such concealment when she looks at Romeo as he goes down from her window or balcony the morning after their consummation: “Methinks I see thee, now thou art so low, / As one dead in the bottom of a tomb. / Either my eyesight fails, or thou look’st pale” (3.5.35-37).
Romeo’s reply—“And trust me, love, in my eye so do you”—hints that he likewise sees such corpseness in her (3.5.58). Of course, their exchange indicates the sorrow both feel in having to part from one another after marrying and having sex. The sighs of sorrow were believed to cause the heart to produce less blood, which would cause the skin to appear pale. In light of the play’s virtually constant imbrication of sex and death, and in light of its tragic conclusion heralded in the Prologue, this exchange also points to their imminent deaths. The beauty each sees in the other barely conceals the corpses beneath the surface, which will soon materialize and absorb that beauty.

It is this concealment to which the Friar’s description of the poison’s effects refers and to which Juliet makes reference just before swallowing the poison: “I have a faint cold fear thrill through my veins / That almost freezes up the heat of life” (4.3.15-16). That she speaks these words and consumes the potion behind curtains that enclose her bed (the marriage bed/death bed analogy always at work in this drama), underscores the layering of living body and dead body, exterior and interior. Moreover, Romeo points to the corpse-within when he sees the seemingly dead Juliet lying in the Capulets’ tomb. After breaking into the tomb and killing Paris, he gazes upon Juliet’s body and remarks:

    Death, that hath sucked the honey of thy breath,
    Hath had no power yet upon thy beauty.
    Thou art not conquered. Beauty’s ensign yet
    Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,
    And death’s pale flag is not advanced there.
    …
    Ah, dear Juliet,
    Why art thou yet so fair? (5.3.91-96; 101-02)

It is tempting to read Romeo as an utter dolt the moment he poses this question (“uh, Romeo, with the very recently-dead Tybalt already moldering next to her, doesn't it also seem odd she still has so much color?”). Yet, it is this very question, following on his ardent, mournful blazon
of her body on the bier, which renders her like a recently formed and painted statue. She is frozen in an idealized marmoreal form that captures and attenuates her youthful, sensuous beauty. His words that follow, however, vividly call attention to the corpse within:

Shall I believe
That unsubstantial death is amorous
And that the lean abhorrèd monster keeps
Thee here in dark to be his paramour?
For fear of that I still will stay with thee,
And never from this pallet of dim night
Depart again. Here, here will I remain
With worms that are thy chambermaids. (5.3.102-09)

Juliet, he imagines, has remained so beautiful because death has claimed her for his own lover. This image readily calls to mind the danse macabre murals that developed in response to late medieval outbreaks of the plague and had still been popular little more than a century earlier—and which remained vivid in the early modern imagination via contemporary plays, poems, and emblems. The standard motif showed Death as a male figure, in a gleefully macabre capering dance, leading a line of dying or dead people to his realm. That Death often was visualized as a lover in these images was sometimes underscored by the presence of a phallus—Death with an erection. And sometimes some of the female figures being led away were rendered with their pubic bones visible to the viewer. For Romeo to see Death as competition is thus understandable—death could figuratively claim her as a lover in the context of this cultural legacy, and—more practically—claim her from the world of the living and thus as his companion.

It is the reference to vermiculation, however, that draws our attention to the corpse just beneath the body’s external boundary. Romeo tries to gloss over this repugnant image of maggots eating dead flesh by referring to them as “chambermaids,” as if they were maidservants to a lady. One of the chambermaid’s duties, though, is to clean—which the maggots-as
chambermaids are indeed doing, by cleaning necrotic flesh from bones, a metaphor that may or may not be apparent to Romeo, but would be to an audience. On the other side of this lively, beautiful surface is death, which Romeo mistakenly believes has already taken hold of Juliet, but which Georges Bataille has noted is always already within every living being. Romeo’s reading of beauty on the surface of Juliet’s body is thus not only evidence of her still being alive, but also of his effort—in (mis)apprehending her to be dead—to paint a beautiful surface onto the repelling materiality of death within, to negate the memento mori packed throughout the Capulets’ vault and moving just beneath Juliet’s still-rosy exterior. Sarah Tarlow sums up this idea well when she writes:

Decay of the dead body presented a challenge to the living in several ways. First was the emotional challenge, as discussed, of witnessing transformation and disintegration of the body of a known individual at a time when personal identity was strongly bound to the body. Second was the anxiety caused to the living at the approach of death because of the prospective shame of becoming a body whose boundaries had become permeable and whose continence could not be trusted. (144)

Nigel Llewellyn makes a similar point in his earlier, groundbreaking work, The Art of Death where he points out that “[t]he main functions of the commemorative monumental body were to resist the inevitable process of decay which overtakes the corpse and to deny the ephemerality of the ritual spectacle of the funeral” (46-7). Romeo marmorializes Juliet’s body, not only with words that recall how he used to see her—his memory of his living Juliet—but with what I would call a gut reaction to the need to suppress his disgust over her “corpse” and anxiety over his own imminent death and resulting “corpseness.”

Kristeva’s thoughts about abjection are also helpful in understanding this marmorialization. The surface of the body is like “that skin on the surface of milk,” which induces nausea and provokes abjection towards “the jettisoned object” and the resulting sense of separation between self and other (Powers 3; 2). Lips touching the fatty layer of cream atop milk,
nose sensing the stench of death, eyes seeing the skin of a corpse that was once a living body—are the portals through which a person finds herself “at the border of [her] condition as a living being” (Kristeva 3). The border between self and other is threatened at these points of contact, threatened with contamination, with the reminder of one’s own death—the memento mori. Since the corpse threatens with contamination, it “must be thrust aside.” That is to say, the subject, in order to form and/or sustain itself, casts aside substances, or elements, which it finds repugnant, which the subject reads as part of itself, but which disgust it and threaten its sense of its subjectivity (Kristeva 3).

We see this impulse—to create a boundary between the living and reminders of the grotesque materiality of death and between one’s own exterior and the interior in which decay does its horrid work—in post-Reformation monumental tombs and effigies. On the one hand, with references to the deads’ sentience and residence, perhaps, in Purgatory proscribed by Protestant reforms, tombs, statues, and epitaphs became memorials; that is, they offered a gaze backward onto the life of the deceased, their qualities, etc., as a way to provide inspiration for the living and draw attention away from the present or “future” of the corpse or its soul. On the other hand, as Clayton G. MacKenzie describes, “in the funeral effigies of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, the sculpture of the deceased person seeks to emanate a sense of life and beauty—a defiance, it seems, of the actualities of death and corporeal interment” (38). MacKenzie offers an example of a contemporaneous effigy in Devon Cathedral, that of Lady Dodderidge, who died in 1614:

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86 These tombs were radically different from the fifteenth- and sixteenth-century transi tombs, which “revealed the skeleton on the cupboard of medieval funerary art, namely its denial of the facts of decomposition” (Binski 149). Transi tombs depicted a composed, perhaps even attractive or idealized frontal image of the deceased; however, the materiality of decay was evident on the sides of the sarcophagus (thus the innards of the body) in carvings featuring a grotesque mix of worms, snakes, lizards, even toads feasting on the remains of the dead—who were shown from this vantage in some stage being devoured.
the marble effigy that caps the tomb...exudes life and beauty and, yes, sex. She lies on her side, propping herself up with her right elbow, and looking straight at us. No funerary or ceremonial attire here. Lady Dodderidge is beguilingly coutured as if for a masque...Composed and alluring [she] communicates with her admirers across the centuries. And then, concupiscently entranced, our eyes light upon the skull beneath her right hand. A truth dawns upon us. We have been contemplating the grotesqueness of a corpse. (38)

Indeed, Dodderidge’s effigy resonates with Juliet’s seemingly dead body, as well as the marmorialized bodies of Desdemona and Hermione. It seems quite plausible to claim that, in the efforts of the deceased’s family (or, the efforts of the deceased who might have overseen the design of his statue or tomb while still living) to present an idealized image to anyone gazing upon it, one also sees efforts to slough off that film from the surface of milk, beautify the horrid, and otherwise erect a boundary between the living and the dead that holds at bay (or gives the comfort of holding at bay) the inevitable material afterlife of the corpse.87

In light of this post-Reformation turn towards a body that was seen as increasingly bounded, and the ways in which this turn plays out in the dramatization of Juliet’s marmorialized body, the gold statues of Juliet and Romeo may be read as emblematic of the culture’s desire to contain corpses, metaphorically and materially. Moreover, these statues signify that—amongst the shifts in beliefs about the dead—there was doubt about the existence of postmortal love. After the corpses of their children are discovered, Montague declares that he “will raise her statue in pure gold, / That whiles Verona by that name is known / There shall no figure at such rate be set / As that of true and faithful Juliet” (5.3.298-301). Capulet responds “As rich shall Romeo’s by his lady’s lie, / Poor sacrifices of our enmity” (5.3.302-03). Standing amidst the poisoned and stabbed bodies of Romeo and Juliet, and Paris, as well as Tybalt and the trove of

87 Michael Neill argues that “the great memorials of this period were almost entirely retrospective in their appeal...they were conspicuously secular substitutes for the liturgical memento of the Mass” (40). I agree that there appears to be a secular impulse in many of these memorials, but Peter Sherlock offers a persuasive counter-narrative “that England’s tombs remained remarkably religious in the wake of the Reformation” (4).
decomposing Capulet corpses and bones, neither father (oddly) refers to the dead _bodies_ of their children. In place of burial rites and interment, they refer instead to statuary representations of Romeo and Juliet. Quite keenly, this signifies a displacement activity—in this case, a displacement of corpses by memorial statues. That these statues are to be made of “pure gold”—a dense metal resistant to most forms of corruption, not to mention highly valuable as currency and commodity as well as beautiful to behold—foregrounds this displacement. The gold images will far outlast the material bodies of the lovers; moreover, the statues will draw attention away from the corpses, which may or may not end up buried amongst the “many hundred years the bones / Of all [the Capulet] buried ancestors.” There also is no mention of any sort of corporeal or spiritual hereafter. The closest Romeo and Juliet will come to any sort of postmortal togetherness is that Romeo’s statue will “by his lady’s lie.” Thus, their statues, in some fashion, will be next to one another, but won’t necessarily touch (as some contemporaneous spousal statues did, via holding hands, etc). Peter Sherlock remarks in _Monuments and Memory in Early Modern England_ that “grave and memorial were not necessarily contiguous” (46). Thus, there’s no indication that their bodies will even decay together, let alone be buried near or next to each other. And even if they were, there is no reference to mutual sentience of one another in an afterworld—a conjunction or companionship in _any_ sort of hereafter.

Their arrival at death’s door, by contrast, is remarkably erotic and is, in fact, the last expression of the lovers’ sexual desire to be expressed. Just before Romeo downs the poison, he embraces and kisses Juliet: “Arms, take your last embrace, and lips, O you / The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss / A dateless [eternal] bargain to engrossing death” (5.3.113-15). The closure of bodies that were once open to each other occurs at the “doors of breath.” And, after Juliet awakens and surmises how Romeo died, she kisses his lips where she hopes “some poison
yet doth hang” (5.3.165). Since no poison remains there—and with the authorities now closing in
on the tomb—Juliet grabs Romeo’s dagger and thrusts it into her body. The closest reference
there is to any postmortal eroticism is Juliet’s hope that the dagger will “rust” in her corpse—in
other words, be there for a good long time. Yet, she gives no indication that she will (or hopes to)
experience any sort of postmortal sentience of this object. Love and the sexual experience of it
ceases at the boundary between life and death, but not before one last powerful experience of it.

Like Juliet, Desdemona is also described by her lover as having marble-like skin—a
quality that readily signifies deadness as well as the hardening of the body’s surface. However,
her body is not described explicitly as such until the end of the play. Yet, in Othello too, there is
a demonstrated concern with boundaries between inner and outer, and the interplay between
these architectural boundaries and the fleshly bodies that move in and out of these spaces. Well
before the tragic last scene in Othello, in which the titular character likens Desdemona’s skin to
“monumental alabaster,” there is a vivid contrast in settings established between Venice and the
citadel on Cyprus, which contributes to the play’s focus on corporeal exteriors and interiors.

Early modern Venice was a wealthy city, having become so in its role as a center of international
trade and commerce. Its lagoon and canals—the ways by which goods, money, and cosmopolitan
traders entered and exited the city—also lent themselves to metaphors for the city itself as a
harlot—fluid boundaries and open for trade. We get a sense of this analogy within the early
modern English imagination in The Merchant of Venice, in Salerio’s speech about his anxieties
over losing goods (a merchant’s livelihood) at sea:

Should I go to church
And see the holy edifice of stone
And not bethink me straight of dangerous rocks
Which, touching but my gentle vessel’s side,
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks. (1.1.29-34)
Salerio’s image of goods spilling forth from his sinking vessel is not only a reference to lost inventory, but also an eroticized image of women, with their silk skirts billowing outward as they float in the foaming waters—in this context, emblems of Venice and its purported values.

Desdemona’s pursuit of Othello—a man who embodies, among other things, travel to far-flung lands, bravery, and a hardscrabble rise from slave to Venetian general—and her clandestine marriage to him are centered in Venice, where her father, Brabanzio, is also a senator. Though guided by strict governance—as evidenced by the senate’s council meeting called to sanction (or censure) their marriage—the Venice in this play is very much the Venice of contemporary cultural imaginings: geographically, culturally, economically, and sexually open.

Othello’s speech before the Duke of Venice and the council recounts in detail Desdemona’s initial fascination with his adventure accounts and her subsequent pity and love for him, which led quickly from courtship to marriage. He recounts this story to dispel accusations that he had “bewitched” her into marriage, but the speech also erects an element of calm, detailed reason into what had, up to this point, been a frothy moment—stirred in part by Iago’s statement to the already-agitated Brabanzio that “an old black ram / Is tupping your white ewe,” and that this “ram,” moreover, is not so old that he cannot “cover[ ] [Desdemona like a] horse” (1.1.88-89; 113). He points out that he obliged her requests for his stories, “And often did beguile her of her tears / When I did speak of my distressful stroke…My story being done, / She gave me for

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88 While I agree with much of what Valerie Traub writes about Othello in her superb book, I disagree with her interpretation that Othello “declar[es] himself to be impotent” (Desire and Anxiety 36). She glean this interpretation from his lines, “Vouch with me heaven, I therefore beg it not / To please the palate of my appetite, / Nor to comply with heat—the young affects / In me defunct—and proper satisfaction, / But to be free and bounteous to her mind” (1.3.260-64). While Othello does try to shift attention towards the cerebral aspects of their relationship as he speaks before the council (Traub “Jewels” 37), his words to me suggest that his appetites are tempered, but not extinguished. He is no ardent, high-flying Romeo, jumping from wall to tree to bed, but rather a man who may not be afire, but is still warm and quite capable of having sex. It seems a bit implausible that a passionate young woman like Desdemona would steal out of her father’s house and secretly marry Othello only so that she could hear more of his swashbuckling and heartfelt stories.
my pains a world of kisses” (1.3.155-56; 157-58). Rather straightforwardly, he closes with the statement that “She loved me for the dangers I had passed. / And I loved her that she did pity them. / This only is the witchcraft I have used” (1.3.166-68). Desdemona supplements Othello’s calm and reasoned speech with her own statement to her father regarding her filial and wifely obligations:

You are the lord of my duty,
I am hitherto your daughter, But here’s my husband,
And so much duty as my mother showed
To you, preferring you before her father,
So much I challenge that I may profess
Due to the Moor my lord. (1.3.184-88)

She makes a distinction between her duties as a daughter and a wife, noting they are now with her husband. While it is often argued (rightly) by literary critics that Desdemona has violated patriarchal convention by choosing her own husband and marrying without parental consent, it is also clear that she has a solid grasp—and will follow—norms dictating to which man she owes allegiance and obedience.

Cyprus, where Othello is sent to combat an imminent Turkish invasion, is on the outskirts of the Venetian empire, and thus suggests the edge of civilization and civil behavior. It becomes obvious, though, as the play progresses, that both Venice and Cyprus embody chaos and order, for in Cyprus, Venice is only beneath the surface. Cyprus is spared attack when the Turkish fleet founders in a storm, yet—in preparation for the attack—the island is now peopled by the characters who were at the center of the chaos back in Venice. For instance, the play opened on a street in Venice, with Iago complaining to Roderigo about being overlooked for a promotion that Othello instead had given to Cassio. This complaint morphs into a kerfuffle in front of Desdemona’s father’s house, under his window, about Othello and Desdemona’s recent marriage. The security of the home, relative to all that is outside its boundaries, is quickly shown
to be otherwise. Iago calls out to Brabanzio, “Look to your house, your daughter, your bags. / Thieves, thieves!” and then coyly asks him, “Are your doors locked?” (1.1.80-81; 84). Even if they had been, Desdemona clearly knew how to unlock them, which foregrounds the apparent ease with which seemingly secure boundaries can be breached and violated (Daileader 36). Similarly, the opening scenes in Cyprus conflate order and disorder. At the citadel—Othello’s residence on Cyprus, another seemingly secure space—Othello orders a guard outside and then instructs his men, his wife, and their attendants to “teach ourselves that honorable stop / Not to outsport discretion” (2.3.2-3). Let’s all practice self-restraint, he says, only to be awakened later that night by Cassio’s Iago-induced drunken fight with Roderigo. And it is within this fortress-enclosure that Iago unfolds his lies about Desdemona and Cassio’s adultery. Indeed, at its core, Shakespeare’s Othello is fixated on fears about “sex out of bounds” and it is thus quite fitting to this theme that these Venetians have ended up in a citadel, on an island at the bounds of civilization named for Venus (Daileader 37).^89

Othello circumscribes his sexual impulses and the time that he devotes to sex with Desdemona. Clearly in love with the woman who is so taken with him, and whose passion has led her to follow him to Cyprus even though she could have remained in Venice, Othello calls her “My Desdemona” as he prepares to leave her arms for Cyprus, “my fair warrior,” “Honey,” and “my sweet” when they are reunited there, kisses her in public, and says “Come away to bed” as he leads her offstage—a place that signifies unboundedness, as Celia Daileader has convincingly demonstrated (1.3.294; 2.1.178; 201; 202; 237). Their offstage sex may well be passionate, if infrequent. However, Othello also tells the council in Venice:

And heaven defend your good souls that you think
I will your serious and great business scant
When she is with me. No, when light-winged toys

^89 Venus was also known by the name Cypris.
Of feathered Cupid seel with wanton dullness
My speculative and officed instruments,
That my disports corrupt and taint my business,
Let housewives make a skillet of my helm,
And all indign and base adversities
Make head against my estimation. (1.3.265-73)

In other words, ever the disciplined military man, he assures the council that his work comes first, lest they assume—even for a moment—that his newly-married self will become lost in the passions of the marriage bed and cloud his abilities to fulfill the physical rigors of his job.

Moreover, Othello’s reference to Cupid seems revealing of his thoughts regarding his own mortality—particularly as an older man. As numerous critics have pointed out, humoral medical theory believed that a man possessed a finite amount of semen (life force) and that, with each ejaculation, his life was shortened. Additionally, as Clayton D. MacKenzie explains, “to be hit with Cupid’s arrow was no laughing matter” to early moderns (25). Our postmodern commercial-driven notion “that blindfolded Cupid firing his arrows is a cute little putto whose sole objective is to bring boundless happiness to the world” blinds us to the very real fact that, throughout early modern Europe, Cupid’s arrows were imagined as lethal, as evidenced not only in the Prologue to Romeo and Juliet, which refers to “‘death mark’d love’,” but also to the sadistic Cupid in Busirane’s horrifying masque in Spenser’s The Faerie Queene (MacKenzie 24). By circumscribing his sexual appetite and its material expression—“Come Desdemona, I have but an hour / Of love”—Othello is figuratively dodging Cupid’s arrows (1.3.297-98).

Indeed, after he passionately greets his wife in Cyprus, he tries to compose this ardor and recall the in-control Othello: “O my sweet, / I prattle out of fashion, and I dote / In mine own comforts” (2.1.202-04). To over-indulge in sex is, to Othello’s thinking, a sign of idleness at best and, at worst, a prescription for death.
The link between sex and death is drawn further together when Othello compares his body to a cistern and when he makes reference to maggots breeding on dead flesh. In what is commonly referred to as the “brothel scene,” Othello tries to extricate a confession from Desdemona by hurling emotionally-charged and grotesque imagery at her. He seethes that her “infidelity” has had toxic effects in his body:

But there where I have garnered up my heart,  
Where either I must live or bear no life,  
The fountain from which my current runs  
Or else dries up—to be discarded thence,  
Or keep it as a cistern for foul toads  
To knot and gender in!  

(4.2.59-64)

Once filled with love for his “fair warrior,” Othello’s heart now risks drying out or turning into a rank underground chamber fit for a knot of toads to lay their eggs and reproduce. Indeed, he sees his own prospects for fatherhood shriveling, but at the same time, sees his body as akin to a container in the ground, a grave of sorts, begetting putrid creatures. Further, when Desdemona affirms her innocence, Othello replies with an image intended to equate the rate with which she and Cassio have sex and that with which she gives birth to vermin: “as summer flies are in the shambles [slaughterhouse] / That quicken even with the blowing” (4.2.68-69). The image here is of flies laying larvae on the carcasses of slaughtered animals where, in summer’s heat, they will grow into a horror show of maggots.

What is particularly striking about this scene is the language Othello uses to describe what is going on inside his body, as well as Desdemona’s. Although he still speaks in verse (he only speaks in prose during his asides and just before and after his epileptic seizure, immediately after Iago lies to him that Cassio and Desdemona have slept with each other), his thoughts reach heights of cruelty that his earlier measured speeches and wonderful storytelling technique were never indicative of. The contrast is harsh and foregrounds the despair Othello feels over both
Desdemona’s purported betrayal, as well as over his loss of control over measured, logical speech. The boundary within him, between a once-comported Othello—indeed, what seems to have been the “public” Othello, the soldier who “did the state some service”—and the one coming unhinged by jealousy, dissolves as he loses control over the capacity to have and maintain boundaries. As his public self destabilizes, we (and he) can see more clearly into the enclosed person, or rather, the person now who is less closed and apprehend some of the effects of jealousy.

When he enters their bedroom to kill Desdemona, and remarks that the skin of her sleeping body is “as smooth as monumental alabaster,” Othello invokes a clear reference to funerary monuments as well as to his declaration earlier (when he vows to kill her) that his “heart is turned to stone” (5.2.5; 4.1.175). On the one hand, as Valerie Traub argues, Othello’s impulse to freeze Desdemona’s body into cold stone is indicative of his need to contain her eroticism and supposed sexual looseness. Indeed, he does have this need, he is so fraught and overwrought by the sense of betrayal, which has destabilized the orderly world he had fashioned for himself. The choice of material though—“alabaster” for making “monument[s]”—points up the difficulty, if not impossibility, of Othello’s project. As Susan Zimmerman incisively observes, “inside every statue there is a corpse: the statue buries something that can never really be seen, the decaying body, the interiority of the human organism” (Corpse 182). Just as within the Ghost of Hamlet Sr.’s armor there is a(n) (unseen) corpse, so too is there one in the supine Desdemona’s, whose body at this moment resonates Lady Dodderidge’s recumbent monumental statue. And this death-like quality is a large part of the alabaster statue’s appeal for Othello, and a significant reason why he imagined Desdemona as such. The disgust her body and its actions earlier signified for Othello—for instance, the cistern his body was turning into, and the host for
maggots hers had become—is now whitewashed in his eyes. Moreover, hardened into a pristine substance, her former beauty, in his eyes, is restored, while the fleshly material inside that spawns maggots is calcified, thus denying them a source to feed on—and denying Desdemona the “opportunity” to continue feeding and spawning them.

He can love what appears to be her dead body, because it no longer signifies corruption and the loss of control he so abhors in everyone, including himself. Her “alabaster” surface also restores to him, or believes it does, his former abilities to organize and cleanly and methodically carry out a task. Othello’s initial desire to shed Desdemona’s blood would not have facilitated this semblance. Indeed, by killing her, he not only kills the woman he mistakenly believes has betrayed him, he becomes again a controlled soldier, killing an enemy in the service of the state. That he earlier declared his heart to have become stone underscores this point. In other words, Othello has had to freeze a part of himself as well, to stop from morphing fully into a cistern whose progeny is grotesque. Marmorialization also becomes a way for him to mask over the horrid deed he is about to commit and beautify the corpse that will result from this deed. Kenneth Gross writes that “[t]he statue…becomes a way of stabilizing our relation with the corpse, with the idea of death…[it] represents…a way of making visible what is invisible, making present what is absent” (21-22). In effect, he turns her body into its own sepulcher. As Desdemona lies at the threshold of death, the boundary between life and death becomes most palpable to Othello in the form of her breath, which he remarks is “balmy” (5.2.16). He feels enticed to kiss her at least twice and says, “Be thus when thou art dead and I will kill thee / And love thee after” (5.2.18-19). As numerous critics have observed—and as Shakespeare’s audience probably would have

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90 I build here on Mary Floyd-Wilson’s observation that “[t]he perfect revenge for Desdemona’s infidelity would be to shed the very blood that incited her wantonness. But when faced with the prospect, Othello is troubled by blood’s multivalence…Her virtue is constituted by the warmth and moisture of blood…To shed Desdemona’s blood or scar her alabaster skin would be to realign her appearance with the monstrous inner appearance that Othello now believes she is hiding” (155).
mused as well—Othello’s lines imply he envisions having sex with Desdemona’s corpse. The popular (and titillating) legend of Herod daily entering the tomb of his wife’s honey-embalmed corpse for seven years was incorporated by several early modern dramatists into their plays, including Middleton’s The Second Maiden’s Tragedy and Massinger’s The Duke of Milan. While the explicit reference to necrophilia is clear, these lines also imply that, in death, both he and Desdemona will be made of similar substances (she of alabaster, he of stone), and will once again be fit companions for each other. Indeed, since he can see into himself that his heart has become stone—and so can we, since, unlike Iago, whose response to Othello’s demand to “know [his] thoughts” is “You cannot, if my heart were in your hand: / Nor shall whilst ’tis in my custody” Othello is revealing his heart and it has become as adamant as stone—he has already likened the materials of their postmortem bodies (3.3.167; 168-69).

As in so many early modern dramas, marriage-beds and death-beds are conflated. And indeed, in early modern English culture, wedding sheets customarily became winding sheets for corpses. In the play’s tragic conclusion, Desdemona and Othello’s marriage bed, covered with their wedding sheets, becomes a bier. The “tragic loading” includes Emilia, but as the stage directions specify, her body is carried out (5.2.374). The final image, then, is of Desdemona and Othello’s corpses on the bed, before the curtain around the bed is closed one last time. Michael Neill points out that this final scene involves numerous openings and closings of the bed curtain first by Othello, then Emilia. These actions “conduct[ ] the audience into a space that has been defined throughout the play as ‘within’—somewhere hidden and secret, an object of recurrent prying speculation.” “The effect,” Neill continues, “…is to register a moment of theatrical discovery as a picture of psychological disclosure” (Issues 164).91 The marriage/death-bed as

91 Patricia A. Parker writes “[Othello] repeatedly eroticizes the offstage chamber linked with Desdemona’s sexuality and hidden behind a door…what has been offstage ob-scene, and hidden us finally brought forth.” Parker describes
both discovery space and concealed space alternately foregrounds and shuts out the horrid spectacle of death’s chief signifier, the corpse. The curtained space becomes an extension of the marmorialized living-and-then-dead body of Desdemona, who revives long enough to proclaim she dies “a guiltless death” (5.2.132). In becoming such an extension, the curtained space likewise symbolizes a “transitional space”—the place where Desdemona is killed, revives, dies; where Emilia asks her dying body to be lain; where Othello falls dead after he stabs himself. It is a vivid and erotically charged transitional space. The repeated partings and closings of the curtain also point up the situation in post-Reformation culture of transitional spaces being nullified, yet persisting in practice by believers who refuse to give up some or all of them—and by a theatre that sees in the debate over transitional spaces fantastic material for its stories and productions (Hillman 39).

As in *Romeo and Juliet*, there is no indication in the final scene of *Othello* that the lovers will share a postmortal life. In fact, Desdemona’s face indicates otherwise. After learning of Iago’s deception, Othello turns to Desdemona’s corpse and says, “Now, how dost thou look now? O ill-starred wench, / Pale as thy smock! When we shall meet at count / This look of thine will hurl my soul from heaven, / And fiends will snatch at it” (5.2.279-82). If there is to be a meeting in heaven, it will not be as reunited spouses, but one where Desdemona is the judge who casts Othello from heaven into hell. The citadel is an enclosure with cracks and openings, locks that are easy to open, and curtains that can be readily parted and (re)closed. In other words, it appears to be a solid structure, with demarcated exterior and interior walls, but it is also a breachable space. The transformation of Desdemona’s body into a symbol of mortuary sculpture

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Othello’s murder of Desdemona as “putting an end to her threateningly open sexuality” and contends that by “foreclosing…increase, the scene of her death…echoes the desire for closure” (251). I agree with Parker’s assessment, and also see “desire for closure” as symptomatic of the desire to contain death and smooth over its horrifying consumption of a beloved object. The intimate physical conjunction shared by lover and beloved shows the lover that s/he too will inescapably be prey to the horrors of death and decay.
is indicative of the contested corporeal and psychic borders in the play and, more broadly, of the shifts in the conceptual framework of what constituted the early modern body—and how it could be accessed and interpreted. That her body, at the moment of marmorialization, is not yet dead, but at death’s door, and that it remains marmoreal after she does finally die—“Cold, cold, my girl”—foregrounds this concern with firm and breached boundaries, as well as boundaries that are difficult to read. For instance, Desdemona can’t see into Othello’s mind or heart to discover why he is so angry, no one can see into Iago’s heart, and Othello mistakes Desdemona’s initially-still body for a dead one. *Othello* offers a profound exploration of the body at the threshold of death and underscores early modern anxieties over the “barking about” of corporeal transparency and the corporeal isolation that seems, ever more, to be the norm.

Like *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*, Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* is concerned with bodily interiors and exteriors, particularly as they relate to erotic subjectivity and the corpse. Of course, in *The Winter’s Tale*, the marmorialized body of Hermione is never materially dead. However, the scene in which Hermione’s statue awakens is quite possibly the most spectacular example of early modern theatricality, particularly in its deployment of concepts pertaining to living and dead bodies. By analyzing the motif of the marmorialized body as it pertains to Hermione, I aim to demonstrate how it intersects with these other two plays in which dead or dying female bodies appear as mortuary sculptures and how unique *The Winter’s Tale* is in its deployment of marmorialization.

*The Winter’s Tale* similarly begins in a space that helps foreground the corporeal issues with which the play is concerned. Leontes’ palace in Sicilia has, for the last nine months, been a place of hospitality where he and his wife Hermione, and their inner circle of courtiers, have been entertaining Leontes’ childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia. It rapidly becomes
clear, though, that Leontes is concerned that too much hospitality has been offered. “Too hot, too hot,” he seethes to himself as he watches Hermione and Polixenes chat alone as she places her hand into his (1.2.110). He assumes that the lighthearted levity shared by his friend and his nine-months’-pregnant wife is indicative of an affair they have been having and goes so far as to believe that the child she carries was sired by Polixenes and that perhaps even their young son, Mamillius, is not his. The palace bursts with hospitality, fecundity, and jealousy—and eventually tyranny. Indeed, Leontes’ mind is overcharged with such torment that he fails to read the truth staring at him in own words:

Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh?...
Horsing foot on foot?
…Wishing clocks more swift…
Is this nothing?
Why then the world and all that’s in’t is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings
If this be nothing. (1.2.287-89; 290; 294-98)

His accusatory speech to Camillo is peppered with nine occurrences of “nothing,” but Leontes is utterly deaf to the correct application of the word for this situation, since the exchanges between Hermione and Polixenes are nothing. Even the rapid-fire deployment of “nothing” at the conclusion of his diatribe fails to catch his ear.

He imagines that the border between Hermione and Polixenes’ bodies has been transgressed, even as Polixenes reminisces about their own intimate bond, formed in childhood: “We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i’the’ sun, / And bleat the one at th’other,” which echoes Camillo’s earlier recollection that “They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.2.69-
They grew up, as Polixenes tells, almost as if they were one being, as twins who share an intimate bond. In Camillo’s words, they were like a tree—two saplings grafted onto one rootstock, growing into one tree, yet in maturity, sprouting branches that go off in different directions, yielding different fruits, yet remaining part of the same tree. Montaigne describes friendship in similar terms when he writes, “[i]n the friendship of which I speak [friends] are blended and melted into one another in a comingling so entire that they lose sight of that which first united them” (“Friendship” 252). It is, perhaps in large measure, this sense of near-oneness he and Polixenes share that causes Leontes to come unhinged—for in seeing the proximity of Polixenes to Hermione, he really sees a part of himself interacting with her and misreads platonic for erotic affection.92

In formalizing the accusation of adultery and treason against Hermione, plotting to kill Polixenes in revenge, and bringing Hermione to a trial for which he has already determined the verdict, Leontes pollutes this inner sanctum of hospitality with the toxicity of his jealousy. As a result, death, which was at the margins of this space in the form of Mamillius’s “sad tale for winter,” which features “a man…[who] dwelt by a churchyard” (2.1.27; 31; 33) moves to the center. The rest of the boy’s tale neither the characters nor the theatre audience is privy to because Mamillius whispers it into his mother’s ear. His story about a man living by a cemetery, and his storytelling technique point up the anxieties over boundaries in this play, particularly as they intersect with death and dead bodies. Mamillius’s whispering is indicative of the desire to bracket off, to create a circle of privacy for oneself and a chosen, intimate other. Whispering

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92 Leontes’ jealousy could also spring from the sight of Hermione having such close interaction with a person whom he sees as his friend. Hermione is not only cuckolding Leontes, but stealing away his best friend in the process. The two people closest to Leontes, he feels, have left him out of their jovial circle, which roils his mind and much of the plot.
erects a boundary the “crickets”—the other women in the room who Mamillius reads as meddlesome eavesdroppers—and the huddled mother and son.

The rupturing of boundaries, and the inability often to correctly read what is inside (or worse, to tragically misread what is inside), is vividly underscored in the unsealing of Apollo’s oracle, which proclaims Hermione’s chastity and Leontes’ jealousy-driven tyranny. The “sealed-up oracle” is delivered to the palace, where Leontes demands one of his officers to “Break up the seals and read” (3.2.125; 130). That even the plain message from Delphos fails to alter Leontes’ mind is indicative of the extreme to which his thoughts are imprisoned by his jealousy. One could argue that the liminal places of his body are poisoned and, at least partly, closed up. Save for his mouth, which seems to know no boundaries, his eyes, ears, and nose (“smutched,” he says like Mamillius’s nose) are closed to the world around him and he reads not what is in his environ, but what he projects from his mind onto his environ, through these clouded liminal points (1.2.123).

In his edition of The Winter’s Tale, Mario DiGangi calls our attention to Benedetto Varchi’s analysis, The Blazon of Jealousy (1615). Varchi writes, for instance, that:

[Jealousy] sometimes bursteth out so far and exceedeth beyond her bounds so much as it turneth itself into extreme hatred, and from thence falleth into a frenzy, and madness, not alone against the party it loveth, or his adversary or rival, but as well against all such, who, as he thinks, may be any an obstacle or let to hinder or cross him in his design and purpose; whereupon have ensued most cruel revengements, and most horrible and savage murders, beyond all common sense and reason. (qtd. in DiGangi, 210)

Varchi’s description of the unbounded expression of extreme jealousy characterizes Leontes’ frenzied reaction to the sight of Hermione and Polixenes friendly flirtation and points up the mortal consequences of such violent rage. Mamillius, for example, dies as a result of his anxiety over his mother’s imprisonment and his father’s threat of capital punishment—news that causes Hermione to faint and be carried offstage. Paulina returns onstage with news of further tragic
consequences: “The Queen, the Queen, / The sweet’st dear’st creature’s dead” (3.2.198-99). Of course, Hermione has not really died, but Paulina conjoins Mamillius’s death with Hermione’s offstage body to set the stage for Leontes’s contrition, which Paulina implicitly believes could only come about were Hermione believed to be dead. Moreover, if Leontes refused to believe even Apollo’s oracle, in which the god declares Leontes “a jealous tyrant,” perhaps—in being bereaved of son and wife—he may finally be able to comprehend his “extreme hatred…frenzy, and madness” and their “most horrible and savage” results.

Hermione’s marmorialized body, which is revealed and miraculously (re)animated in the play’s final scene, is often interpreted as a signifier for restoration—of Hermione herself, of family, and of kingdom. To be sure, this scene does effect certain “restorations,” not least of which is the restoration of the now-grown Perdita to her mother. However, it is also a scene that profoundly foregrounds loss as something permanent and it is Hermione-as-statue that most emblematizes this point. In a play in which boundaries between self and other are dramatized via characters’ concerns with corporeal integrity and non-integrity, the statue presents an exterior surface that is at once hard, presumably, by being made of marble, and an interior that may be solid marble—or some other material, as the color of Hermione’s complexion and animate veins suggest. In other words, the statue is at once alluring and difficult to read. Leontes is immediately beguiled when the curtain concealing the statue is drawn open: “Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed / Thou art Hermione; or rather, thou art she / In thy not chiding” (5.3.24-26). The statue signifies Hermione in its material likeness—including present-day wrinkles—as well as in its comportment in that it does not immediately upbraid Leontes. Further, Leontes remarks that this cold surface reminds him of how once “she stood, / Even with such life as majesty—warm life, / As now it coldly stands—when I first wooed her” (5.3.34-36). Indeed,
according to Leontes’ account in act 1, it took “three crabbèd months… / Ere I could make [her] open [her] white hand” to accept his courtship (1.2.104-05). The figure now before him embodies both the warm inviting beauty and the frustrating coolness she earlier exhibited. Leontes’ eroticization of the seemingly-dead-stone-as-living-body also underscores the conceptual boundary between living and dead bodies that roiled contemporary religious and scientific debates. Is this marble figure living or dead? If it is merely stone, how can it look so real as to invite touching? Judith Butler aptly notes that “the spatial distinctions of inner and outer…facilitate and articulate a set of fantasies, feared and desired” (Gender Trouble 134). Paulina’s observation when she initially parts the curtain—“I like your silence; it the more shows off / Your wonder”—foregrounds the horror and allure that this statue evokes, since “wonder” can be a response to a mystery that often prompts both types of reaction (5.2.21-22). And Leontes is so captivated by the statue, he declares, “There’s magic in thy majesty,” and is so taken by its realism he asks, “Does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it,” as if the statue’s material hardness reflects the hardness in him, which had “killed” his wife and killed his son (5.3.39; 5.3.37-38).

The play on boundaries, and the production of eroticism therein, is furthered by the space in which this intimate circle of family and courtiers has gathered to view the sculpture: first, it is de-centered from the palace (the epicenter of tragedy and grief in this play); moreover, it is in a curtained space, within Paulina’s private gallery, which is in her house. Standing before the statue, the viewers are in a position to gaze on the body, the way the garment clings to its curves, and the shape and color of its face and hair. For Leontes, this spectatorship goes deeper, since he has seen the living Hermione naked, and has had sex with her. At one point, he is so
overcome with desire, he pronounces, “Let no man mock me, / For I will kiss her” (5.3.79-80).

It also seems as if the highly-charged response elicited by the statue picks up on Leontes’ “nothing” speech earlier: Leontes makes something out of “nothing” because he does not understand the distinction. Similarly, this statue is a material “something,” but in signifying a life that (supposedly) is no longer there, is it a “nothing?” Is it (merely) a memorial? These questions are difficult to answer precisely because the boundaries between the living and the dead have become so fraught. That said, as a statue representing Hermione, and as a flesh-and-blood woman, Hermione is poised in a liminal place between life and death, between discontinuity and continuity. Standing frozen, she is no less a statue than Hamlet Sr.’s Ghost, or Juliet, or Desdemona—a surface behind which is a corpse that will someday emerge. She is also, at this moment, her own mortuary statue. Thus, even as she projects a still-warm beauty, she also carries the horror of death within her. In this sense the figure on the pedestal is a companion piece (or the inverse) to the pregnant body in the play’s first half. The popular womb/tomb dichotomy, embodied as a work of art to be gazed upon and studied, contributes to the wonder of this piece, since the proverbial skull-beneath-the-skin is so close. Indeed, the proximity of this dichotomy to the people gathered around could be partly what entices Leontes to want to touch it. He is so allured by its resemblance to Hermione that he wants to touch it—the “it” being the sculpture as well as its evocation of Hermione’s corpsesness. Is this what death would feel like to the touch? Is this statue really as warm as it appears to be?—not unlike the rosy-lipped Juliet, or

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93 Both early modern and modern audiences would recognize the inferences throughout this scene to Ovid’s tale about Pygmalion. Even though Leontes did not fashion this statue, his desire to kiss it might have conjured the image of Pygmalion’s amorous kissing and embracing of his creation, desiring it to be real. Doubtless, Shakespeare was also drawing on John Marston’s satiric poem, *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image* (1592). Marston’s version pokes fun at Petrarchism, at an artist’s creation of a female figure he designates as beyond the reach of his amorous touch. Like Leontes, Pigmalion too “thought he saw the blood run through the vaine” (5). In not wanting to be mocked for throwing himself at Hermione’s likeness, Leontes’ words also conjure the image of Marston’s erotically overwhelmed Pigmalion, rolling around on the floor and in the sheets with the marble Galatea.
the balmy-breathed Desdemona, whose marmorialized bodies have similar effects on their husbands. In touching the statue of his beautiful wife, Leontes has the chance to caress death.

It is interesting to speculate too that this space, and this “sculpture,” were fashioned by a woman—Paulina—unlike in Romeo and Juliet and Othello, where the male lovers marmorialize women. Particularly notable about Paulina’s role here is that she had to have used her eyes and her hands to model this “sculpture” in both artistic and practical terms. Such explicit, hands-on shaping of a body that is intended to pass as a statue is not a concern in these other plays. Paulina and Hermione probably would have had to imagine what the “statue” should look like, in order to produce the greatest impact. Paulina most likely would have helped Hermione dress, arrange her hair, then walk with her friend to the place where the “sculpture” will stand—one could imagine the moment when they let go of one another’s hands and Hermione “metamorphoses” from soft fleshly being into hard marble. The foregrounded account of this statue’s creation, as told by the Third Gentleman, is that Paulina commissioned it from Giulio Romano, an Italian artist known more for his drawings, especially the sexually-explicit engravings for I Modi, “a collection of pornographic images” that Shakespeare may well have known about (DiGangi 405-06). Taken together, the idea of Romano sculpting this figure and Paulina fashioning and arranging it, adds to the sculpture’s eroticism. Leonard Barkan puts it well: “the sixteen-year absence of Hermione is distinct from the motif of the statue coming to life” (Barkan 640). During this time, Hermione waited for the oracle to be fulfilled, Paulina secreted and cared for her, and possibly together, they devised the idea for the statue. These temporal and spatial aspects further invest this sculpture with power. It is born of a (possibly collective) vision that radically alters the lives of the characters who beheld its metamorphosis.
But this sculpture and its metamorphosis also highlight incredible loss. Lori Humphrey Newcomb’s straightforward observation is rather apt here: “[m]onuments depend on what is lost” (240). Indeed, because they signify a dead person, and depending on their location, such sculptures could denote the sites where the dead are buried. For all its life-likeness—and its being a living person—Hermione’s statue signifies death. In an era that saw a proliferation of monumental tombs and memorial statues, no one in Shakespeare’s audience would have missed this connection. For example, the restored Perdita and the revivified Hermione together signify the dead Mamillius. His absence infuses this reunion with sorrow and, in light of the restoration of Hermione, reminds us of what can never be restored. Additionally, when Hermione steps down from the platform, “She embraces him,” but speaks no words to him (5.3.112). Her silence erects a boundary between them; or rather, reinforces the one Leontes had erected sixteen years ago. Despite Leontes’ contrition, carefully overseen by Paulina, this boundary seems nearly implacable. In 2005, Edward Hall’s Propeller Company presented *The Winter’s Tale*, first in the UK, then at BAM (Brooklyn Academy of Music). Its staging of the conclusion of the statue scene is, as DiGangi aptly remarks in his summary of this production, “devastating” (426). Unlike most productions that dramatize this moment as an awkward reunion, but a reunion nonetheless, Propeller underscores the irretrievable loss at the heart of this scene. With all the lines spoken, Leontes tries to reach out to the characters, all of whom pull or walk away from him. He is left alone downstage. At this moment, the actor who played both Mamillius and Perdita, (re)appears downstage as Mamillius and lights a candle:

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94 Op. cit., pp. 424-27. I saw Propeller’s production at BAM and the effect on me and, really, the entire audience it seemed, bespoke a (collective) consideration of the depth of the devastation suffered by everyone—and the utter solitude in which Leontes now finds himself, even in the midst of reunion and the impending marriage of Perdita and Florizel. I am very grateful to the Theatre on Film and Tape Archive at the NYPL for the Performing Arts for allowing me and my students at Baruch College this semester (Fall 2012) to view the tape of this production, after we had read and discussed the play. Their responses were similarly intense and produced spirited and dispirited discussion as we slowly made our way out onto the darkening Plaza, the winter solstice only a few days away.
Leontes turns to face Mamillius. Smiling warmly, Leontes approaches his son, waving him over for a hug. Mamillius stands holding the candle in his outstretched arm…Leontes stops about ten feet from Mamillius, both arms out, leaning his body toward him and eagerly waving him closer. Mamillius blows out the candle and the stage goes dark. (426-27)

As conceived by Propeller’s director, this moment emphasizes the staggering isolation Leontes now faces. In obsessing about overfull spaces and breached boundaries, Leontes now finds himself on the outside of what, for him, has become a closed system. The conclusion also hints at doubt in a shared afterlife. Metaphorically, Leontes and Hermione have entered an afterlife of sorts, but it does not appear that it will be a shared afterlife. She may have embraced him when she first “awoke,” but there is no further evidence that she desires any sort of intimacy with him, particularly since the only words she speaks, after having been silent for sixteen years, are to the gods to bless her daughter and to Perdita herself. The statue scene is traditionally read as redemptive: Perdita has been found and reunited with her family, Leontes has been contrite and penitent under Paulina’s guidance, Hermione is revealed to have been alive all along, and in embracing Leontes, suggests her forgiveness of his wretched actions. Despite the emblems of forgiveness in this scene—not least of which are the Marian qualities Hermione’s statue signifies—it is also a scene that complicates the elements of forgiveness. Hermione, for instance, speaks only to her daughter, whose promised restoration is what sustained Hermione during her years of seclusion. I believe her silence towards her husband—and the heart-wrenching absence of Mamillius in this reunion—problematicate the aura of redemption and make it possible for a theater company such as Propeller to present such a provocative alternative to traditional stagings.

Further, Hermione’s restoration as a living person highlights the ephemerality of stone. Of course, she never was stone or marble, but as Shakespeare’s “Sonnet 55” points out, “Not
marble nor the gilded monuments / Of princes shall outlive this powerful rhyme” (1-2). The speaker’s intention is to emphasize the durability of this verse to his beloved: even those seemingly sturdy marble and gilded monuments—constructed to evoke and preserve memory—are not as durable as the words of this love poem. These lines also point up that materials such as marble, alabaster, and granite eventually do wear away. John Donne expresses a similar notion in “II Meditation” when he writes, “[m]an who is the noblest part of the earth, melts so away, as if he were a statue, not of earth, but of snow” (336). Statues are just as prone to decay and annihilation as flesh is.

In each of these plays, the marmorialized bodies signify the seemingly enclosed body that remains troublingly unenclosed. More particularly, they stand for the body at the threshold of death, where its status as dead, not-dead-just-yet, or not dead points up issues within the plays over corporeal legibility and signification. These seemingly dead bodies likewise point up broader cultural trends towards seeing the body as increasingly closed. Indeed, no bodies registered issues of corporeal boundedness more pointedly than dead ones in post-Reformation England. Susan Zimmerman underscores the centrality of the corpse in these debates and the appropriation of these debates by the theatre:

[d]espite new pressures from religion and science…the mysterious power of the corpse, long connected in the popular imagination to the notion of a kind of smothered sentience, or animation, was not easily extinguished. The ensuing tensions between new ideologies and outmoded practices were inevitably exploited by the public theater.

(“Duncan’s Corpse” 322)

And mortuary statues and monumental tombs increasingly reflected these tensions. As the marmorialized bodies in these three plays show, tomb statues also “shape[d]…images of the dead or dying body itself” (Gross 21).
CHAPTER 5:  
Death’s Release: Comedy and the Erotics of the Grave in  
The Widow’s Tears and The Faithful Shepherdess

“The grave's a fine and private place, 
But none, I think, do there embrace.” 
—Andrew Marvell95

“…comedy is really about death and dying” 
—Marjorie Garber96

“The animal dies, but the death of the animal is the becoming of consciousness” 
—Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel97

While in my previous chapter I analyzed descriptions of the body as a tomb or grave, in this chapter, I analyze the eroticism generated around tombs and graveyards and explore how comic and tragicomic genres engage cultural anxieties surrounding death and chaste erotic subjectivity. George Chapman’s comedy, The Widow’s Tears (1612), depicts the tomb as an erotically charged space that operates as the proving ground for female chastity. Doubting his wife Cynthia’s repeated pronouncements that she would remain a lifelong widow were he to die, Lysander stages his death, stations himself in the guise of a graveyard sentinel outside his tomb, and then is so aroused by his widow’s near-mortal lamentation over his hearse that he enters the tomb and attempts to seduce her. The grave operates in a similar fashion in John Fletcher’s pastoral tragicomedy The Faithful Shepherdess (1608) where Clorin, the titular shepherdess, consecrates herself to a life of chastity and remembrance over her lover’s grave. Smitten by her vow and its aura of self-renunciation, one of the forest’s shepherds, Thenot, woos her with words of adulation by her lover’s grave. Both plays initially appear to reproduce prevailing ideologies

97 This quotation is from Hegel’s “Jena Lectures” and was used by Georges Bataille as an epigraph to his essay, “Hegel, Death, and Sacrifice.”
about the lustful widow and the chaste widow. As the actions of the male characters around them demonstrate, the widows in these plays personify early modern cultural anxieties about unmastered female sexuality. However, both Cynthia and Clorin ultimately resist the spatial and ideological enclosures to which they had been confined and instead gesture towards a future that is more self-determined than circumscribed by stereotypes of the widow. While appropriating a chaste subjectivity that is patriarchally defined, Cynthia and Clorin also push that subject position beyond the bounds determined by Protestant patriarchal culture. I shall argue that the grave in each play functions as one point in an erotic triangle, a point through which the erotic and thanatotic converge to reproduce and interrogate patriarchal definitions of chastity and widowhood. In both plays, the grave and its (presumed) corpse function as the focal point of an erotic triangle within which the widow’s self-professed chastity becomes contested territory and the corpse a touchstone for how this chastity is fashioned and interpreted.

In both *The Widow’s Tears* and *The Faithful Shepherdess*, the erotic triangulation involving the grave is similar to the schema described by Linda Charnes in her illuminating study, *Notorious Identity: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare*. In her analysis of the scene in Shakespeare’s *Richard III* (1592), in which Richard of Gloucester woos the widowed Lady Anne over the corpse of her father-in-law, Henry VI, Charnes convincingly explains the necessity of the corpse to Richard’s seduction of Anne and her seemingly inconceivable acquiescence to him. After Richard orders the pallbearers to set down the corpse, Anne excoriates him for murdering both Henry and her husband Edward. As Charnes explains, Anne’s invectives—“Foul devil,” “Behold this pattern of thy butcheries,” “See, see dead Henry’s wounds / Open their congeal’d mouths and bleed afresh,” “Thy deed inhuman and unnatural / Provokes this deluge most unnatural”—point up her abject disgust for Richard at the same time

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that they direct the characters’ and audience’s gaze to the corpse positioned between them (1.2.50; 1.2.55-56; 1.2.60-61). In a rhetorical tour-de-force:

Richard picks up the threads which run through Anne’s (and the audience’s) engagement with Henry’s wounds by openly respeaking them as sites of fetishistic scopophilia: loci of sexual rage and jealousy, as well as substitutive objects / causes of desire, in a libidinal economy which Richard structures around penetration—the transgression of political, social, personal, and gender boundaries. (42)

Most provocatively, he recasts Henry’s fresh-bleeding wounds as agents of his erotic passion. No longer are they “a sign of accusation,” but “rather of the plenitude of [his] desire” for Lady Anne (Charnes 49). “Your beauty was the cause of that effect,” he insists. With these words, Richard draws a direct correlation between Anne’s sexual appeal as the cause inciting him to kill the king and the slain body as the effect of the desire she has aroused in him. He coyly concedes that he committed murder, but Anne, he contends, was the provocateur. As Charnes sums up, “Richard underscores Anne’s ‘involvement’ with him in those wounds, one which binds them together” (49). Thus, the corpse is integral to their erotic exchange in that it facilitates this exchange and, ultimately, their sexual conjunction as husband and wife.

Charnes’s insightful interpretation of triangular desire involving a corpse provides an apt model for analyzing similar wooing structures in The Widow’s Tears and The Faithful Shepherdess. As already noted, both dramas feature erotic triangles made up of two living bodies and a grave containing a dead body (in Chapman’s play, the presumption that the grave contains a dead body). In these plays, the corpse, and the grave around it, operate as loci for creating, disseminating, and authenticating widowed chaste subjectivity. What is particularly striking about these triangular arrangements is that, unlike the brief scene in Richard III, these arrangements constitute a central portion of the dramatic action in the plays. That the full last two acts of The Widow’s Tears and virtually all of The Faithful Shepherdess dramatize this
sex/death nexus underscores its significance to the action and to the fashioning of an erotic subjectivity that pushes against the available dichotomy of lusty versus chaste widow.

The widows in these plays are at the apex of this triangle as erotic agents, a position that is reinforced by their literal position topographically: Cynthia sheds her tears and succumbs to the disguised Lysander’s romantic advances on top of Lysander’s hearse and Clorin consecrates herself to chastity and resists Thenot’s amorous worship while standing above her lover’s grave. This “woman on top” position proves significant to the plays’ outcomes and alludes to the female agency that eventually develops out of these triangulations. Part of my argument here is indebted to Natalie Zemon Davis’s study, “Women on Top: Symbolic Sexual Inversion and Political Disorder in Early Modern Europe.” Davis remarks that “[i]n hierarchical and conflictive societies, which loved to reflect on the world turned upside down, the topos of the woman on top was…a widespread form of cultural play, in literature, in art, and in festivity” (152). Davis calls into question the perception that “these reversals…are ultimately sources of order and stability in a hierarchical society” and argues “that comic and festive inversion could undermine as well as reinforce that assent” (153; 154). The woman on top “was a multivalent image and could operate to widen behavioral options for women within and even outside of marriage” (154). Thus, while the scenes that dramatize triangular desire draw the audience’s gaze to the male corpse, they also repeatedly call attention to the female character on top, a position that amplifies her culturally and erotically unsettling attributes. Similar to the function of Henry’s corpse in the tense erotic dialectic between Richard and Anne, the corpses of Lysander and the shepherd are claimed by the female characters as signifiers with which to symbolically underwrite the subject positions they are claiming. The corpses and graves are also used by the male characters to read the female
characters’ claims of chaste widowhood. Thus, the corpse and grave become the loci through which the females’ subjectivities characters are configured, deployed, and contested.

**Early Modern Widows**

The status of the widow in early modern culture was a contested matter. On the one hand, the widow was a threatening figure because she was no longer under male marital control—either in her sexual appetites or her social position. The stereotype of the sexually incontinent widow, eager to discard her mourning weeds in favor of the wedding sheets of a virile suitor was, in fact, pervasive, and formed the basis for one of the theatre’s most popular stock characters. This stereotype implied that such a widow, particularly one still relatively young, could potentially emasculate a would-be suitor through her previous sexual experience. As Lawrence Stone puts it:

> it was generally assumed that young widows, suddenly deprived of regular sexual satisfaction by the loss of a husband, were likely to be driven by lust in their search for a replacement…Suitors of widows were expected to make aggressive sexual advances, unlike suitors of virgins, who in upper-class circles were virtually untouchable before marriage. (281-82)

Although easy to mock, the image of the lusty widow betrayed a deep cultural discomfort with unfettered female sexuality.

Further, the widow’s unmoored status threatened the ideology that undergirded Protestant companionate marriage. Ostensibly, companionate marriage offered an equalization of the genders as it “assumed that the wife was capable of the sympathy, understanding and intelligence necessary to maintain her side of the partnership” (Honig 64). Edmund Tilney’s advice to suitors in his conduct book, *Brief and Pleasantt Discourse of Duties in Mariage*, would seem to support this notion: “Let hir person be sought, not hir substance, crave her vertues, not hir riches, then shall there be a joyfull beginning, and a blessed continuance in amitie, by which all things shall
prosper, and come to happie ende” (111). But Tilney’s idea of an intellectually and emotionally prosperous union does not comprise two hearts and two minds; on the contrary, he advocates a companionate marriage that absorbs the female spouse into the male:

In this long, and troublesome journey of matrimonie, the wise man maye not be contented onely with his spouses virginitie, but by little and little must gently procure that he maye also steale away hir private will, and appetite, so that of two bodies there may be made one onelye hart, which she will soone doe, if love raigne in hir and without this agreeable concord matrimonie hath but small pleasure, or none at all, and the man that is not liked, and loved of his mate, holdeth his lyfe in continuall peril, his goodes in great jeopardie, his good name in suspect, and his whole house in utter perdition. (112)

True accord in a marriage is achieved only when the husband has grafted his wife’s will onto his own, not so much through subjugation as by drawing her will into sympathetic agreement with his.

But what happens to the woman whose autonomy has been subsumed by her husband if she finds herself widowed? In a revealing analysis of Hans Eworth’s Tudor portrait (fig. 6) of the widow Lady Dacre, Elizabeth Honig suggests that portraits of widows in the gentry and aristocracy bear their late husbands’ masculine qualities. In Eworth’s portrait, for example, Lady Dacre presents an imposing, almost formidable figure that would seem to suggest a strong, independent person. But the inclusion of an image of her late husband in the upper-left background of the canvas compromises this impression by implying his continuing influence on his wife. As Honig points out, Lady Dacre’s portrait unmistakably depicts its subject as “still tied to her dead husband. By marrying her, he had made her part of himself in a fundamental way: death did not change this” (65). Moreover, the overt conflation of masculine and feminine traits in the Dacre portrait—together with the fact that this portrait was painted eighteen years after Baron Dacre’s death and well into Lady Dacre’s third marriage—points up the portrait’s artifice. As Honig astutely summarizes, “[t]he whole socially constructed idea of the Good Widow is an
artificial one, born of male anxieties about the place and potential of the female when released from the bounds of wedlock” (66).

Fig. 6. Mary Neville, Lady Dacre. Oil on oak by Hans Eworth (England, c.1555-58) National Gallery of Canada.

The implicit question, then, in Lady Dacre’s portrait was a controversial one in early modern culture: should a widow remarry, and what are the implications of her doing so? On the one hand, a widow posed a rather immediate threat to patriarchal socio-economic structures since
she now could legally own property in her name, oversee the allocation of money, and enter into contracts. For these reasons, the widow was encouraged to remarry; yet “the remarriage of any widow confronted every man with the threatening prospect of his own death and the entry of another into his place” (Todd 55). Alexander Niccholes warns, for instance, that:

At the decease of their first husbands, they learn commonly the tricks to turn over the second or third, and they are in league with death and coadjutors for him, for they can harden their own hearts like iron to break others that are but earth…For she that so soon forgets the flower of and Bridegroom of her youth, her first love and prime of affection (which like a color laid on in Oil, or dyed in grain, should cleave fast and wear long), will hardly think of a second in the neglect and decay of her age. (222)

Thus, although the widow was excoriated for sexual excesses, remarriage posed an arguably greater threat to patriarchal values—that the husband would be erased from memory.

As some of the period’s polemics excoriating the remarrying widow attest, and as the widow’s popularity as a stock character in early modern comedies shows, remarriage was a contentious and perennially provocative issue. Chapman’s play manipulates commonplace apprehensions in the service of his own comedic and ideological ends. What Chapman succeeds in doing better than any other playwright of the period is to create a new dramatic framework for viewing early modern widows, based, to be sure, on the cultural currency of the time, but unlike any single stereotype.

The Widow’s Tears

Likely written in the early 1600s and performed at the Blackfriars and Whitefriars theatres as well as at Court before its publication in 1612, The Widow’s Tears was one of Chapman’s most popular plays. Chapman’s primary source is Petronius’s Satyricon, which recounts the story of the legendary Widow of Ephesus. Grieving for her dead husband, the Ephesian widow encloses herself in her husband’s tomb, where she nearly dies of thirst and
starvation. Unlike Chapman’s Lysander, the husband of the widow in Petronius’s play really is
dead and the graveyard sentinel who seduces her inside her husband’s tomb is not her doubting
husband in disguise, but a real soldier guarding the executed bodies from theft. While the
sentinel is seducing the widow in her husband’s tomb, one of the corpses is stolen from a cross
and the sentinel himself now faces death for his negligence. To save her new lover, the widow
offers to replace the stolen corpse with her husband’s, a ruse which they accomplish. This story
of the widow who breaks her vow of chastity in her husband’s tomb was popular in early modern
English culture,99 so it is not a surprise that Chapman would rework it into a drama amidst
debates about widows and the anxieties they induced.

At the outset of the play, Tharsalio—Lysander’s irreverent younger brother—raises the
question that provokes the subsequent action: what constitutes the “true face of things” with
respect to female sexuality and widowed chastity (1.1.141)? Tharsalio’s cynical stance—that a
widow’s tears are “short-lived” and that “their weeping is in truth but laughing under a mask”—
counters that of Cynthia, who staunchly defends the vow of Eudora, Tharsalio’s intended, “to
preserve till death the / unstained honour of a widow’s bed” (1.1.75-76; 1.1.87-89). In this
exchange, Tharsalio sets up Cynthia: he’s already confident of success with Eudora; when indeed
he does marry her later, he gloats: “Here are your widow-vows, sister, thus are ye all pure
naturals…weak paper walls thrust down with a finger” (3.1.92; 98-99). Thus Tharsalio and
Cynthia establish an ideological opposition that will be mediated—disastrously—by Lysander.

In his study of masculine anxiety in early modern England, Mark Breitenberg observes
that “[t]he anticipation of being cuckolded…exists prior to any definitive signs of its prospect:
cuckoldry anxiety rehearses a play that may never be performed since it is largely a projection of

99 Kathryn Elisabeth Jacobs writes that “versions of [this story] had spread until, by the fourteenth century, they
could be found throughout France, Germany, Italy, and England” (73). Please see her study, Marriage Contracts
from Chaucer to the Renaissance Stage (Gainesville: UP of Florida), 2001.
the husband’s own fears translated into a story about his wife’s inevitable infidelity or concupiscence” (5). This comment precisely describes Lysander’s initial position. Knowing that Tharsalio’s success was contingent on Eudora abandoning her vow, Lysander begins to anticipate that Cynthia might do likewise. However, in this case, Cynthia’s betrayal has the power to stigmatize him socially as a cuckold.

Eudora’s remarks about her chastity offer an informed contrast to Cynthia’s on this subject and broaden the play’s discourses about remarriage and female erotic subjectivity. It is noteworthy that the widow in question, Eudora, is not yet on stage: her vow has been reported by Cynthia, her betrayal prophesied by Tharsalio, and her virtue questioned by Lysander. Later in the play, Eudora’s servant Sthenia offers yet another report of her mistress’s “fearful protestations” against remarriage which, it would seem, are almost too hyperbolic to be wholly credible (2.4.22). Chapman’s dramatic device of making a character legible through gossip and reportage suits his larger purpose: the cultural stereotypes that define widowhood are themselves largely constructed from rumors and misapprehensions. Thus, in The Widow’s Tears, reportage comes to resemble a mock-chorus that articulates prevailing anxieties about the suspect status of widows.

In her illuminating study, Widows and Suitors in Early Modern English Comedy, Jennifer Panek argues that critics have been too quick to assume that early modern “male anxiety about a widow’s unrestrained sexuality led to the deployment of the stereotype of the lusty widow as a scare tactic to discourage marriage.” Although this was the case in many instances regarding real-life widows, it often was not (9). In other words, often the widow was encouraged to remarry, rather than consign herself to lifelong chastity. Panek remarks that “[i]n [The Widow’s Tears], nobody except the women and the gullible Lysander sings the praises of perpetual
widowhood.” In fact, “a cultural bias against remarriage is hard to find” in the play (79). Panek’s work offers a provocative intervention in early modern criticism on stage widows and their real-life counterparts. She points out that “The Widow’s Tears…embod[ies] some of early modern English culture’s prevailing anxieties about the remarrying widow” at the same time that it “reveals…not the lusty widow stereotype as dissuasive weapon, but the lusty widow as reassuring fantasy, a fantasy that, on the contrary, works to enable remarriage” (78). The Widow’s Tears is not a comedy that aims to humiliate the lusty widow for her supposed weakness, but one that shows the widow’s lust as a quality that arouses masculine desire, returns the widow to the marriage market (a good thing, if securing control over her inherited assets is an objective), and compensates “threatened masculinity” by depicting the widow as driven by a sexual appetite that needs mastering (90; 81).

When Eudora herself appears, she contradicts the chaste reputation she’s taken pains to promote—but not in the way described by her detractors. Although she is clearly contemplating remarriage, her avowed chastity provides a convenient rationale for dismissing a trio of suitors she finds utterly tedious; indeed, she is disdainfully uninterested in a “great Viceroy,” despite his pedigree (1.2.23). In effect—notwithstanding her superior social position, Eudora has already chosen the aggressively amorous Tharsalio to be her future husband, and her erotically charged

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100 As evidence that early moderns were not nearly as averse to remarriage as modern critics have claimed, Panek cites numerous sermons, ballads, and conduct books that privilege remarriage over perpetual widowhood. While many of these texts focus on younger women of at least middling means, rather than older women past childbearing years, or those who are indigent—and thus suggests a somewhat qualified stance on remarriage debates—Panek’s study points up the gap between lusty stage widows and their real-life counterparts and convincingly argues that early modern culture was not as up in arms over remarriage as critics have often claimed. Vivian Brodsky offers a similar argument in her essay, “Widows in Late Elizabethan London: Remarriage, Economic Opportunity and Family Orientations.” While observing that city comedies would “remain indecipherable when removed from their social context,” Brodsky cautions against “taking deceptive literary evidence at face value. One might also,” she continues, “contemplate the parallel dangers of prescriptive literature—conduct books and sermons—too often relied upon by the historian to describe ideals which might have been aired in lofty and didactic isolation from contemporary practices” (126). Thus, while playwrights found a profitable subject in cultural stereotypes of the overheated widow, there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that male anxieties about real-life widowhood and remarriage (and the “conduct books and sermons” generated by such anxieties) consumed early modern thought as much as many modern historians believe.
banter with him reveals a clever and self-possessed woman who’s adept at keeping the upper hand. Indeed, as “the woman on top,” she controls the direction of his suit. Eudora strikes down Tharsalio’s exaggerated and suggestive vows—“Only, madam, that the Aetna of my sighs and Nilus of my tears, poured forth in your presence, might witness to your honour the hot moist affection of my heart”—as “a ruffian’s oaths, as common as the air, and as cheap as the dust” (2.4.239-41; 2.4.55-56). Yet, the subtext of their exchanges is mutual attraction and, by the end of the scene, both Tharsalio and the audience understand that Eudora will readily assent to his overtures in the future. This *contretemps* is thereby exposed as a kind of sham—both suitor and widow are mutually invested in the dissolution of their respective vows, which they have transformed into the language of courtship.

It is also important to note that, while Tharsalio parades his wedding attire and keen sense of victory onstage, it is Eudora who has *bestowed*—not only the funds to purchase the clothes, but access to her bed and body. Part of this, of course, is due to her superior social and economic standing. However, she uses her “woman on top” position to her advantage. In the scene quoted above—which is the last time we see Eudora and Tharsalio as an unwedded pair—Eudora appropriates the language of (sexual) aggressor. Her threat to “use blows…of the mortallest enforcement” and to “ambush” him is barely a thinly veiled promise to pursue and quickly catch him if he dares approach her again (2.4.264-65; 267). Likewise, it is significant that her acceptance and their wedding take place off stage. By having these moments reported rather than performed on stage, Chapman keeps hidden the precise manner of Eudora’s “turn” and prompts the audience to speculate how an early modern widow might be able to fashion an erotic subjectivity outside the purview of dominant discourses.
Chapman divides his play into two discrete parts—unusual in city comedy in that multiple plots typically occur concurrently rather than consecutively. By arranging *The Widow’s Tears* so that the Eudora/Tharsalio plot precedes the Cynthia/Lysander plot, Chapman establishes a foundation on which the main plot is built. Specifically, he establishes a contrast that complicates the issue of Cynthia’s widowhood, and that raises questions about its authenticity prior to its enactment on stage. In a play that dramatizes a hotly debated cultural issue, Chapman foregrounds the idea that fixed ideologies can be difficult if not impossible to live by—and, as his characters demonstrate, it is foolhardy to operate under the illusions of such rigid ideological strictures.

When *The Widow’s Tears* turns to its main action—the tomb or corpse plot—the Eudora/Tharsalio relationship frames that of Cynthia and Lysander, which allows Chapman to examine widowhood through points of intersection and difference. For example, one of the play’s persistent issues is the question of authenticity: how can one be certain of the authenticity of an emotion or mode of behavior? As we have thus far seen, the exchange between Eudora and Tharsalio is superficially a sham—yet, the lovers are able to recognize the emotions behind the mockeries. They are complicit in playing roles. But in a far different situation—notably Cynthia’s extravagant grief in learning of Lysander’s supposed death—the witnesses to her passion disagree as to its sincerity. Tharsalio, for instance, derides it as a carefully crafted spectacle, whereas Eudora’s servant Lycus finds it moving:

> Perform it, call you it? You may jest; men hunt hares to death for sports, but the poor beasts die in earnest: you wager of her passions for your pleasure, but she takes little pleasure in those earnest passions. I never saw such an ecstasy of sorrow, since I knew the name of sorrow. (4.1.35-39)
The audience is likely to assume that Cynthia’s tears are more sincere than does Tharsalio, but is her outsized grief—she passes five days in the tomb without food or drink—ritual performance?

As her maidservant Ero describes it:

Her pow’rs of life are spent; and what remains
Of her famished spirit serves not to breathe but sigh.
She hath exiled her eyes from sleep or sight,
And given them wholly up to ceaseless tears
Over that ruthful hearse of her dear spouse. (4.2.28-32)

In the main plot, these “ceaseless tears” become the organizing trope for Chapman’s exploration of several problematic questions, which may be summed up as follows: is self-sacrificing grief *inauthentic?* how does intense grief connect with erotic desire? and how is erotic desire amplified by a setting that connects marriage bed and deathbed?

Highly skeptical of women’s virtue, neither Tharsalio nor Lysander accepts Cynthia’s tears at face value. Tharsalio, for instance, assumes she is dissembling: “My sister may turn Niobe for / love; but till Niobe be turned to marble, I’ll not despair / but she may prove a woman” (4.1.135-37). For his part, the disguised Lysander interprets Cynthia’s tears as signs of “self-humour, voluntary penance / Imposed upon yourself” (4.2.55-6). Ironically, if Cynthia were not weeping, she would likewise face scorn. According to Juan Luis Vives, “Hit is the grettest token that can be of an harde harte and unchast minde not to wepe for the dethe of her husbande.”

But Cynthia’s tears appear excessive to sympathizers as well as detractors. Indeed,

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101 See Vives’ essay, “On the Chastity and Moral Rectitude of a Widow.” His conduct book, *The Education of a Christian Woman*, was first translated into English in 1529 and was republished regularly at least until 1592, making it “the most popular conduct book for women during the Tudor period and beyond” (Fantazzi “Introduction” 31). Thus, a good widow was expected to cry. Cynthia, however, has taken instruction for proper widowed behavior beyond prescribed bounds in a manner that calls attention to herself rather than the loss of her spouse. Indeed, her character up to this point in the drama acts according to the myth of the widow who makes a great show of mourning while already keeping a semi-dry eye open for a new husband. In his romance, *Morando the Tritameron of Love, the First and Second Part*, Robert Greene writes “The call of the quail continueth but one quarter and a widow’s sorrow only two months, the one sad for her old mate, the other careful for a new match.” In Greene’s example, mourning occurs, but is all too brief and morphs from an expression of grief to a ploy aimed at attracting a new husband.
she has taken instruction for proper widowed behavior beyond prescribed bounds, and surrendered herself so completely to her fixation with chaste widowhood that she risks dying.

Unrestrained grief to the point of exhaustion is akin to sexual surrender, and in early modern humoral theory this connection is made explicit: tears can become a sexual substance. As Gail Kern Paster puts it, “Galenic physiology proposed a body whose constituent fluids . . . were entirely fungible . . . blood, semen, milk, sweat, tears, and other bodily fluids turn into one another . . . (9). In their erotic capacity, Cynthia’s tears evoke those described in Richard Barnfield’s poem, “The Teares of an Affectionate Shepheard Sicke for Love, or the Complaint of Daphnis for the Love of Ganymede” (1594). In the poem, the skeptic Daphnis cautions Ganymede to

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\begin{align*}
\text{Trust not [Guendolen’s] teares, for they can wantonnize} \\
\text{When teares in pearle are trickling from her eyes.}
\end{align*}
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Daphnis criticizes not only the duplicity of women but also the self-induced eroticism of lachrymosity. Like Guendolen, Cynthia too weeps “cisternes of … ceaseless teares,” signifiers of her desire for her dead love, but also for the condition of desire itself. She has so tightly bound herself to her fantasy of widowhood that her tears, ironically, offer her a possible release from

\[\text{102 An association between tears of grief and generation can be traced at least to the Middle Ages, “in the veneration of the Mater Dolorosa, par excellence... the Virgin Mary” (Goodland 32). As Katharine Goodland observes in Female Mourning and Tragedy in Medieval and Renaissance English Drama, the copious tears Mary shed at the crucifixion indicated her labor pains as she “gave birth to the Church of the world” (32). Tears were often associated with procreative power. Quoting Laura Severt King (Sacred Eroticism, Rapturous Anguish: Christian Penitent Prostitutes and the Vexation of Allegory, 1370-1608), Goodland also notes the legend of Mary Magdalene weeping “her belly full of tears.” These “tears have wondrous procreative force; like semen, they fill her belly and engender Christ there” (qtd. in Goodland 17).}
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\[\text{103 In Shakespeare’s Richard III, Lady Anne weeps tears onto Henry’s wounded and bloodied corpse. As he marvels at his success in wooing Anne, Richard recounts the image of Anne “With curses in her mouth, tears in her eyes, / The bleeding witness of her hatred by.” As he seduces her, she spills tears onto the corpse that is the conduit for their erotic energy. Her tears signify the passion of anger at the same time that, co-mingled with Henry’s blood—which, as Linda Charnes has shown, Richard transforms into a sign of his arousal for Anne—they symbolize generative substance.}\]
these circumscribed borders and likewise underscore a desire not to be controlled. Because Cynthia has materially emptied herself of her sorrow, she is in a position to either surrender to death or to begin creating a new identity; she has spent her vital fluid in an orgasmic sense, up to the threshold of death. Thus what Lysander discovers as he opens the door to the tomb is a desiring, affective body.

Remarking on the body of the widow in his play *The Dead Hands* (2004), Howard Barker contends that “of the many paradoxes of Death, the most shocking is the eruption of a reckless *joie de vivre* created by the spectacle of the cadaver . . . an exhortation to *live while you can* . . .” (Rabey 208). The sex/death conjunction in the last two acts of Chapman’s play does indeed dramatize such a reckless release: it is deliberately constructed and provocative. This schema features three figures in a tomb: Cynthia, the disguised Lysander, and the hearse containing “his supposed corpse” (4.1.15). A place of burial, it should be noted, is a space characterized by “nauseous, rank, and heaving matter . . . worms, grubs and eggs” (Bataille 56-7); it is the “ancient receptacle” Juliet describes as “packed” with “the bones / Of all my buried ancestors” (4.3.38; 40; 39-40); and it is Hamlet’s site for the erasure of identity, where “Imperial Caesar, dead and turned to clay, / Might stop a hole to keep the wind away” (5.1.196-97). But the grotesqueries of putrefaction, of ultimate obliteration, are also the raw materials of transformation: “the corpse signifies . . . the phenomenon of becoming/unbecoming,” and the

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104 Thomas Wright’s treatise, *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, was published in 1600; a revised and expanded edition appeared in 1604. Wright describes the metamorphic effects of humors on affections and constitutions. When, for example, “these affections are stirring in our mindes, they alter the humours of our bodies, causing some passion or alteration in them.” Not only is the body altered in some fashion through humoral activity, so is the mind, and these changes influence one’s actions. Cynthia’s affective grief creates the picture of chastity she had earlier envisioned for herself.

105 *To spend*, in early modern terms, could refer to emptying or squandering vital sexual fluid. When the speaker of Shakespeare’s sonnet 129 says “The expense of spirit in a waste of shame / Is lust in action” he is referring to the emission of semen in a non-procreative, purely pleasure-centered context. The beloved has “spent” his energy after “spending” his semen. Similarly, the speaker of the ballad, “The Lamentation of a New Married Man,” berates her new husband: “While you among your minions / Spend more than is your owne.” Again, the addressee is being taken to task for ejaculating his supposedly finite semen amongst his coterie of companions rather than where his wife believes he ought, which is with her.
cemetery is “a place of oblivion . . . which annihilates all distinction,” yet incubates new life (Zimmerman 234). That Cynthia stages her grief, succumbs to seduction, and “liberates” herself in a noxious tomb, over a (presumably) dead body, paradoxically emphasizes the *joie de vivre* in her personal transformation.

Chapman configures Cynthia’s capitulation to Lysander’s sexual overtures—appropriately enough—by linking the pleasure of food to that of sexual satisfaction. Cynthia is attempting to starve herself, and Lysander points to the “affrighting spectacle of death” all around them as a cautionary spectacle of “wasted” bodies (4.2.76; 26). Lysander would have Cynthia kill herself with his proffered (phallic) sword, but it is Ero, in her dual role of maid and bawd, who proposes to coax Cynthia to eat and to drink the meat and wine Lysander brought, and thus to “make her turn to flesh and blood / And learn to live as other mortals do” (4.2.176-77). Ero’s phallic metaphor leaves no doubt as to the reason for her intervention: “Did not I tell you how sweet an operation the soldier’s bottle had? / And if there be such virtue in the bottle, what is there in the soldier?” (4.3.5-7). In indicating her willingness to rejoin the society of the living, Cynthia herself takes up this imagery. With a suggestive gesture of the wine bottle to Lysander, she establishes this linkage: “I’ll pledge you, sir” (4.3.68).

As Cynthia and the disguised Lysander become sexually intimate, imbibing wine and embracing, the hearse/corpse becomes a prop to secure their connection. Having functioned as

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106 See Zimmerman (*Corpse*) and Neill (*Issues*). Graves and tombs are sites of grotesque putrefaction, but they also are sites of transformation.
107 Chapman makes clear the “noxiousness” of this tomb through the description of Cynthia’s emaciated body over the hearse (which he allies with the presumed corpse within the hearse), phrases such as Lysander’s “this affrighting spectacle of death,” which one can imagine to be a stage direction signaling
108 Lysander emphasizes the sexual subtext here by paralleling her current protestations with those she expressed on the night she “lost [her] maidenhead” (4.2.119).
109 This tableau evokes the sex/death nexus in one of the period’s most significant paintings, “The Judd Marriage” (1560), in which marriage and death are intimately conjoined (fig. 7). The painting depicts a couple exchanging wedding vows in the presence of a skull: they stand facing one another, each with a hand placed on the skull between them. The skull rests on a small table, which stands on a larger, altar-like table. The inscription at the base
of the smaller table reads: “The worde of God / Hathe knit us twayne / And Death shall vs / Divide agayne.” The painting underscores this eventual rupture by placing the couple’s hands not on a Bible, but on a skull, an emblem of death and dematerialization. Lying horizontally at the base of the painting, on the larger, altar-like table, is a naked corpse, resting on a shroud that covers its genitals, across which its hands are folded. The husband’s right index finger points down towards the corpse, while the wife’s left hand rests on her abdomen with its fingers likewise pointed down towards the corpse between them. The precise angle of the couple’s fingers appears to be directed at the corpse’s genitals. Thus their resting and active hands, together with the cadaver’s overlapped hands, form a triangle, linking all three parties and signifying the conjunction between sex and death, intimacy and decay. This staged scene recalls the dynamics of the painting in its triangulation of the wife and husband with death. The skull and corpse in the painting signify the role death will play in eventually severing their conjunction at the same time it gestures to carnality by which their marriage will be joined until that severance. The conjunction between sex, death, and separation is visualized in the painting and dramatized in the tableau on stage.
a banquet table, it also serves as an altar when they make their vows, and finally as a wedding bed. Thus the morbidity of the corpse is a multivalent and changing symbol. Initially it signifies the life-threatening self-absorption of Cynthia’s seclusion, but later it becomes imbued with an erotic liveliness that is allied with Cynthia’s desire to engage again with life. She would have died had she not begun to eat and drink again; indeed, Ero described her in terms that likened Cynthia’s wasting frame to a corpse. The meat and wine—flesh and blood—revitalize Cynthia. The wine also has a mildly intoxicating effect, which facilitates her kiss with the disguised Lysander over the hearse of his supposed corpse. And Cynthia herself has allied her affective body with the corpse because it is within the tomb (rather than anywhere else) that she stages her chaste widowhood. Indeed, Cynthia’s extreme version of this persona could only achieve the shape she envisions in the setting of death and decay. Proximity to her husband’s corpse would feed her sorrow at the same time that the tableau she creates would engender the fame she seeks.

Cynthia’s about-face is complete when, after she has been seduced, she intervenes to save her new lover by offering to substitute Lysander’s “corpse” for that of an executed man stolen under the “sentinel’s” watch (a capital offense): “I have a body here which once I loved / And honoured above all; but that time’s past” (5.3.16-17). These words point up that Cynthia was indeed a chaste wife and widow, but that she is now doing what many early moderns expected of widows: she has become loyal and chaste to a new love. As Jennifer Panek writes of this scene, Cynthia “implies that her love and honor [which she once gave to her husband] are now due with equal devotion to the soldier” (89). For Lysander, of course, Cynthia’s proposal only confirms

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110 In her study of early modern funeral traditions, Clare Gittings describes the ritual of sin-eating, in which “the coffin or corpse served as a table for food and drink” (155). As Gittings points out, the sin-eater was usually a poor person in the deceased’s community, who was paid to eat bread and drink beer over the coffin or corpse of a person who had died without confessing his sins. It was believed that, via sin-eating, the deceased’s sins would be forgiven and his soul allowed into heaven. The practice served to “draw the community together” (154). In the context of Chapman’s play, a version of sin-eating amplifies the erotic communion developing between Cynthia and her disguised husband. See Gittings’ book, Death, Burial and the Individual in Early Modern England (1984).
her disloyalty, and he is disabused further by her response to his enforced “confession,” when, in an effort to forestall the opening of the empty hearse, he admits that it is he, the sentinel, “that slew thy husband” (5.3.27). Shocked but not dissuaded by this news, Cynthia exclaims passionately: “Love must salve any murder” (5.3.41). The eroticism of the “corpse” in the hearse is evident in the explicit way in which Cynthia connects the body in the hearse with the body of the soldier: she is ready to swap the former (which at one time she had loved) so that she may enjoy the latter, which she has come to love. Both “bodies” are thus signified via Cynthia’s in this moment of amorous exchange and, in effect, husband-swapping. Though obscured from sight, the “corpse” within the hearse signifies as such: as a “hearsed” object within a tomb, the “body” inside is signified as dead; it is also the body that initially exerts so much force over Cynthia’s own—she sobs, languishes, and nearly dies in response to its presumed deadness. Indeed, the corpse cues her to enact her fantasy of chaste widowhood and the corpse continues to serve as a point of contact, materially (via the hearse) and symbolically, for the exchanges between Cynthia and the “sentinel.”

The farce that ensues, involving an actual tug-of-war over the hearse, is a brilliant comedic turn: even with their roles transformed, Cynthia has lost none of her emotional intensity, or Lysander his anger. There are many situations in the play that would have elicited laughter, but none so forcefully as this scene. However, Chapman’s dénouement is also serious, even horrifying. If Cynthia had succeeded in prying open the lid of the hearse, she would have (presumably) been confronted with a corpse nearly a week dead. Its smell and appearance would

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111 In her informative and engaging study, Imagining Sex: Pornography and Bodies in Seventeenth-Century England, Sarah Toulalan observes that “this was a culture in which humor and sex were fundamentally entwined” (194), a sentiment echoed in Laurent Joubert’s Treatise on Laughter (1579), which examines the imbrication of the comic and the erotic. In the repertoire of laughter’s somatic effects, “the face is moving, the mouth widens, the eyes sparkle and tear, the cheeks redden, the breast heaves…and when it goes on for a long time the veins in the throat become enlarged…we cough, perspire, piss, and besmirch ourselves by dint of laughing, and sometimes we even faint away because of it” (Joubert 28). In this respect, the open-throated, teary-eyed audience of The Widow’s Tears becomes intimately connected with the spectacle in the tomb.
have been formidable. After Tharsalio has informed Cynthia of Lysander’s duplicity (in his absence), she is prepared to denounce her husband. As they wrestle for possession of the contents of the hearse, Lysander expresses incredulity at Cynthia’s boldness: “Art thou not the most—” (5.5.80), to which a Cynthia responds, interrupting him, “Ill-destined wife of a transformed monster, / Who to assure himself of what he knew, / Hath lost the shape of man” (5.5.81-83). In Cynthia’s eyes, the empty hearse has come to signify the remains of the manipulative man Lysander has become as well as the receptacle for their now essentially dead marriage. In tricking Cynthia into believing she is a widow, Lysander has symbolically made himself a widower. Cynthia’s skill in calling his bluff is deft, revealing a self-possession absent in the woman we initially saw protesting her steadfastness to Tharsalio, and in the passionate persona of the tomb scene. In the end, Cynthia does not allow herself to be reinscribed either as a lusty widow, or as an unchaste wife.

Judith Butler argues in *Undoing Gender* that:

> sexuality is never fully captured by any regulation. Rather, it is characterized by displacement, it can exceed regulation, take on new forms in response to regulation . . . In this sense, sexuality is never fully reducible to the ‘effect’ of this or that operation of regulatory power. This is not the same as saying that sexuality is, by nature, free and wild. On the contrary, it emerges precisely as an improvisational possibility within a field of constraints. (15)

That Cynthia’s sexual and social status lies outside conventional parameters after her repudiation of Lysander is signaled by the place she occupies onstage in the play’s final scene. As the male characters attempt to resolve the plot’s many confusions, Cynthia stands apart with Eudora, the widowed woman she had earlier castigated for remarrying. The stage directions note, “Eudora whispers with Cynthia,” and although their words are not in the text, Cynthia’s physical distance from the group of men suggests a new erotic subjectivity outside available paradigms (133).
Clearly, the revelation that her husband is alive has not prompted Cynthia to return to their marital relationship. Her last words to Lysander are unequivocal, revealing that she is finished with him: “Farewell: I leave thee there my husband’s corpse, / Make much of that” (5.5.88-9). She is both leaving him with the “corpse” and as a corpse, one that he unwittingly fashioned himself.¹¹² In Butler’s terms, Cynthia has improvised the possibility of a new identity under the constraints of a widowhood that was thrust upon her. She has divested herself of these constraints—mobilizing her sexual desire, eschewing “regulatory power,” and discovering a joie de vivre that only her experience of widowhood in a place of death could have made possible.

**The Faithful Shepherdess**

John Fletcher’s tragicomedy, *The Faithful Shepherdess*, similarly interrogates prevailing notions about chaste widowhood through Clorin, who makes a pledge over her lover’s grave to remain steadfast to his memory, while renouncing her own former passion and pledging to curb the lust of her fellow shepherds and shepherdesses. She is subsequently wooed over this grave by Thenot, a fellow shepherd who unceasingly praises her as an emblem of perfect womanhood for this loyalty and austerity. While Clorin models herself as the forest’s healer, she is nonetheless a vexing figure in the play. In her compelling study of the virginal female body in early modern drama, Marie H. Loughlin pinpoints Clorin’s virginity as the source of this instability. Specifically, it is Clorin’s embodiment of “two incompatible virginities…absolute virginity and transitional virginity” that renders her so “supremely unstable” (54). She thus signifies medieval asceticism in her renunciation of sex as well as availability on the marriage market via her widowhood. She also recognizes the value of her intact hymen: whoever controls it, controls her

¹¹² That Lysander is unaware that Cynthia is irretrievably lost is apparent when he moans “What have I done? / O , let me lie and grieve, and speak no more” (5.3.89-90).
sexual subjectivity. By vowing to keep it intact, she asserts control over her body and subject position.

Prior to the Reformation, absolute virginity had been a viable (even laudable) option for women. As Theodora Jankowski notes, the view extolled by early Church fathers that “virginity for both men and women was superior to marriage” was still very strong throughout the Middle Ages (10). Indeed, as Thomas Aquinas posits, “by taking the vow of virginity or of consecrated widowhood and thus belonging to Christ, [these women] are raised to the dignity of men, through which they are freed from subordination to men and are immediately united with Christ” (qtd. in Jankowski 72). Consecrated virginity, moreover, was a lifestyle available not only to women who had never married but likewise widows who could live a chaste life in either the secular world or as part of a religious order. Following the Protestant Reformation, with its dissolution of religious houses and emphasis on marriage over ascetic life, “[v]irginity became a transitory state for women” (Jankowski 11).^113^ Perpetual virgins no longer had a designated place in post-Reformation English society. Queen Elizabeth, of course, styled herself as the exception to this rule, but even she—as an heir-less monarch—caused consternation among her court and

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^113^ The Acts of Dissolution (1537 and 1539) closed England’s religious houses and suppressed their religious orders. As Lawrence Stone makes clear, “[t]he medieval ideal of chastity as a legal obligation for priests, monks and nuns and as an ideal for all members of the community to aspire to, was replaced by the ideal of conjugal affection” (135). Though perpetual virginity and consecrated chastity were viable choices throughout the Middle Ages, female religious communities and avowed virginity in general were the source of cultural anxieties, chiefly because of the autonomy such choices signified women could invoke over their bodies and sexualities. Jankowski notes, for example, that women’s religious houses were organized under the guardianship of male ecclesiastics and that anxieties over relatively autonomous abbeys and convents spurred Rome to exert tighter control over women’s houses from the thirteenth century onward (67). Moreover, since virginity was equated with an enclosed body, “nuns often had to present no other evidence than an open gate to their monastery to be perceived as violators of their vows of chastity” (Jankowski 69). Such anxieties extended to secular vowesses as well, as evident in reactions to Margery Kempe. Her vow of chastity afforded her the opportunity to forego further pregnancies and leave her husband at home as she went on pilgrimages. Her vow, her travels, and her affective piety together caused a lot of consternation among lay and ecclesiastical persons wherever she went. There also were people in medieval societies who regarded virginity with ambivalence, as evidenced in The Wife of Bath’s Prologue when Alys cleverly remarks “And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe, / Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe? / Poul dorste nat comanden atte leeste, / A hyng of which his maister yaf noon heeste” (71-74). Virginity is a fine quality for those who can bear it, Alys observes, but in general virgins must surrender their “maydenhede” if more virgins are to be produced. Alys also calls to witness St. Paul, who, though he advises virginity over marriage, does not command it precisely because Christ did not command it.
her subjects. In this context, Fletcher’s Clorin is an intriguing, unsettling anomaly—not simply because she is “queer” in her persistence to remain a virgin, but because she expressly links her virginity with her autonomy.

Further, Clorin’s virginity and subjectivity are linked with her dead lover’s corpse. His grave, in fact, operates similarly to Lysander’s in *The Widow’s Tears*: it is the site on which Clorin proclaims and asserts her avowed chastity and against which it is measured by the love-stricken Thenot. In this sense, the grave (and the corpse within it) becomes integral to the shaping, deployment, and evaluation of female erotic subjectivity. The play opens with Clorin addressing the grave of the lover she has just buried, in a monologue that interlaces erotic references to the corpse with sexualized images of the landscape in which they had cavorted:

```
Haile holy earth, whose colde armes do embrace
The truest man that ever fed his flockes:
By the fat plaines of fruitfull Thessaly,
Thus I salute thy grave, thus do I pay
My early vowes and tribute of mine eies,
To thy still loved ashes: thus I free
My selfe from all ensuing heates and fires
Of love, all sports, delights and games,
That Shepheards hold full deare: thus I put off.
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The imbrication of sex and death in this passage is striking. Foremost is the image of the grave as a subterranean mistress “embrac[ing]” the corpse, continuing, in a sense, the work Clorin herself can no longer perform. She fashions the grave as an extension of herself both in her anthropomorphizing of it and the ardent language directed to the corpse. Rhetorically and materially, she stakes the grave as her territory. Not only is she the one who has buried the corpse, she declares she will:

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Dwell by thy grave, forgetting all those joyes,
That former times made precious to mine eies:
Onely remembering what my youth did gaine,
In the darke hidden vertous use of hearbes:
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That will I practice, and as freely give
All my endeavours, as I gaind free. (1.1.27-32)

Clorin declares she will live perpetually near her lover’s grave, abjure herself from present and future sexual arousal, and forget the memories of her sexual life with her lover. Instead, she will practice herbalism to promote chastity among her fellow shepherds and shepherdesses who have “through too much heat / Growne wild or lunaticke” (1.1.36-7). What initially appears to be a promise to her dead love to cloister herself around his grave, in fact seems like a plan to reengage with her community. Having left her lover in good hands, as it were, she is free to move on to matters more significant than being “crowned with fresh flowers / For Summers queene,” as she was wont in her former life (1.1.18-19).

As the above passages illustrate, virginity is suffused with eroticism, which contributes to the complexity and instability of Clorin’s character. This is not to suggest that Clorin is duplicitous in her vow. Rather, it points up that virginity is not a subject position devoid of eroticism, but one whose object is not as readily legible as that in hetero- or homoerotic configurations. As Mario DiGangi observes, “the virgin is threatening for…her denial of normative sexual functions and gender roles” (592). Clorin draws together not only “absolute virginity and transitive virginity,” but austere and sensual eroticisms, qualities that come across not only in her opening speech, but in the speech’s open vowel sounds—with /æ/, / ɪ/, / ɛ/—which

114 In his study, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster.* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005), Garret A. Sullivan writes “erotic self-forgetting describes the production of a desiring subject who often experiences his or her subjectivity as a crisis of identity” (48). While Clorin is not undergoing such a crisis, per se, she is, I argue, undergoing a transformation of identity—one that is produced, in part, through her “forgetting” (abjuring, really) her identity as an amorous shepherdess. In this space of erasure/abjuration, she creates an opening for a new subject position.


116 The open vowels of closely-spaced words like “Haile,” “holy,” “embrace,” “mine eies,” and “fires” produce the open sounds to which I refer. Richard Strier, in his study, *The Unrepentant Renaissance: From Petrarch to Shakespeare to Milton,* points out that “the mouth must open wide to convey [the] sense of…extension” (115). One of the most evocative examples of the effect of vowel sounds on conveying the emotion of particular words is Juliet’s “Gallop apace” speech, in which she envisions consummating her love with Romeo. Sounds, such as those
evoke the sound of sexual pleasure (Loughlin 54). Thus, even as Clorin vows to remain a chaste
girl, she exudes a sensuality that negates the idea of virginity as cold and lifeless. The
openness of these sounds also suggests an openness within the speaker, which in this case may
be read as Clorin opening herself to becoming. One might also argue, then, that she takes
pleasure in her developing autonomy.

Clorin’s eroticism also is reflected in her intimacy with the grave. In her analysis of
Clorin’s vow, Marie Loughlin keenly observes that “she is, in essence, represented as betrothed
and perhaps even married to the dead” (55). Of course, such a relationship is not at odds with the
play’s social milieu where real-life widows often were read in precisely this manner—as being
married to a man who is materially dead to the world, while he awaits his wife in the hereafter.
This element, however, is missing from The Faithful Shepherdess in that Clorin never mentions
an afterlife—let alone one in which she will be reunited with her resurrected spouse.

What Clorin has is a dead lover, and this dynamic between the living and the dead is one
not only that influences her emerging subjectivity, but one that she is instrumental in shaping. In
their introduction to the essay collection Dead Lovers: Erotic Bonds and the Study of Premodern
Europe, Basil Dufallo and Peggy McCracken explain the significance of the dead lover to erotic
subject formation:

The notion of a vanished erotic bond, together with its tenuous preservation in language,
images, performance—indeed, in virtually all of the myriad resources that culture has to
offer—imbues the dead lover with essential paradoxes that challenge our very
understanding of desire, culture, and ourselves. The dead lover confronts us with the
possibility that all desire is founded on lack, that cultural production is always a means of
substitution, prosthesis, or fetishization, and that what we call our ‘selves’ is
incomprehensible without reference to an other both present and absent, ineluctable and
yet lost. (1)

produced by “O,” “thou,” “die,” together with repetitions of the word “come” and other images of sexual coupling,
verbally—and tonally—convey the meaning of Juliet’s thoughts. In her guide, Speaking Shakespeare, voice coach
Patsy Rodenburg instructs “let’s isolate the vowels. The vowels help you isolate the feeling in the text” (58).
Expanding on Lacanian notions of lack, Dufallo and McCracken identify the lost, dead lover as integral to subjectivity. The dead lover’s absence and lingering qualities are constitutive components in the living lover’s subjectivity in part because these sites of dematerialization and memory are inscribed with meaning by the living lover—a possibility afforded rather than thwarted by lack. Indeed, the fecund environment Clorin conjures in her vow—“fat plaines,” “fruitfull Thessaly,” “fresh flowers,” and “Berries…Chestnuts, Plantains”—has its counterpart in the grave: the corpse whose dematerialization simultaneously signifies regeneration (1.1.3; 3; 18; 42). It is useful to consider here the words of Dufallo and McCracken: “[i]nsistence on a physical bond with the dead is madness, but the insistent embodiment of loss in the figure of the dead lover may also construct a place of agency” (1-2). Clorin’s dead lover and the grave she tends are central to her emerging sense of autonomy and virginal subjectivity.

At the same time that Clorin emphasizes loss and abjuration, she also speaks quite emphatically of possession. Shortly after she completes the burial ritual, Clorin is startled by the Satyre, who enters her arbor as he gathers fruit for Pan’s feast:

But behold a fairer sight,
By that heavenly forme of thine,
Brightest faire thou art devine:
Sprong from great immortall race
Of the Gods: for in thy face,
Shines more awful maiesty,
Then dull weake mortalitie
Dare with misty eies behould
And live,…

(1.1.57-65)

Basing his response on her physical appearance and her solitude among nature, the Satyre mistakes the mortal Clorin for an immortal deity and promptly drops to his knee before her. The comic aspect of his error is foregrounded because—as a satyr—he has neglected to accost a
beautiful, solitary woman when he sees one. Instead he melts into submission, going so far as to offer her some of the fruits he has gathered while equating her with the forest’s bounty:

See how well the lusty time,
Hath deckt their rising cheeks in red,
Such as on your lips is spread,
Heere be berries for a Queene,
Some be red, some be greene (1.1.85-89)

That a satyr positions himself so submissively to a mortal virgin underscores the absurdity of comparing women to pieces of fruit—one of many such conceits in romantic poetry and prose—while the laughter generated by this scene amplifies the eroticism in this speech. In fact, the Satyre renders Clorin fecund and sensual. After he departs, and Clorin shakes off her initial surprise at his greeting and obsequies, she quickly deduces that her power to control the Satyre’s (presumably inherent) lust derives from her virginity. To her own question, “What greatnesse or what private hidden power, / Is there in me to draw submission, / From this rude man, and beast,” she recalls her mother’s advice:

…if I keepe
My virgin flower uncropt, pure, chaste, and faire,
No Goblin, wood-god, Faiery, Elfe, or Fiend,
Satyr or other power that haunts these groaves,
Shall hurt my body ………
…sure there is power
In that great name of virgin, that bindes fast
All rude uncivill bloods… (1.1.103-05; 112-116; 24-26)

Clorin links her apparent power to her virginity, specifically her unbroken hymen, which seems to guard against threats to her body.

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117 Jeremy Lopez writes “[m]ore than anything else, puns and verbal jokes in Renaissance drama tend toward the sexual. Sexual wordplay is therefore perhaps the best index we have for understanding the phenomenon of punning and wordplay in general” (39).
The hymen was examined with increasing scrutiny by early modern anatomists such as Andreas Vesalius, Ambrose Paré, and Helkiah Crooke. Paré, for instance, doubted the existence of a material membrane and tried to debunk it as a signifier for virginity (Loughlin 31). Anatomical study of the hymen, like that of the clitoris, gave it “an enhanced discursive presence,” a presence laden with anxieties over female chastity and erotic subjectivity, as well as possibilities (Traub Renaissance 16). Its ephemerality was noted as assertively as its material presence “as a material seal” (Loughlin 32). While Clorin’s claim to chastity is firm, her claim to virginity is unstable. For instance, if she did share such “heates” with her former love, how is her hymen intact? And does a ruptured hymen necessarily indicate sexual consummation? Yet, the ambiguity of the hymen appears in this case to undergird the aura of its power—unseen, it can still register as a powerful symbol of corporeal integrity and controlled female sexuality.

As we see, Clorin’s virginity and vow of chastity to her dead lover arouse the ardor of Thenot, who lauds Clorin as the paragon of womanhood. However, his ideas about chastity are derived directly from Petrarchan discourse, which fixes the beloved object as perpetually desirable because she has been idealized into a realm of permanent inaccessibility. While Clorin’s view of herself appears to echo that of Thenot, she resists being fixed in the conventional mold of inaccessible chaste virgin and instead aims for an identity beyond the

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118 In her illuminating study, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002), Valerie Traub offers an analysis of the clitoris as a site of female subjectivity, an analysis that is useful for understanding more fully the correlation between the hymen and female erotic subjectivity in Fletcher’s play. Traub argues against prevailing criticism that equates chastity with asexuality and compellingly illustrates her case with a close reading of Queen Elizabeth in the Armada portrait. Elizabeth’s authority and self-possession are conveyed not through her refusal of phallic penetration, but her assertion of erotic autonomy. Traub calls the viewers attention to “the drop pearl in the Armada portrait [which] emblematizes the erotic self-assertion of the most powerful woman in the realm, figuratively announcing Elizabeth’s sovereign right to her own pleasures” (130). The pearl is strategically located over the Queen’s genitals, calling attention to her sexual organs, even as the dress on which the pearl rests encases her body in stiff folds and corsetry (Traub 130). Thus, “[i]t is the clitoral body of Elizabeth, not the imagined threat of the phallus, that reigns over the Armada portrait” (133). Traub’s reading of this image points up the eroticism inherent in chastity. Simply because a female rejects phallic penetration in favor of virginity or chastity does not mean she has become asexual (128). In fact, as the Armada portrait shows, female chastity often derives its erotic aura from the subject’s keen awareness of and pleasure in “her ability to say No” and assert sexual agency (128).
boundaries described by her suitor. When Thenot enters the space around the grave to pay homage to Clorin, she immediately calls him on his transgression and asserts her control over this space. In his wooing of Clorin and her resistance to this wooing, both use the buried corpse as a referent to define Clorin and her chastity. For instance, when Thenot declares his love for her, Clorin immediately draws his attention to the grave and the threat of her lover’s angry ghost rising in revenge:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Thou hast abus’d the strictness of this place,} \\
\text{And offered Sacriligeous foule disgrace} \\
\text{To the sweet rest of these interred bones,} \\
\text{For feare of whose ascending fly at once,} \\
\text{Thou and thy idle passions, that the sight} \\
\text{Of death and speedy vengeance may not fright} \\
\text{Thy very soul with horror.}
\end{align*}
\] (2.2.99-106)

By intruding into this space, Thenot has not only dishonored the sanctity of the grave, but also threatens the integrity of Clorin, who has marked this space as hers and who has elected to live here undisturbed. Even his name is suggestive of the role he assumes: “Thenot,” aurally and orthographically, echoes Thanatos as well as “the knot,” specifically the virgin knot he so fetishizes and idolizes.

In response to Thenot’s obsequious worship, Clorin continues to refer to her lover’s corpse in all its morbid and supernatural horror. In fact, she speaks her anger through the image of the agitated corpse:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Darest thou abide} \\
\text{To see this holy earth at once devide} \\
\text{And give her bodie up, for sure it will,} \\
\text{If thou persuest with wanton flames to fill} \\
\text{This hallowed place}
\end{align*}
\] (2.2.108-12)

The image of the grave “giv[ing] her body up” also suggests the idea of Clorin giving her virgin body up. Indeed, she genders the grave female—unusual in early modern drama, where most
graves have gender-neutral pronouns. Additionally, the connection drawn between Clorin’s enclosed body and the enclosed grave points up the fear and disgust with which early modern patriarchal culture often read female sexuality and reproduction. In his treatise, The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book (1540), Thomas Raynalde refers to this commonly-held idea when he writes, “yet by reading here of things to them before unknown, they [men] shall conceive a certain loathsomeness and abhorring towards a woman” (19). While Raynalde himself professes to believe that “neither is there any part in woman more to be abhorred, than in man,” his reference to his readers’ mindset acknowledges prevailing notions of disgust. Moreover, as Susan Zimmerman notes, throughout much of human history, the female body “has served…as the traditional locus of taboo, and its eroticism and fertility govern most rituals of defilement or purification” (Corpse 6). Thus, even before Reformation theology and anatomical discoveries began to complicate traditional beliefs about the dead body and the relationship between the dead and the living, the cultural imagination was calibrated towards reading the female body as the locus of corruption and sin, regeneration and death. Thenot’s amorous language negates this viewpoint. In fact, he reads her over and against the corpse because that is how he is able to create and sustain his image of the virginal Clorin as “the best of all / Her sex, that ever breathed” and “all perfection” (2.2.49-50; 2.2.108). After being approached by the intensely lust-stricken Cloe, who at one point pronounces, “It is Impossible to Ravish mee, / I am soe willing,” Thenot is eager to encounter what he believes is the antidote to Cloe’s intense sexual drive: the austere, consecrated virgin—steadfast, hence unavailable.

Thenot, in fact, seeks to enclose Clorin with conventional Petrarchan language, and her resistance to such inscription produces the tension from which her new subject position emerges.

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119 Raynalde’s treatise, The Birth of Mankind: Otherwise Named, The Woman’s Book, was first published in 1540 and therein was frequently republished through 1654 (xv).
Thenot’s wooing is replete with conventional Petrarchan blazons, which construct a version of Clorin he wants to see, but one she readily repudiates. Indeed, the more passionately Clorin chastises Thenot and implores him to leave, the more insistent his wooing becomes:

’Tis not the white or red
Inhabits in your cheeke, that thus can wed
My minde to adoration: nor your eye
Though it be full and faire, your forehead hye,
And smooth as Pelops shoulder: not the smile
Lies watching in those dimples, to beguile
The easie soule, your hands and fingers long,
With vaines inameld richly, nor your tongue,
Though it spoke sweeter than Arions Harpe,
Your haire woven into many a curious warpe,
Able in endles errour to infould
The wandring soule, not the true perfect mould,
Of all your bodie, which as pure doth showe,
In Maiden whitenes as the Alpisen snowe.
All these, were but your constancy away,
Would please me lesse than a blacke stormy day   (2.2.116-31)

He deploys a stock description of a beloved object and tries to impose it on her. Each hyperbolically perfect part would lose its value if she ceased being constant and chaste, he tells her. His compliment, then, is also a warning that she had better remain chaste or she will utterly lose her value. It is also indicative of his effort to claim control over her sexual subjectivity. Against this image of patriarchally-defined female perfection, Clorin again invokes the image of her lover’s corpse. If Thenot does not desist, Clorin threatens, she will “raise again…from silent grave, / Those sparckes that long agoe were buried here, / With my dead friends cold ashes” (2.2.139-41). The reference to a grave—and presumably the corpse within it—as having “sparckes” points up the eroticism associated with this grave. This is also the grave to which Clorin earlier ascribed “heates and fires” and “wanton flames.” The heat she associates with this space signifies its generative, procreative potential. Materially, the grave is now the site of decay
and regeneration, but symbolically, it also is Clorin’s generative space for a subjectivity that is still emerging.

The corpse and grave are contested territory, with Thenot and Clorin having a figurative tug-o’-war over it. While Thenot makes reference to the corpse in order to remind Clorin of her vow as well as to draw a contrast between her transcendent virginity and the decayed morality of mere mortals, Clorin repeatedly calls up images of the corpse in order to assert her sovereignty over the arbor and her subjecthood. For instance, she refers to the corpse alternately as “interred bones,” “bodie,” and “cold ashes,” variations that underscore states of decay and amplify the horror of the grave. By conjuring such disturbing images, Clorin hopes to frighten Thenot away. She likewise claims to have power over the corpse when she tells Thenot he can perhaps evade her dead lover’s wrath if she “with prayers appease his Ghost belowe, / That else would tell thee what it were to be, / A rival in that virtuous love, that he / Imbraces yet” (2.2.113-16). She deploys the ghost as Thenot’s rival, who still loves Clorin and whom only she has the power to keep contained in his grave. She implies that Thenot’s safety, perhaps even his very life, rest in her hand.

Clorin’s defiance in this scene echoes that of other Jacobean stage virgins, notably Isabella in Measure for Measure and Marina in Pericles. For example, when Angelo tells Isabella that the only way she can save her brother Claudio from capital punishment is to surrender “the treasure of [her] body” to Angelo, she replies:

…were I under the terms of death,  
Th’ impression of keen whips I’ld wear as rubies,  
And strip myself to death, as to a bed  
That longing have been sick for, ere I’ld yield  
My body up to shame.  

(2.4.100-04)
She would rather endure the suffering of virgin martyrs than surrender her virginity and she declares this unequivocally to Angelo. Similarly, when Marina finds herself enslaved in a brothel, and on the brink of losing her virginity to the governor, Lysimachus, she asserts:

If you take from me
Mine honour, you’re like him that makes a gap
Into forbidden ground, whom after
Too many enter, and of all their evils
Yourself are guilty. My life is yet unspotted;
My chastity unstained ev’n in thought. (19.98-103)

She appeals to the governor’s sense of justice as a means of dissuading him from penetrating her. Yet, even if the governor were to do so, Marina notes that her pure mind would help keep her body clean. Virginity is frequently under assault in early modern drama and, in the examples of Isabella and Marina, both are betrothed at the conclusion of their respective plays. By contrast, Clorin remains a virgin at the end of *The Faithful Shepherdess*. One way to account for this different outcome is to consider the role of the corpse. Whereas Isabella and Marina construct their virginal identities on available models, Clorin appears to be creating a model as she goes along, so to speak—one that draws upon a recognizable outline, but which will be filled in with an as-yet-to-be-defined substance. This self-fashioning relative to the corpse of her lover is indicated by her repeated references to her lover’s corpse while Thenot woos her. These repeated references indicate her need to keep the space of the grave clear so as not to disrupt the semiotic flow she has established between its subterranean and terrestrial layers, between a decomposing object and an emerging subject.\(^{120}\)

\(^{120}\) My reference to semiotics draws on the theories of Roland Barthes and Umberto Eco. Barthes writes, for example, that “semiology aims to take in any system of signs [that] constitute systems of signification” (9). Please see *Elements of Semiology*, translated by Annette Lavers and Colin Smith. (London: Jonathan Case), 1967. Eco states that “semiotics is concerned with everything that can be taken as a sign” (7) See Eco’s *A Theory of Semiotics* (Bloomington: Indiana UP), 1976. Semiotic elements in this play include non-verbal signs—such as Clorin’s stance above the grave as its guardian—together with verbal signs—such as the declarations and pronouncements she makes to assert her authority as the keeper of the grave.
Clorin asserts her power in two notable ways: she becomes the custodian of her lover’s grave “in honor of [his] love” (1.1.36-7; 1.1.26) and she administers her medicinal remedies to shepherds and shepherdesses who, “through too much heat [have] / Growne wilde or lunaticke.” In doing so, she draws together the erotic and thanatotic in ways that amplify the procreative elements of both. In the process, what she gestures towards is a jouissance that affirms rather than denies or dissolves selfhood. The concept of jouissance, of course, is predicated on the dissolution of self in the quest to fulfill desire, as set forth by Lacan and interpreted by a host of critics, most eloquently by Cynthia Marshall and Leo Bersani. While jouissance clearly applies to modes of pleasure and suffering aimed towards dissolution and continuity, it seems that Clorin’s desires and the desires she incites suggest that there is also pleasure to be had in seeking and affirming identity—that is, in moving decidedly against dissolution, however tenuous and finite such a gesture among mortals is. Judith Butler posits this idea in her analysis of Antigone’s defiance of Creon’s edict: “I began to read Antigone and her critics to see if one could make a case for her exemplary political status as a feminine figure who defies the state through a powerful set of physical and linguistic acts” (Antigone’s Claim 72). While Clorin’s acts as an avowed virgin in the forest of Thessaly are not explicitly political, I would like to make a similar case that her vow of perpetual virginity, rejection of Thenot’s wooing, and designation of herself as the forest’s healer signify her conscious defiance of

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121 I should note that the script also includes “cattell” among Clorin’s patients. The sentence thus has Clorin healing “men and cattell” of assorted ails from lovesickness and “wicked art[s]” to snake bites. Whether Fletcher meant to include lovesick bovine as a way to underscore absurdity into an already fantastical text—or if this is simply an oversight—is unclear. The image remains of Clorin as a healer, but certainly one who is decidedly unusual. It is interesting to note, too, that early modern examples of witchcraft sometimes involve animals in erotic scenarios. For example, in Rowley, Dekker, and Ford’s The Witch of Edmonton, Old Banks, a countryman, blames Mother Sawyer for casting as spell that made him “cast mine eye at [my dun cow] and…I cannot choose…but run to the cow and taking up her tail kiss…my cow’s behind” (4.1.53-57). Clorin is not a “witch,” but through her knowledge of herbal remedies, and her singularity in her community, she does stand out as someone in possession of at least special knowledge, if not special powers that factor into her subject formation.

122 In her earlier study, Subjects of Desire: Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century, Judith Butler observes that Deleuze’s assessment of Hegel’s theory of desire recasts desire as a phenomenon whereby “productive desire [is] jouissance” (213).
culturally-prescribed heteronormativity. Indeed, she wrests the conventional construct of the
chaste, unattainable maiden from Thenot, who repeatedly tries to pin it on her, and adapts that
construct to formulate her new role in the forest. Not unlike the erotic tug-o’-war over
Lysander’s hearse in *The Widow’s Tears*, the erotic exchanges between the female subject and
the male wooer over the grave of the dead male lover in *The Faithful Shepherdess* spark a *joie de
vivre*—a desire specific to these plays to live again and one which is aimed ultimately against
dissolution.

This contest over the authority to define her illustrates how vexing the widow and the
possibility of female erotic autonomy could be in early modern culture. The widow, for example,
signified a woman who had had her sexual appetite aroused in marriage, and now in widowhood,
she was often imagined as driven by a lust that could slip beyond patriarchal modes of
governance. Similarly, the virgin was “the woman whose entire body is an emptiness through
which the paternal word is conveyed” (Kristeva *Tales* 374). Clorin’s virgin body becomes
contested territory precisely because Thenot and Clorin try to write it in utterly conflicting ways.
Interestingly, in his blazon, Thenot never mentions the body part that Clorin identifies with her
virginity: her intact hymen, which signifies not only her material state as a virgin, but also an
amulet of sorts against violation and a means by which to affirm the ability to enact choice, to
assert agency. Read in this light, Clorin’s open vowels in her opening speech underscore her
openness to “becoming.” Moreover, her description of her hymen rhetorically constructs an
image of impervious, fruitful chastity, a fruitfulness that comes from the agency she derives from
it. Specifically, she authors herself through her “virgin flower uncropp’t,” a material and
symbolic emblem, which she vows to hold on to perpetually. This perpetually uncropped state is
an act of defiance in a community where most everyone else is focused on pairing off. Yet, she
does not isolate herself, but makes herself useful to the community. However, even as she is a restorative figure, she remains a problematic figure; in fact, it is because of the restorative qualities she embodies that she is so problematic. A similar dynamic is central to Christian doctrine regarding the corpse and redemption. As Susan Zimmerman explains:

The relationship between the dead and the transfigured body was figured, finally, by the corpse, an encapsulating emblem for the polar contrasts encompassed by Christianity. The corpse, as a dead body, was paradoxically generative, not static, and in two seemingly opposite directions. On the one hand, putrefaction bore witness to the mortal punishment imposed by God for original sin: in a horrific analogue to Holy Communion, body rot became food for worms, re-incorporated as a debased life form. For man to be reborn, cleansed of the original taint, he must first undergo death and decomposition…At the Last Judgment, the body/corpse would be glorified—that is, rendered eternally changeless and incorruptible. [Thus,] the Christian believer was enjoined to conceive of the putrefying corpse not only as food for worms, but also as the raw material, as it were, of the beatified self. (Corpse 33-4)

Central to Christian conceptions of death and redemption is the inherently contradictory body, tainted by original sin and thus condemned to die and decay, but via decay, to become purified and thus redeemable.

Clorin herself acknowledges she is mortal, born of mortal parents and therefore destined eventually for the grave. She tries, therefore, to create some form of order for herself after losing her lover, and for the forest, characterized as it is by nocturnal antics. In his study, Michael Neill writes that “[d]eath stands for all those natural forces that threaten to reduce the painstakingly constructed order of society to chaos, a mere tumbled heap” (Issues 14). Clorin’s desire to remain unpenetrated might therefore be a strategy to, at least metaphorically, define her body as impervious to corruption and create a sense of order around her. She has, for instance, removed herself from the cycle of human reproduction—a phenomenon that guarantees the continuation of the species, but also accentuates the mortality of the individual. However, while she denies procreation in its most recognizable form (childbearing), she affirms procreation through the
metaphor of renewal symbolized by her pure, virgin body and her work as a healer. In fact, the
cornucopia of flowers and herbs she lists can be seen as an extension of her own “virgin flower,”
put to beneficent use repeatedly (and by her authorship) rather than one time only in the
defloration that would mark her entry into a heteronormative dichotomy. Clorin’s seemingly
incongruous bodily qualities (purity and mortality; virginity and fecundity) may be further
explained in the context of Judith Butler’s appraisal of desire not as something that must always
be deferred and negated, but as something that can also be experienced discontinuously and
positively (hence, enable rather than thwart individuation). In her reading of Deleuze’s
interpretation of Hegelian desire, Butler writes that “[b]eneath the contrived scarcity conditions
which have produced desire as a modality of deprivation resides a life-affirming desire, and for
Deleuze the political and personal task of a post-Hegelian erotics is to retrieve this Spinozistic
persistence and recast it as a will-to-power” (Subjects 213). In other words, desire leads to
subjectivity not only from negation (Lacan), but also from affirmation, from a willful assent to
power that allows the subject to move (and function as a subject) beyond dialectical constraints.
Butler’s assertion that “Deleuze’s theory prescribes a move from negative to productive desire”
is largely what we see in Clorin’s will to power (213). She moves from self-denial to self-
assertion, from the virgin she equates with cold sexual austerity to an empowered figure of
 chastity who owns her abilities as healer and no longer needs the grave as her chief signifier of
autonomy.

In his famous epistle of the play’s first published edition (1609), Fletcher sets out his
ideas about tragicomedy, a genre he was instrumental in bringing to the early modern English
stage. In response to Sidney’s denunciation of tragicomedy as a “mongrell” genre that ill-
combines tragedy and comedy, Fletcher defends it as a worthy type of mixed drama. It draws
“familiar people” into a play that “wants death, which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neere it, which is inough to make it no comedie” (497). The people in tragicomedy, he writes, face real troubles, encounter real dangers, which though they are mitigated or resolved by comedy, nonetheless resonate as real threats. In Fletchian tragicomedy, these dangers come from sex. Verna Foster remarks that the playwright “introduces the danger of death into the framework of romantic comedy by dealing explicitly with his lovers’ sexuality” and explains how this strategy intersects with Fletcher’s description of tragicomedy:

[s]ince the particular sexual experience that he dramatizes must contain tragic potential, there has to be something wrong with it. Hence the motifs of incest, lust, rape, sexual jealousy, and frustration that have given Fletcherian drama its reputation for decadence and triviality, though these are hardly trivial subjects. (82)

As the nocturnal antics in The Faithful Shepherdess show, “too much heate” can have potentially lethal consequences. Of course, Fletcher’s play is not a diatribe against sexual passions. Nor is it, as Terence P. Logan dismisses, “an esthetic…failure, with lack of plot as its basic fault” (32). On the contrary, Fletcher does not “glorify” chastity, but uses it to explore dimensions of female erotic agency. Lust becomes foregrounded because it is a cast of shepherds and shepherdesses—in various states of arousal and chaste love—who exhibit it. With so many entrances and exits in the play, the stage becomes a veritable highway of comic and near-tragic sexual adventures and it is within this active and highly-charged plot that Clorin’s singularity can best be explored. Whereas comedy in The Widow’s Tears is always central—even Cynthia’s potential death-by-starvation in the tomb is negated almost immediately by the appearance of her disguised husband at its entrance—comedy in The Faithful Shepherdess is interlaced with the possibility of death. Indeed, the elements of danger that continually skirt tragicomedy shift the stakes of eroticism

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and sexuality in these plays. While death is averted in the action of *The Faithful Shepherdess*, it does not entirely “want[] death[],” since the play opens with Clorin’s burial of her lover. In fact, the presence of death in a play so rife with sexual topics amplifies the sex/death nexus so prevalent in the Elizabethan and Jacobean imagination, but it also drives home contemporaneous anxieties about death and the continuity of (one’s) existence and explores how these concerns are inherently connected with eroticism. It is no surprise then that Fletcher’s tragicomedy, which “by its defining dramatic requirements…connects sex with both death and laughter” (Foster 82).

By the end of *The Widow’s Tears* and *The Faithful Shepherdess*, both Cynthia and Clorin have begun to free themselves from absolutes. The tomb and grave scenes function to test the vows of chastity each character so passionately made at the beginning of the play. These scenes, moreover, serve as opportunities for the lusty widow and chaste widow to express a subject position outside existing parameters. Tellingly, neither character is restored to her former role. Cynthia is still a wife, and presumably a chaste one, but, as the play’s concluding tableau illustrates, her marriage has suffered an irreparable rift. As she stands apart and whispers with Eudora, it is clear that she has spurned not only Lysander for his duplicity, but is developing a sympathy for and with the play’s other widow, who appears to reciprocate in kind. Standing together, they signify a space in which it possible for a woman to resist being (re)inscribed into patriarchal sexual and social schemas and create possibilities for her own identity.

Though still an avowed virgin, Clorin has broken the part of her vow in which she promised to remain by her lover’s grave. When one of the forest’s shepherds needs to have a cure administered, Clorin quickly reprioritizes her responsibilities. As she is about to rush off to the shepherd’s side, she pauses and says to her lover “Pardon thou buryed body of my love, / That from thy side I dare so soone remove, / I will not prove unconstant, nor will leave / Thee for
an hower alone” (196-99). She has begun to see the importance of her work and of her need to leave the graveside more and more in order to perform it. Thenot, too, registers the significance of her departure from the grave. When he reappears to continue his ardent suit, Clorin has had enough of his compliments. In order to free herself from his fawning overtures, she pretends to suddenly feel unbounded lust for him and professes her “feelings”: “See what a holy vowe, for thee I breake” (4.5.40). Utterly horrified by the shattering of his illusion, Thenot desperately tries to push her back on his pedestal: “Thincke yet deare Clorin of your love, howe trewe, / If you had dyed, he would have bene to you” (4.5.43-4). When it becomes clear that she refuses to heed him, Thenot declares:

I doe contemne thee nowe, and dare come neare,
And gayse uppon thee, for me thinkes that grace,
Austeritye, which satt uppon that face,
Is gone, and thou like others, False mayde see,
This is the gaine of foule Inconstancy (4.5.72-6)

Finally liberated from Thenot’s efforts to fix her chaste identity, Clorin reflects, “I rather chuse though I a woman bee, / he should speake ill of all then dye for me” (4.5.95-6). It is doubtful that Clorin sees herself as willingly sacrificing the reputation of all women in order to free Thenot from his amorous servitude. Given the care she has shown to her fellow shepherds and shepherdesses, and her steadfastness in remaining uncoupled, it is more likely that while she sees Thenot as a nuisance and obstacle, she does not perceive in him a malicious, threatening figure. Her words, “I rather chuse,” moreover, reveal a will to remain autonomous and be free to shape an identity that reaches beyond conventional models of chastity. They also echo Queen Elizabeth’s words from her 1559 address to Parliament in which she says, “I happelie chose this kynde of life, in which I yet lyve which I assure yow for myne owne parte, hath hitherto best contented my self.” Not unlike Elizabeth, Clorin asserts a virginal identity, one which draws on
existing models, but which the female subject reshapes according to her own principles of
pleasure and autonomy. Indeed, the widows in both plays suggest how “[t]he woman on top
renewed old systems, but also helped change them into something different” (Zemon Davis 183).
Cynthia emerges from her “widowhood” and her own near-death experience a more assertive
figure than we encountered at the beginning of the play. Certainly, she has discarded her ideal
image of widowed chastity. The “something different” to which Davis refers is important to note
here: except for Eudora—the play’s only widow, and a genuine one—neither characters nor
audience members are aware of what this “something different” could be. Cynthia’s new subject
position is left intentionally ambiguous because there are no contemporaneous models that an
audience would recognize as a liberating alternative to the role she leaves behind. Similarly,
Clorin “chuse[s]” to leave her lover’s graveside, which suggests agency. Rather than being the
grave’s keeper and the chaste, isolated widow, Clorin reintegrates herself into the pastoral
community to watch over her fellow shepherds and shepherdesses. But she, too, assumes a new
role that infers autonomy, but leaves its shape ambiguous. In both plays, it is left to the audience
to imagine how this autonomy might be achieved and sustained.
Primary Texts


Secondary Texts


Honig, Elizabeth “In Memory: Lady Dacre and Pairing by Hans Eworth,” *Renaissance Bodies: The Human Figure in English Culture c. 1540-1660.* Eds. Lucy Gent and Nigel Llewellyn. London: Reaktion Books Ltd., 1990. Print


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