Wasteful Bodies:

Queer Embodiment and Erotics in Early Modern Literature

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Abstract

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Wasteful Bodies: Queer Embodiment and Erotics in Early Modern Literature is an investigation of the bodily orifice in English drama and poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Reading texts from Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and Middleton, this project traces a queer discourse of the orifice in literary and dramatic representations of sex in the early modern period. Prevailing queer and feminist accounts of embodiment, erotics, and sexual difference in early modern studies continue to be constrained by what I characterize as a penetrative discourse of sex. In reconsidering how sex and the orifice function as potent sites of social transgression and sexual nonnormativity, I draw on affect and queer theory to challenge critical assumptions about how bodily borders and sexual acts are figured in early modern literature. The first half of *Wasteful Bodies* revisits the tragic endings of two prominent characters in the queer canon, Shakespeare's Adonis and Marlowe's Edward II. In the first chapter, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Adonis?," I argue that critical interpretations of Adonis as an aestheticized, unreproductive proto-homosexual have risked *over*sexing Adonis's body, relying on presumptive binaries of biological sex and gender. My second chapter, "Wasting Time in *Edward II*," takes up the question of social and sexual disorder in Marlowe's *Edward II* to reconsider what the queer figure of Edward II discloses about the figural language of sodomy and its association with death, punishment, and waste. Through the lens of Alenka Zupančič's theory of

the comic, the latter half of *Wasteful Bodies* brings together two dramatic texts of the early seventeenth century that respond to Jacobean cultural anxieties regarding succession and kinship in a comic or satiric register. The third chapter argues that the play's orificial refusals, failures, and stoppages remain under-studied, as scholarship on Jonson's use of theatrical space and his fixation on waste management remains largely focused on the orifices' excretory functions. In my final chapter, "Seeing Sex in *The Revenger's Tragedy*," I consider the persistent vitality of the dead bodies of *The Revenger's Tragedy* alongside critical perspectives on early modern anxieties about sexual continence, bodily closure, reproduction, and succession.

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Table of Contents

Introduction	1
Chapter One How Do You Solve A Problem Like Adonis?	15
Chapter Two Wasting Time in *Edward II*	43
Chapter Three Jonson's Orificial Play	73
Chapter Four Seeing Sex in *The Revenger's Tragedy*	101
Conclusion Exit, Pursued by the Unbearable	131
Bibliography	120

Wasteful Bodies:
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Introduction

Wasteful Bodies is an investigation of the bodily orifice in English drama and poetry of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Reading texts from Shakespeare, Marlowe, Jonson, and Middleton, this project traces a queer discourse of the orifice in literary and dramatic representations of sex in the early modern period. In reconsidering how, and in what contexts, sex and the orifice can activate potent figurations of social transgression and sexual nonnormativity, I draw on affect studies and queer theory as well as recent groundbreaking studies of early modern discourses of sexuality to challenge critical assumptions about how bodily borders and sexual acts are figured in early modern literature. Prevailing queer and feminist accounts of embodiment, erotics, and sexual difference in early modern studies continue to be constrained by what I characterize as a penetrative discourse of sex, which not only presumes the self-evidence of penetrative acts, but also tends to rely upon and to reinscribe binaristic vocabularies in registering a scene of sex. While much germinal queer scholarship has shed light on nonnormative forms of intimacy in the early modern period, non-penetrative erotic paradigms remain understudied. In attending to scenes in which the animacy of partial, fragmented objects and bodies perplexes and dazzles, unsettles and disorganizes, I draw on interdisciplinary work in waste studies to query how the dis-

course of sex in the early modern period is shaped by cultural anxieties regarding bodily borders.

Queer Limits

In revising our understanding of the early modern orifice, this dissertation, in the words of Judith Butler, “seeks to open up a discursive site for reconsidering the tacitly political relations that constitute and persist in the divisions between body parts and wholes, anatomy and the imaginary, corporeality and the psyche” (74). The orifice makes a fitting frame for my intervention, as I wish to query first, the imagined boundaries of the body and second, the relational possibilities they encode. Openings in the body, of course, play a crucial and ambivalent role in the negotiation of bodily borders and intimate relationality. Sexual penetration, often figured in terms of battle or conquest, structures scenes of bodily contact within dichotomies of passivity and activity, femininity and masculinity, openness and closure. Propriety and bodily control are associated with a closed, contained bodily border, while bodily openings and excrescences are freighted with the threat of excess, impropriety, and uncontrol.[1] In remapping orificial figurations across four canonical and widely circulated early modern texts, I investigate ways in which early modern disciplines of the body alternately constrain and are confounded by where and how bodies open, and what they open onto.

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[1] See Paster’s “Leaky Vessels: The Incontinent Women of City Comedy” in *The Body Embarrassed*, 23-63, esp. 24-25.

This study is motivated by questions of gender, sexuality, and positionality; along with Sara Ahmed, I investigate "queer orientations" of the body and desire that "don't line up" with the dictates of conventional sexual norms (107). Lineage is a particularly powerful determinant of early modern gendered and sexual norms, as Theodora Jankowski acknowledges in advancing the thesis that virginal women occupy a queer position in the social structures of early modern England. Women who insist upon remaining virgins, Jankowski argues, refuse to participate in a sexual economy that treats the female body as a reproductive vessel, an object that functions to ensure the continuity of a patriarchal line. Like Jankowski, I am interested in how the resistance to gendered and sexual norms can be staged on the body, particularly through the embodied refusal to take up a position that would otherwise ensure the functioning of a patriarchal social order.

Jankowski's argument, however, proceeds to hypostatize the activity of resistance, transforming the queer into an ontological state. John Lyly's Gallathea and Phillida, Jankowski proposes, preserve their virginities *precisely by getting married*: Venus consents to turn one of them into a boy in order to legitimize their union, but "the organ here becomes an add-on part, sort of like a better fitting dildo" (26). Perhaps the late addition of male genitalia does decenter or trivialize male-bodied desire and the act of heterosexual penetration, insofar as Gallathea and Phillida's prior intimacy seems neither to require a penis nor to lack erotic pleasure. The figure of the queer virgin, from this perspective, opens up textual possibilities of non-reproductive, non-genital intimacy that fail to comply with

compulsory gendered and sexual norms. Jankowski therefore embraces their marital union as "a new sort of marriage" (26). Though the penis is added precisely in order to confer legitimacy and permanence upon their relationship, in Jankowski's analysis Gallathea and Phillida are thought to remain queer.

This terminological slippage sutures queerness to marriage by treating the queer as a quality that inheres in the relationship and their bodies. Treating the queer as a trait that endures in the body or a particular erotic relation, however, results in narrowly defining the queer; it constitutes the queer through its categorizing function. *Wasteful Bodies* intervenes in queer literary studies in order to query queer methodologies in which non-heterosexual, non-penetrative, and/or non-reproductive acts and desires are taken to assure a subject's membership in the category of the queer. Anca Parvulescu points out that to define the queer in relation to nonreproductivity may rely on a too-narrow definition of reproduction, which fails to account for the labor of "day-to-day reproduction" (88). Such an inquiry into the ongoing, quotidian activity of reproduction opens up questions about how a life is registered as such through the mobilization of future-oriented bodily narratives of productivity, viability, and self-sufficiency. *Wasteful Bodies* invests in scenes of self-reproduction that disrupt the organizing logics of viability and futurity. Rather than mapping the queer according to categories of acts and desires, that is, *Wasteful Bodies* attends to encounters with stoppage and interruption that threaten to delay, syncopate, or confound the forward movement of narrative and the discipline it imposes on desire.

We might consider Castiza of *The Revenger's Tragedy* as a counterexample of virginal resistance. Castiza rebuffs the advances of the immoral Duke, who attempts to reach her through the mediation of a messenger. Castiza's refusal takes the form of "a box o'th'ear" to the messenger (2.1.31 s.d.), and she asserts, "I swore I'd put anger in my hand, / And pass the virgin limits of myself / To him that next appeared in that base office, / To be his sin's attorney" (2.1.32-35). Her mother chastises her, accusing, "Thou wouldst be honest 'cause thou wouldst be so, / Producing no one reason but thy will!" (2.1.149-150). Castiza's resolute refusal, that is, suggests an *excess* of willfulness, rather than chaste restraint. Her adherence to her own desires, or "will," takes her *beyond* the "virgin limits" of herself, which is to say, it flouts the conduct typically associated with the virgin, traditionally a position of reserved self-containment and decorum. At the same time, her distinctly un-virginal overflow of emotion repels the sexual advances that are motivated precisely by her virginity. The dual movement of Castiza's outburst queers her virginal status: she maintains her chastity by giving in to her desire.[2]

Perhaps it seems counterintuitive to regard a box o'th'ear as a queerer bodily act than the addition of a dildo. My intention in doing so is to reconsider how and why the "queerness" of certain bodily acts or configurations is treated as more or less self-evident. I am motivated by Carla Freccero's efforts "to urge re-

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[2] For a discussion of the box o'th'ear and the paradoxical construction of Castiza's virginity from the perspective of the play's portrayal of male sexuality, see Judith Haber's *Desire and Dramatic Form in Early Modern England*, esp. 64-65.

sistance to [queer's] hypostatization, reification into nominal status as designating an entity, an identity, a thing, and to allow it to continue its outlaw work as a verb and sometimes an adjective" (5). Alongside Freccero, I resist assigning the queer a taxonomic function whereby queer desire is defined by suturing it to same-gender or same-sex object choice and/or nonreproductive erotic acts. I undertake in this project to read texts, as Madhavi Menon puts it,

> as queer texts without also assuming that they are either homosexual or proto-homosexual documents. This disorienting experience—when we queer texts that have no gays in them—takes queerness away from its primary affiliation with the body and expands the reach of queerness beyond and through the body to a host of other possible and disturbing configurations. (4)

The box o'th'ear, I contend, queerly splits Castiza from herself: it exceeds her bodily "limit" even as she asserts it.

Queer Materials

In approaching questions of bodily and narrative movement, this project is informed by preceding scholarship in the burgeoning field of waste studies.[3] I am indebted, in thinking through regimes of bodily discipline, containment, and control, to Norbert Elias's *The Civilizing Process.* Mary Douglas's *Purity and Danger,* too, is an indispensable text; her anthropological study describes the cultural

[3] Susan Signe Morrison, in *Excrement in the Late Middle Ages: Sacred Filth and Chaucer's Fecopoetics,* defines waste studies as a field of scholarship that is "focused on filth, rubbish, garbage, and litter" (139).

construction of dirt as at once constitutive of and antithetical to the social order.[4] Drawing on the body of scholarship that follows from these foundational studies of waste enables me to map early modern understandings of organized social spaces and a healthy, viable social body.[5] As the organizing borders of the body are drawn by and through the elimination of waste, the queer, as Will Stockton argues, is "often degenerate and wasteful by definition, differentiated from the reproductive telos of both historical and contemporary body politics, and produced by the purgative movements of a heteronormative social order" (xix). The movements of purgation and excretion therefore figure prominently in the theorization of embodied resistance that I pursue in the following chapters.

I explore the problem of queer resistance from the perspective of partial, intractable, interruptive bodies, dislodged from their proper social and sexual positions, that take on the excremental taint of "matter out of place" (Douglas 36). If, as Julia Kristeva puts it, "refuse and corpses show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live" (3), these bodies refuse to be permanently thrust aside; instead, they persist in muddying up the threshold of body and waste, life and death. *Wasteful Bodies* stresses scenes in which characters persist in reproduc-

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[4] In *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*, Douglas writes, "Dirt offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment" (2).

[5] For more on filth's role in constructions of early modern public and private space, see Emily Cockayne's *Hubbub: Filth, Noise, and Stench in England, 1600-1770.* For explorations of early modern excremental tropes, see Jeff Percels and Russell Ganim's edited collection, *Fecal Matters in Early Modern Literature and Art: Studies in Scatology.*

ing themselves at this threshold, "producing no one reason but their will."[6] Shakespeare's Adonis wastes his beauty by refusing to procreate, while Marlowe's Edward II wastes time pointlessly standing in the bowels of his castle, deferring his own death sentence. Jonson's *The Alchemist* and Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* relentlessly reanimate and recycle fragmented, partial bodies that defer the restoration of order and borders. The activity of resistance, in these texts, disturbs and undoes the social organization of viable and nonviable, agential and inertial, active and passive, productive and unproductive subjects.

Exploring the reverberations of bodily excrescence, eruption, and interruption within the discourse of sexual practices and sexual positionality provides an opportunity to build on a rich ongoing scholarly conversation that seeks to uncover erotic configurations that might otherwise remain illegible as such within a heternormative, reproductive paradigm.[7] Will Stockton and James Bromley's *Sex Before Sex: Figuring the Act in Early Modern England* begins with a similar line of inquiry to mine. Its chapters outline a constellation of "unknowable, ignored, alternative forms of sex" that challenge and expand contemporary understandings

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[6] See also Dominique Laporte's *History of Shit*, in which Laporte describes the management of waste as securing one's place in the social through a negotiation of identification and individuation at the threshold of the house: "This little pile of shit, heaped here before my door, is mine, and I challenge any to malign its form. This little heap is my thing, my badge, a tangible sign of that which distinguishes me from, or likens me to, my neighbor. It is also what distinguishes him from me. His heap will never be mine. Whether he be friend or foe, this alone will allow me to recognize if we are alike: neat, clean, negligent, disgusting, or obviously rotten" (30).

[7] In addition to the work by Traub and Jankowski I refer to elsewhere, see Celia Daileader's "Back Door Sex: Renaissance Gynosodomy, Aretino, and the Exotic."

of early modern sex (19). On the utility of existing sexual terminology for such a project, Stockton and Bromley explain,

> The continuing reference to and utilization of these terms is predicated not only on the fact that they are ultimately inescapable as analytical reference points but also on the fact that there is no single definition of them. There are many different ways of being sexual or being gay, for instance. We seek here to exploit the current incoherence of sex by analyzing acts that seem, more but also less obviously, to warrant the term. (12)

Sex Before Sex is, as I am, invested in denaturalizing what counts as sex to early modern scholarship. Stockton and Bromley, however, move in a methodologically different direction from mine. In an effort to discover unexpected or overlooked features of the landscape of sex, *Sex Before Sex* takes up scenes of specific acts — among them anilingus and chin chucking — that, for Stockton and Bromley, "warrant" belonging to the category of acts called sex.

I follow from Stockton and Bromley's expansion of what constitutes an erotic act, as in my first chapter's discussion of chafing in *Venus and Adonis*, but I am less interested in the material act of sex that may or may not "warrant" belonging to the category of acts grouped under the name of sex. Of more interest to me are how scenes of bodily contact are figured in the literary text; how the text labors to *produce* the scene of sex as such; how the text registers the complex and conflicting affects that structure a scene of sex; and how sex tends to evade or re-

sist its own materialization. I therefore mobilize and extend Mario DiGangi's persuasive claim that "we cannot always be entirely confident that we know which bodily acts count as 'sexual'" (11). While Stockton and Bromley's collection of essays strives to locate the sexual and to expand its ambit, I pursue the radical indeterminacy of what "counts as" sexual.[8] I hope here to advance an understanding of the early modern queer that, without centralizing a set of acts that more or less obviously counts as sex, moves against the grain of a penetrative paradigm and gestures toward a retheorizing of how erotic contact is registered. This is a project interested in the limits of representing the sex act as such, the limitations of the "graphic", and the affects that are activated and circulated by scenes of seeing sex.

The Structure of the Dissertation

The chapters of this dissertation inquire into the sexing of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis,* the embodied excesses (and excrescences) of Marlowe's *Edward II,* the alchemical translations through which bodily lack is redressed in Ben Jonson's city comedies, and the life-and-death consequences of what I term the "undead objects" of *The Revenger's Tragedy.* I argue that the implacable interruptions of bodily excrescence in these Renaissance texts stage a sustained resistance to progressive, digestive allegories of bodily productivity and normative subjecthood.

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[8] Valerie Traub's *Thinking Sex with the Early Moderns*, as I discuss in chapter four, explores the indeterminacy of the sexual from the perspective of "early modern linguistic practices" to argue persuasively that "the instability of sex talk mirrors the instability of sex" (177).

The first half of *Wasteful Bodies* revisits the tragic endings of two prominent characters in the queer canon, Shakespeare's Adonis and Marlowe's Edward II. I reconsider how their position as queer figures has historically been produced through the lens of a penetrative paradigm. Such a paradigm, I argue, risks overvaluing figurations of penetrative sexual acts at the expense of the multiplicity of meaning that subtends early modern sexual wordplay. In the first chapter, "How Do You Solve a Problem Like Adonis?," I argue that critical interpretations of Adonis as an aestheticized, unreproductive proto-homosexual have risked oversexing Adonis's body, relying on presumptive binaries of biological sex and gender to interpret Adonis's resistance to Venus's advances and his eventual death at the point of a boar's tusk. I remap the topography of Adonis's body with particular attention to the pronominal multiplicity and orificial figurations that shape the poem's depiction of his body. This chapter sets the stage for the following chapters' re-evaluation of how nonnormative bodily configurations and erotic pulsions take the form of encounters with the unbearable, the unpalatable, the fragmentary, and the abject.

Following the first chapter's discussion of orificial erotics in Venus and Adonis, my second chapter, "Wasting Time in *Edward II*," takes up the question of social and sexual disorder in Marlowe's *Edward II* to reconsider what the queer figure of Edward II discloses about the figural language of sodomy and its association with death, punishment, and waste. The sodomitical spectacle of Edward's death is widely thought to confirm his position as a queer figure, repudiated by

the social order to which his sodomitical sexual object choice posed a threat. I argue, however, that this critical consensus has not yet fully accounted for the temporal contours of Edward's association with waste. Edward, who dithers and defers in spite of the inevitable, is associated in the play with the waste of time, an association materialized in bodily terms by his eventual imprisonment in the sewage of the castle. I argue that in Edward's persistent refusal to accede to his own death, the waste of time suspends and dislocates the orderly movement of succession on which the social order depends. Like a stoppage in the smooth digestive movement of the play, Edward refuses to be flushed. Informed by Kristeva and Lacan's theories of abjection, this chapter recalibrates how queer early modern scholarship registers life, death, and endings.

Through the lens of Alenka Zupančič's theory of the comic, the latter half of *Wasteful Bodies* brings together two dramatic texts of the early seventeenth century that respond to Jacobean cultural anxieties regarding succession and kinship in a comic or satiric register. In so doing, I argue, these texts develop a queer discourse of the orifice as a site at which the injunctions of normative sexuality are short circuited. My third chapter, "Jonson's Orificial Play," argues that Edward's queer, undead endurance in spite of the unbearable takes a comic form in Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Figurations of bodily space and domestic space are collocated in the play, producing a theatrical space in which to interrupt the action of the play is to interrupt the smooth functioning of the social body. Scholarship on Jonson's use of theatrical space and his fixation on waste management remains

largely focused on the orifices' excretory functions. Though indeed Jonson's resilient, irrepressible comic bodies are characterized by their products, the anatomical passages of the play are as often stopped up as they are functioning. This chapter argues that the play's orificial refusals, failures, and stoppages remain under-studied. I argue that Jonson's comic operation of recycling language and props has a vivifying effect: the bodies and the language of the play are animated by a kind of persistent vitality that refuses closure and repeatedly disorganizes the categories of bodily inside and bodily outside.

In my final chapter, "Seeing Sex in *The Revenger's Tragedy*," I consider the persistent vitality of the dead bodies of *The Revenger's Tragedy* alongside critical perspectives on early modern anxieties about sexual continence, bodily closure, reproduction, and succession. Even as Vindice, the titular revenger, relentlessly insists upon unveiling the sexual decay of the Duke's family, his very efforts to do so produce an excess of linguistic and figurative indeterminacy rather than the indisputable proof that he strives for. The uncanny mobility of partial and undead bodies in the play, I argue, produces a generically impure hybrid dramatic text and, further, challenges the binaries of activity and passivity, penetrator and penetrated, on which prevailing models of transgressive sexuality often rely.

In this investigation of the orifice, then, I build on preceding work on early modern affect and queer erotics in order to think through affective mess and disorientation, self-contradiction, and queer resilience. In particular, I hope to continue to grapple with what Traub characterizes as a "collective discomfort" that

"impels scholars to pass or paper over—or attempt to pin down—what is enigmat-
ic or inconclusive" when it comes to reading early modern sex (212).

Chapter One

How Do You Solve a Problem Like Adonis?

In order to take up the question of Adonis's body and its role in the erotics of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis,* we might identify the problem of Adonis in two registers. First, he is a problem within the poem itself: his body is the unyielding surface upon which Venus's thrusts generate narrative friction. Second, Adonis continues to pose a productive problem for the field of Shakespeare scholarship, as *Venus and Adonis*'s erotics continues to invite critical re-evaluation. Scholars read Adonis variously as an eroticized proto-homosexual and as an unreproductive queer figure who resists Venus's procreative desires. In what follows, I ask a question that intentionally risks seeming reductive in order to trouble the interpretive framework within which we attend to Shakespearean sex, gender, and desire. My reductive question is this: What is Adonis's sex? In other words, what does Adonis's sex consist of, and how does is it materialize in the text? How does Adonis's sex (or his presumed sex) inflect critical consensus regarding his position in the poem's erotic economy? Previous accounts of the queer movement of *Venus and Adonis*'s erotic economy, I contend, are constrained by a resilient penetrative paradigm in early modern sexuality studies, which continues to shape critical work on nonnormative sexualities and gender positions. This chapter aims to explore new queer approaches to reading desire in Shakespeare, and further, to

unfold previously understudied non-penetrative images of sexual contact within the poem.

My focus is Adonis's bodily resistance, both to Venus's advances and to certain contemporary critical readings of his sexuality, particularly in queer criticism. While many queer critics laud Adonis for the way in which he seems to stand in for an erotic position against or beyond heterosexual coupling, the material sex that supports readings of his sexuality remains largely unqueried. I argue that while prevailing frameworks for theorizing gay and queer desire make visible, to some extent, the ways in which Adonis poses a problem for "straight" narratives, nonetheless the scholarship on Adonis's bodily resistance overwhelmingly engages an erotic paradigm that is limited by its reliance on the normativizing reinscription of sexual difference. This chapter argues that within the current critical conversation, the multiplicity and orificiality that characterize Adonis's body are often subordinated to his presumed male-bodiedness and its difference or similarity to other sexed bodies in the poem. Such readings of Adonis both straighten out the material contours of his body and constrain the kinds of sex he is thought to be available to engage in. At the thresholds of Adonis's body, where Venus repeatedly chafes and begs admittance, that is, critics tend to focus on the non-procreative implications of Adonis's penetrability, or, rather, his initial *im*penetrability (to Venus) followed by his ultimate preference for the penetration figured by his death on the tusks of a boar. The queerness of Adonis's sex, often thought within a matrix of penetrative sexual contact, might more powerfully be located in

his embodied resistance to a penetrative sexual paradigm that undergirds much queer early modern scholarship.

Oversexing Adonis

Richard Halpern's *Shakespeare's Perfume* considers the erotics of the Sonnets in light of Shakespeare's theologically-tinted terminology of procreative "use" and sinful "abuse"—terminology Shakespeare also employs with regard to Adonis. Sonnet 4, Halpern points out, reproaches the youth's masturbatory "abuse" of his semen and instructs him to "spend" himself in more useful pursuits (20). In a reiteration of this theme, Venus insists to Adonis, "Torches are made to light... Fresh beauty for the use, / Herbs for their smell, and sappy plants to bear; / Things growing to themselves are growth's abuse" (163-166).[9] In both cases, as Halpern observes of the fair youth sonnets, the argument for procreation is given a primarily aesthetic basis. Critics have argued that Sonnet 5's depiction of the youth's beauty distilled into perfume presents a kind of poetic procreation in which the youth's semen produces a purely aesthetic object, rather than a child.[10]

For Halpern, Shakespeare's *aesthetic* procreative injunction, rather than reiterating the rhetoric of sodomy's condemnation, actually perverts that rhetoric. Halpern proposes that

[9] Citations from Shakespeare's poetry are from *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition,* edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus.

[10] See Helen Vendler's *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets.*

> in the very process of endorsing a licit, reproductive sexuality, the procreation sonnets employ a range of figures that mimic, and in some cases may derive from, theological condemnations of sodomy. If at times these sonnets covertly endorse or propose sodomitical practices, they also constitute a distinctive sexual aesthetic precisely by negating, expelling, or purging sodomy. (20)

That is, in the play between the womb and the sterile glass bottle, Shakespeare taints the "proper" vessel with the impropriety of sodomy, even as "the sublimating rhetoric of the sonnets separates out an impeccably refined and aestheticized form of desire from a sodomitical discourse that is then abjected as fecal remainder" (21). When Sonnet 5 transforms the reproductive vessel into the decorative one, Halpern suggests, "something one might call Shakespearean homosexuality emerges" (21). Such a nomination is provisional to allow for the anachronism of modern sexuality labels, but it nevertheless reveals and confirms an implicit presumption that the organizing quality of the desire depicted is the male sex shared by the speaker and the object of desire.

The "something" that is emergent in Sonnet 5 goes on to shape Halpern's reading of Sonnet 20, which describes the desired youth's creation by Nature in this way:

> And for a woman wert thou first created,
> Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
> And by addition me of thee defeated

By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.

But since she pricked thee out for women's pleasure,

Mine be thy love and thy love's use their treasure. (9-14)

Halpern suggests that the late addition renders the penis "superfluous" (27), yet he implicitly elevates the fair youth's penis to a position of primary importance, at least insofar as the penis provides the sole figure for the male "sex" that gives rise to the nomination of "Shakespearean homosexuality." Halpern names a homosexuality that we might call Shakespearean, but forecloses the question of whether this is a Shakespearean erotics we might (or *might not*) call homosexuality. In Halpern's analysis of the Sonnets' sublimating economy of desire, I argue, the naming of Shakespearean homosexuality gets ahead of itself. Crucially, of course, this is not instead to affirm the poem's heterosexuality; my goal is not to rewrite the straightness of Shakespeare's sexual orientation, but instead to open the question of the sex on the basis of which the name of homo*sex*uality emerges.

In the causal chain depicted by Sonnet 20, Nature's desire precedes and then precipitates the "addition" that renders the youth no longer a woman. In other words, her desire, preceding the youth's maleness, is not predicated on his sex; she desires the youth in the first place, and consequently she sexes him to accord with her desire for him to procreate with women. Desire, then, operates in a way that is indifferent to gender and sex, though procreative injunctions drive a fantasy of being able to change sex at will so as to "use" the body for the purposes of procreation. Basing a taxonomy of the poem's relations of desire on the youth's sex,

then, inverts the narrative. Such a taxonomy foregrounds the "prick," or the genital sex of the youth, at the expense of taking seriously the parts of his body that are sexed differently insofar as they were "for a woman… first created." The terminology of homosexuality collapses the sonnet's temporal play in order to name what is "really" a same-sex attraction between the speaker of the poem and the youth.[11]

For Roland Barthes, being named is a profoundly unhappy experience of immobilization, particularly when it comes to the naming of homosexuality. D.A. Miller's influential essay *Bringing Out Roland Barthes* explores the implications of Barthes's unease in terms of the hypostatizing effect that the naming of sexuality can have on the subject and the body. Miller remarks, on the self-nomination of the homosexual,

> Even men on whom the overall effect of coming out has been empowering will sometimes also have to submit to being mortified by their membership in a denomination that general social usage treats, as though there were nothing else to say about them, or

[11] As Thomas Laqueur illuminates, modern frameworks of binary sex— and even the notion of sex as biological—cannot be assumed in the early modern period, during which a one-sex model of biological sex remained in circulation. Laqueur writes, "The problem is rather that in the imaginative world I am describing there is no 'real' sex that in principle grounds and distinguishes in a reductionist fashion two genders. Gender is part of the order of things, and sex, if not entirely conventional, is not solidly corporeal either. Thus the modern way of thinking about these texts, of asking what is happening to sex as the play of genders becomes indistinct, will not work. What we call sex and gender are in the Renaissance bound up in a circle of meanings from which escape to a supposed biological substratum is impossible" (Laqueur 128).

> nothing else to hear them say, with all the finality of a verdict. (23-4)

Such a phenomenon is indicative of a sexual culture in which an identitarian paradigm subtends our understanding of sexuality, resulting in taxonomies of desire that rely primarily on the sexes of the subject and object in categorizing erotic relations. Bringing out Adonis, or classifying his desire based on the relational logic of homo- or hetero-sexuality, risks organizing him to death, ossifying the prick that marks the only difference that matters within a sexual and relational paradigm that organizes desire in terms of genital sex. The organizing principles of such a paradigm treat Adonis as though there were nothing else to hear him say, a treatment that actually echoes Venus's own declaration of love. Hearing Adonis makes little difference to Venus; rather, she insists, "Had I no eyes but ears, my ears would love / That inward beauty and invisible; / Or were I deaf, thy outward parts would move / Each part in me that were but sensible" (433-436). Venus goes on to enumerate how, even with the loss of each of the five senses, "yet would my love to thee be still as much" (442). Paradoxically, it is precisely in demonstrating the extremity of her attachment to Adonis that Venus asserts her indifference toward Adonis's voice.

Following Venus's profession of love, Adonis's voice continues to be mortified. The poem offers up a vivid image of Adonis's body opening to reply. When Adonis opens the "ruby-colored portal" of his mouth, his mouth is likened to "a red morn that ever yet betokened / Wrack to the seaman, tempest to the

field" (451, 453-454). The semblance is sufficient answer for Venus, and it seems there is nothing else to hear him say, as

> This ill presage advisedly she marketh.
> Even as the wind is hushed before it raineth,
> Or as the wolf doth grin before he barketh,
> Or as the berry breaks before it staineth,
> Or like the deadly bullet of a gun,
> His meaning struck her ere his words begun. (457-462)

Venus's gaze, that is, immediately penetrates Adonis's meaning, if not his body. Adonis's voice is not heard; its "honey passage" is arrested by Venus's preemptive recognition (451). Adonis's mouth is immobilized as well, supplanted by metaphor. It becomes an image, an "ill presage." As far as Venus is concerned, Adonis's meaning is written on his face so clearly that it preemptively overtakes whatever he might have been about to say. In this sense, Venus succeeds in penetrating the orifice Adonis presents to her gaze, but the yielding of Adonis's body opens not onto internal bodily space, but rather onto his *meaning*—or, more precisely, what Venus takes his meaning to be. Further, where the figurative language of the passage might seem to suggest Adonis penetrating Venus, "like the deadly bullet of a gun," the penetrative figures of the passage actually *displace* scenes of bodily contact with the preemptive arrival of Adonis's refusal. Their mutual penetration is not a kind of material contact with the body, but rather the inscription of a symbolic fate.

In the penetrative economy of the erotic figures that this passage mobilizes, meaning takes the form of the presage; put another way, it arrives ahead of time. Tightly woven, metrically parallel similes stage scenes of meaning's arrival: the rain arrives in the wind's hush; the bark in the wolf's grin, the stain in the berry's break. The first line of the final couplet, however, interrupts the parallel structure of the preceding comparisons. Death is the ultimate foregone conclusion, since, lacking the dependent clause that specifies the particular significance of each of the previous examples, the line implies not only that a bullet presages death, but that the presage as such is deadly. In short, *penetration* is mortifying; the meaning it affords is an intimation of death. Fittingly, the "ill presage" seems to kill Venus, "and at his look she flatly falleth down, / For looks kill love" (464).

Penetrative figures in the poem support many readings of the play's erotics in terms of gender role reversal, but Richard Rambuss argues that queer Renaissance criticism that "principally turn[s] on role reversal and gender inversion" does not sufficiently account for the erotics at play in *Venus and Adonis* and in Shakespeare's work more generally (242). Rambuss contends that it is limiting to a queer scholarly project to rely on instances of cross-dressing, effeminacy in men, and masculinity in women to be the paradigm in which we read non-heterosexual desires in Renaissance texts. It's a point well taken: why should the vocabulary of queer relations be limited to a certain subset of gender expressions? Rambuss goes on to call Adonis a "figuration of a proto-gay male desire." Rambuss reads the insistence on the pronoun "she" in descriptions of Venus to argue

that Venus, instead of being "a figure of gender inversion or indeterminacy" as some critics have suggested, rather embodies a "distinctly female" (if not conventionally feminine) sexuality (246). Similarly, Rambuss insists upon the masculine maleness of Adonis's body as a way to trouble the limits of the bodily figures available to queer or non-heterosexual readings.

Rambuss's attentiveness to binary sex, however, comes at the expense of a broader challenge Adonis poses for rubrics of queer bodily matter. If we approach the contours of Adonis's body from the angle of the pronominal, as Rambuss does with Venus, a sexed positionality emerges for which Rambuss does not account. Consider Adonis's position in relation to Cupid at the textual moment Rambuss credits with foregrounding male homoerotic desire. The poem describes Adonis's dimples as "These lovely caves, these round enchanting pits, / Open[ing] their mouths to swallow Venus' liking" and suggests that Cupid himself "made those hollows" in the hope that, "if he were slain," Adonis's dimples would serve as his tomb (247-248, 243). Following Rambuss's example, however, we might note that there is no "he" referring to Adonis here to affirm the maleness of the (homo)eroticism between Cupid and Adonis. In fact, the only "he" in this passage is Cupid, and the only pronouns that indicate Adonis's position in this desiring relation are plural: "*these* lovely caves," "*their* mouths," "*those* hollows." Rather than insisting on a fantasy of a singularly male form, then, the surface of Adonis's body here offers sites for sexual access and erotic engagement in the register of the nongendered plural.

Rambuss's reading, intent on Adonis's maleness, in effect closes up the several openings in the surface of Adonis's body in order to presume the synonymy between the pronominal positions occupied by Cupid and Adonis. The persistence of the nongendered plural in descriptions of Adonis's eroticized body, however, demands a reinterpretation of the presumptively *homo* eroticism that engages Cupid and Adonis. This encounter between Cupid and Adonis explores an erotic scene in which multiple pronominal positions are active, though a binaristic gender paradigm in criticism collapses these possibilities. I consider the multiplicity of Adonis's sex to be an opportunity to shift the terms of queer studies' engagement with Adonis's body and to reevaluate what "counts" as sex. In what follows, I revise what I have argued is a critical oversexing of Adonis, which, while it has enabled criticism that troubles certain formulations of (homo)erotic desire, has also tended to mortify Adonis in the name of a hypostatizing sexual binary.

Orificiality

In her efforts to woo Adonis, Venus employs the normative logic of procreative utility when she insists, "Torches are made to light, jewels to wear, / Dainties to taste, fresh beauty for the use" (163-164). Venus is of the mind that the very point—the "use"—of Adonis's body is to reproduce its own form. Beauty put to no use is downright wasteful; to invoke the inevitable pun, it is pointless. Further, Madhavi Menon points out, Adonis not only fails to engage in reproductive sex, he "stands in the way of sex; even more, he is the instrument by which

consummation is actively excluded from the poem" ("Spurning Teleology" 504). Insofar as Adonis obstructs (implicitly reproductive) consummation, he provides a queer resistance, a stoppage in the smooth functioning of end-oriented narrative movement. Adonis is pointless in the sense of lacking a point, of failing to achieve an erection and the penetrative consummation it would imply, of course, but also in the sense of *refusing* to allow anything to come to a point.[12]

Adonis's queerness has thus been studied from the perspective of his resistance to what Judith Roof names "the orgasmic ideology of narrative" (20).[13] The way in which Adonis's embodiment queers the construction of the material border of the body, however, remains understudied. Orifices, traditionally signifiers of sexual availability, penetrability, and, often, effeminacy, are the primary feature associated with Adonis's body. Adonis's orifices, however, resist easy assimilation into a penetrative erotic paradigm. His body opens even as it refuses entry; he is at once easily legible to Venus and yet unavailable to her. These tensions are condensed in the evocation of the "ruby-colored portal," which I linger over above. His mouth, by opening, offers refusal rather than acceptance. Venus puns on this deftly, complaining, "Would thou wert as I am, and I a man, / My heart all whole as thine, thy heart my wound" (369-370). Adonis, his bodily surface unbroken by

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[12] As Judith Haber suggests in her exploration of pointlessness in Marlowe's *Hero and Leander,* "The disruption of end-directed narrative is paralleled by, and indeed equivalent to, the disruption of end-directed sexuality" (43).

[13] See also *Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* by Coppélia Kahn, who attributes Adonis's sexual reluctance to his failure to achieve masculine maturity.

penetration's "wound," is frustratingly "all whole," even as his orifices insist on the fact of his being "all *hole*."

Formally, the chiasmus of Venus's lament evinces her imagined exchange of positions, seeming to imply the evenness of an equation: her wounded heart for Adonis's uninjured one, her gender position for his. From the perspective of a penetrative paradigm, then, the chiasmus is easily construed as a cross-stitch, a neat suture between fungible gender roles and the penetrative sex act. Will Stockton's *Playing Dirty* works within such a frame to read another scene of Shakespearean gender reversal: Helen's remedy for the king's fistula in *All's Well That Ends Well.* Stockton intimates, appreciatively, "Helen's methods are not clear… At the very least, she probably has to insert her fingers into his body" (57). For Stockton, the implication of sodomy here and elsewhere in the play "queer[s] opposite-sex relations predicted [sic] on genital and orificial clarity" (xix). Orificial confusion, even as it demonstrates the precarity of sexual difference, however, is hemmed in by a resilient penetrative paradigm. That is, though the encounter with the king's body remains offstage and unseen it nevertheless, at the very least, constitutes a penetrative act, thereby suturing gender roles to penetrative positionality. In contrast, though Venus seems to fantasize about gender reversal in terms of penetrative positionality, she does not quite suggest an exchange of hers for his; instead, she wishes that Adonis were "as I am" and that she were a "man." The chiasmus doesn't merely ignore the question of whether Adonis is a man or not; it

actually doesn't ask the question at all. Adonis's manhood is, here perhaps most clearly, beside the point.

This is not, of course, to dismiss out of hand all readings that turn on the gendered and historically specific implications of scenes of penetration in which conventional gender roles are inverted. I do want to reconsider, however, the queer force attributed to (sub)versions of the penetrative act. I am suggesting that there are ways in which even antihomophobic and antiheterosexist projects none-theless obscure their foundations, which are seated in a sexual discourse for which penetration remains the structuring figure. I do not wish to argue that penetration, as a material act, is irrevocably heterosexist, or that penetration is necessarily an inscription of power in favor of the penetrator, or that penetration should be es-chewed as a sexual practice. Rather, my intention here is to explore queer early modern erotic economies in which penetration is not the bodily configuration whose possibility precedes and provides the possibility of sex itself. Of course, there are a number of critical voices that explore early modern figurations of non-penetrative forms of sex.[14] Nonetheless, penetration remains, overwhelmingly, *the* cultural and critical paradigm for erotic acts.

Penetrative paradigms for thinking nonnormative or socially transgressive scenes of sex in the early modern period often draw on Bakhtinian studies of so-

[14] Valerie Traub's *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* elaborates a study of "the dilemma of lesbian representation in the early modern period" (6), exploring the discursive construction of the penetrative tribade and other figures of same-gender desire among women.

cial hierarchy and early modern bodily borders.[15] Mikhail Bakhtin's influential *Rabelais and His World* provides a foundational study of images of the grotesque and the classical body in early modern culture, in which he associates the excess, hybridity, and vulgarity of grotesque realism with "a potent, populist utopian vision of the world seen from below and a festive critique, through the inversion of hierarchy, of the 'high' culture" (Stallybrass and White 7). For Bakhtin, figurations of the grotesque body undo social hierarchies that depend on bodily closure. Bakhtin defines the grotesque in relation to the orifice, or, as he puts it, the body's "apertures and convexities":

> Contrary to modern canons, the grotesque body is not separated from the rest of the world. It is not a closed, completed unit; it is unfinished, outgrows itself, transgresses its own limits. The stress is laid on those parts of the body that are open to the outside world, that is, the parts through which the world enters the body or emerges from it, or through which the body itself goes out to meet the world… This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. (26)

[15] See Stallybrass and White 6-7.

Bakhtin emphasizes the way in which the "unfinished," un-self-contained quality of the grotesque body undoes a social order predicated on the differentiation of "high" and "low" cultural as well as bodily strata.[16]

Given the statuesque ideal form Adonis is thought to embody, discussing him in relation to the porous, bursting bodies of Bakhtin's grotesque may seem at first counterintuitive.[17] By repeatedly opening, however, Adonis's body fails to assume the unbroken surface Bakhtin associates with the orderly, classical body. Instead, the topography of Adonis's body bears similarity to the unclosed, disorganizing image of the grotesque. More radically, Adonis resists the collocation of the orifice and penetration that supports Bakhtin's vision of generative, utopian contact between the body and the world outside it. For Bakhtin, the interpenetration of the body and the external world erases hierarchical difference because it fractures the "closed, complete unit" of the body, producing in its place a "chain of genetic development," or a kind of hereditary sameness that enables its own reproduction. Adonis, then, provides a useful counterpoint to the cavities and protuberances Bakhtin celebrates, particularly in relation to the penetrative orificial implications of Bakhtin's formulation. Adonis's orificial body troubles a social

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[16] Other scholars have further suggested that the analogy of the social body and the physical body produces early modern fantasies of a healthy body politic that correspond with images of smooth, uninterrupted bodily borders. For an exploration of so-called "foreign bodies" and their supposed infection or infiltration of the healthy body politic, see Jonathan Gil Harris's *Foreign Bodies and the Body Politic: Discourses of Social Pathology in Early Modern England.*

[17] Indeed, Venus in some ways more readily invites comparisons to Bakhtin's grotesque, as she has lent herself to assessment by Rambuss as "panting, sweating, rapacious" (Rambuss 247), while C.S. Lewis describes her as "voluminous" and disturbing (498).

order figured by coherent, contained bodily borders, while simultaneously his position in the erotic economy of the poem does not quite support a penetrative hermeneutic.

Importantly, though Adonis's body features myriad orifices, these orifices do not, as in Bakhtin, open onto life-giving or generative possibilities. Venus, frustrated at every turn by Adonis's unwillingness to let her in, demands, "What is thy body but a swallowing grave?" (757). Even after his death in the conclusion of the poem, when Adonis is transmuted into a flower, Menon points out, "Unlike the Ovidian narrative in which Adonis turns into a flower that will be resurrected annually through Venus's mediation, the Shakespearean text leads to Adonis's spontaneous transformation into a pansy that is immediately plucked up and withers, with no mention of rebirth" (501). Insofar as life is secured through "genetic" or sexual reproduction, Adonis thus refuses to accede to it. Venus's desperate plea of "What is thy body but a swallowing grave?" exemplifies the discomfiture of a penetrative sexual paradigm to which Adonis's embodiment poses something of an unanswerable question. Unclosed but impenetrable, Adonis instead embodies deathly pointlessness and a queer unviability.

Chafing

Lee Edelman's reading of Hamlet's "to be or not to be" soliloquy provides a useful way of theorizing a queer "or" within a future-oriented social order in which survival and reproductive viability are intertwined. For Edelman, the "*or*der of survival" describes "a conceptual geography of places in which everything

'must be *or* not be,' such that even non-being would inhabit a place, would assume the signifiable form that turns it into a one" (152). Following Edelman's formulation, we might consider the *or*der of the orifice, which inscribes the difference that penetration materializes. Penetration is discursively constructed along the axes of organizing binaries. The positional difference between penetrator and penetrated necessitates and produces the conceptual difference between the whole and the hole, the closed and the open bodily border. It is here that Adonis provides an opportunity to reconsider the repertoire of configurations, gestures, and frictions that are legible to our sexual rubrics. The problem Adonis poses for the discourse of sexual positionality is also a problem for how sexual acts are registered as such. In this section, I read scenes of erotic contact in the poem against the grain in order to resist the condensation of the poem's sexual figural vocabulary into a penetrative framework that subordinates the poem's various figurations of erotic play to the figure of penetration, which inscribes "the mark of an absence absenting the absence it marks" (Edelman 150).

When Adonis declines to meet again and announces his intentions to hunt the boar instead, Venus's concerns conjure figures of penetration. She fears the boar's "tushes, never sheathed," the "bristly pikes" of his back, and the "snout [that] digs sepulchres where'er he goes" (617, 620, 622). She fears the boar

> … naught esteems that face of thine,
>
> To which love's eyes pay tributary gazes,
>
> Nor thy soft hands, sweet lips, and crystal eyne,

> Whose full perfection all the world amazes;
>
> But having thee at vantage—wondrous dread!—
>
> Would root these beauties as he roots the mead. (631-636).

The boar thus appears as a threatening penetrating figure, who, by puncturing Adonis's bodily surface, threatens to dismember him, to separate his body into parts without regard for its "full perfection," or proper order. Criticism tends to read Adonis's ending with the boar as a climactic and doomed homoerotic encounter. Adonis is rooted to death by the boar, punctured as well as pinned in place once and for all.

To register the scene of Adonis's death as the final word on Adonis's penetrability, however, is to fail to hear the way in which the boar's goring reverberates in the narrative. Importantly, the boar's penetration of Adonis occurs offstage. Venus experiences a protracted internal drama in the process of discovering that Adonis has been killed: first, she "hearkens for his hounds, and for his horn" (868), seeking signs of Adonis's survival. Following the sound of the hounds, Venus is arrested by the realization that "the cry remaineth in one place, / Where fearfully the dogs exclaim aloud" (885-886). This ill portent she dismisses, as "cheering up her senses all dismay'd, / She tells them 'tis a causeless fantasy, / And childish error that they are afraid" (896-898). Immediately following this, however, we are told she "spied the hunted boar, / Whose frothy mouth, bepainted all with red… A second fear through all her sinews spread" (900-903). As she encounters the boar and the injured, howling hounds one by one, Venus curses

Death, convinced anew that Adonis has been killed. Yet even after seeing the boar's bloody mouth and hearing the hounds' howling, Venus doubts herself one more time when "far off she hears some hunstman hollo" and believes it to be Adonis, alive and well (973). As Venus strains to hear confirmation of Adonis's survival or death, she is plunged into a sensory world in which the evidence of her senses is fallible, subject to doubt. Recall that earlier in the poem, Venus is certain that even if she were left with any one of her five senses, "yet would my love to thee be still as much" (442). Now, however, her senses threaten to betray her. The evidence of the body becomes unreliable; in the earlier scene, Venus reads the evidence of Adonis's opening mouth before he so much as speaks, but now she strains to hear his voice.

As Venus's senses are overwhelmed with the dizzying movement between over-credulousness and self-doubt, the episode culminates in the sight of "the wide wound that the boar had trench'd / In [Adonis's] soft flank" (1052-1053). The scene of penetration is thus displaced and, in its place, the poem presents Venus's extended vacillation and the accompanying cognitive and sensory uncertainty. And as Venus beholds the very image that seems to confirm that the boar is responsible for fatally disordering Adonis's full perfection, the location of that wound appears to swim before her eyes:

> Upon his hurt she looks so steadfastly,
>
> That her sight, dazzling, makes the wound seem three;
>
> And then she reprehends her mangling eye,

That makes more gashes where no breach should be. (1063-1066)

Venus's gaze, in other words, redoubles the body's wound, dislocating and multiplying the sites at which Adonis is rooted. The poem supplants a scene of penetrative bodily contact, that is, with a scene of looking, which in turn refracts and reenacts the boar's mortifying penetration of Adonis's body.

In the original lyrics from which this chapter takes its title, the answer to the question "How do you solve a problem like Maria?" is another question: "How do you catch a cloud and pin it down?" If one were to catch a cloud and pin it down, the song implies, the cloud one pinned could hardly still be said to *be* a cloud. The act of *pinning* the cloud amounts, that is, only to displacing it. Prior to Adonis's death, in fact, Venus foresees Adonis's fate, after which she tries to warn him off by describing a vision of "an angry chafing boar, / under whose sharp fangs on his back doth lie / *An image like thyself*, all stained with gore" (662-664, emphasis mine). Here, as we have seen in his opening mouth, Adonis's body opens onto a visual presage that, even in announcing the inevitability of its meaning, preempts and displaces the material encounter it heralds.

Other scholars have commented on the poem's erotic frustrations and suspensions, which defer or circumvent sexual consummation. Catherine Belsey notes that the poem's "anarchic" portrayal of desire produces a narrative in which "gratification is not an option" (275). Indeed, the poem's lush erotic images in tension with its "lack of sex" lead Pablo Maurette to suggest that the poem dallies both with "a newer, more sensual poetic trend coming from the Continent and in-

spired by classical amatory poetry, and the still prevalent lyrical conceits of the Petrarchan tradition," in which the object of desire is idealized and thereby rendered unattainable (356). In the movement between overt sexuality and chaste deferral, Maurette asserts that Venus and Adonis "never even come close to consummating the affair," though he goes on to detail the poem's fixation on kissing and to characterize the kiss as an erotic act that "mediates between chaste love and sexual intercourse" (356). The kiss, then, is at once distant from sex and near to it.[18] In zoning the terrain of the erotic, however, criticism has tended to affirm an absolute lack of "real" penetrative consummation, at the expense of overlooking the radical discursive instability and uncertainty that, I argue, precipitates the problem of pinning Adonis.

In order to move aslant of penetrative logics and to approach the erotics of the poem from another perspective, I conclude in this section with a discussion of chafing, which, I argue, generates an undertheorized erotic current within the text, and which provides a useful site of resistance to the preemptive ending that a penetrative paradigm imposes on Adonis. Attending to *Venus and Adonis*'s chafing provides an opportunity to reframe what figurations are legible as sex for queer early modern criticism. Indeed, even as Adonis refuses Venus's penetrative and procreative advances, there is nevertheless more to say about the ways in which their bodies come into contact. As I have mentioned, Venus reacts to the sight of

[18] For a discussion of the way in which the poem depicts erotic experience through the negotiation of paradox, see S. Clark Hulse's "Shakespeare's Myth of Venus and Adonis."

Adonis's opening mouth as to a killing blow. Mortified by the omen she reads there, she "flatly falleth down" and Adonis, "believing she is dead, / Claps her pale cheek till clapping makes it red" (467-468). He continues in the same vein as "he wrings her nose, he strikes her on the cheeks, / He bends her fingers, holds her pulses hard; / He chafes her lips" (475-477). Venus's collapse initiates a level of active contact between herself and Adonis that Venus has otherwise failed to achieve. In fact, for this poem, in which penetrative desires come to nothing, the erotic figure of chafing actually enjoys a measure of success. Adonis, who has so far coldly countered Venus's seductive rhetoric, here attempts to quicken her flesh in return. If we consider how the narrative "problem" of Adonis is turned on its head in this scene, erotic possibilities materialize that bear on queer theorizations of sex more generally.

The clash of Adonis's body against hers results in Venus's seeming resurrection. When she wakes, Venus seems to be overcome by the paradoxical sensations of extreme emotion. She demands,

> O, where am I?
>
> …in earth or heaven,
>
> Or in the ocean drenched, or in the fire?
>
> What hour is this: or morn or weary even?
>
> Do I delight to die, or life desire? (493-496)

Venus's repeated O's, including the repetition of the sound in her repeated or's, sound the cry and the rhythm of pleasure in response to Adonis's varied rubbing.

Chafing here brings about a pleasurable moment of release on one condition: namely, as “he kisses her... she by her good will, / *Will never rise* so he will kiss her still” (479-480, emphasis mine). Insofar as erectness has come to emblematize penetrative desire and sexual practice, it seems significant that not only are there no erections in this scene, but there is a necessary lack of them. It is the only time Adonis willingly responds to Venus’s body, and its implications for the erotics of the poem are suggestive.

Adonis’s chafing brings about an overwhelming wash of conflicting sensations, as Venus’s disoriented queries suggest above. Unable to orient herself affectively or temporally, Venus finishes the sextet with another paradoxical couplet. She claims, “But now I lived, and life was death’s annoy; / But now I died, and death was lively joy” (497-498). Life and death are both immanent in the experience as Venus’s attempt to organize herself in relation to binary choices of earth/heaven, ocean/fire, and morn/even fails to gain any traction. In effect, Adonis’s chafing undoes the organizing function of the *or*. Within such an encounter, Venus and Adonis’s respective positions within a penetrator-penetrated binary become unnecessary questions.

In her sometimes loving, sometimes aggravated attention to the abutting contours of their bodies, Venus favors rounded, circular figures. Having clutched Adonis to her in a firm embrace, she metaphorizes her arms as a pastoral enclosure that fairly thrums with bodily promise. She reasons,

> Since I have hemmed thee here

> Within the circuit of this ivory pale,
>
> I'll be a park, and thou shalt be my deer.
>
> Feed where thou wilt, on mountain or in dale;
>
> Graze on my lips, and if those hills be dry,
>
> Stray lower, where the pleasant fountains lie. (229-234)

In her imagined scene, her body becomes the "park," a "circuit" within which Adonis may take his pleasure. Valerie Billing notes that Venus's landscape metaphor "plays into a common Renaissance poetic trope of describing the female body as an erotic landscape that encourages male conquest or colonization," but, Billing claims, Venus queers this trope by asking Adonis to wander across this eroticized landscape rather than to "conquer or penetrate" it (133). Indeed, in elaborating the metaphor, Venus's language insists on surface rather than puncture or entry. She describes "Sweet bottom-grass and high delightful plain, / Round rising hillocks, brakes obscure and rough" (236-237). I am not fully convinced, however, that the scene fully "exclud[es] penetration" as Billing suggests (134). The metaphor of the park's enclosure elaborates descriptions elsewhere of Venus's arms as a "limit" and a "band" (235, 225), and a penetrative configuration is not difficult to overlay on these metaphors of contact. Enclosure, of course, marks out a bodily space for Adonis to be inside of, and thus might suggest a kind of bodily opening. The lack of conventional phallic metaphors of conquest, that is, seems not to preclude the kind of bodily configurations that we traditionally refer to as penetration. Rather, what seems significant to me about the passage is that even

where Venus alludes to the anality of "sweet bottom-grass" and the pubic image of "brakes obscure and rough," her figurations of these bodily sites map the contours of the body in terms of topography, texture, and taste. The queerest feature of Venus's pastoral fantasy, then, might more accurately be that in this dense, lush, suggestive series of erotic metaphors, Venus's circular figures resist the positional orientation of penetrator/penetrated, passive/active, inside/outside. In short, she refuses to inscribe the differential logic that demarcates penetration as its own particular and privileged class of erotic acts.

Moreover, the invitation to "graze on"—rather than to swallow or pin—Venus's body refocuses the erotic energy of the figure on a kind of contact that is predicated on proximity rather than traversal. To graze something, of course, is to touch it but only just: unlike penetration, which presumes a depth of contact, grazing takes place on the surface. The figures of chafing and grazing therefore suggest some forms of erotic contact that tend in criticism to disappear behind the prominence of the poem's penetrative ending. Unlike pinning and penetrating, which presume a definitive moment of traversal from outside to inside, chafing expresses a more diffuse kind of contact between bodies. I build here on Eve Sedgwick's graceful unpacking of the critical potential in the preposition "beside," when she suggests that "the irreducibly spatial positionality of beside also seems to offer some useful resistance to the ease with which beneath and beyond turn from spatial descriptors into implicit narratives of, respectively, origin and telos" (8). Sedgwick's "beside" disorganizes the front/rear, under/over, top/

bottom, inside/outside paradigms that impose a mortifying narrative form on the points of contact between bodies. As a figure for thinking sex, chafing takes up Sedgwick's resistance to the narrativization of binary sexual positions. Just as to be beside someone is, equally, to have them beside you, to chafe something is equally to be chafed by that thing in return.

In his generative study of desire and sexual difference in Shakespeare, Stephen Greenblatt suggests that the "special pleasure of Shakespearean fiction" lies in Shakespeare's association of erotic friction, or chafing, with linguistic play (*Shakespearean* 89). Further, Greenblatt points out, Shakespeare even "seems to imply that erotic friction *originates* in the wantonness of language and thus that the body itself is a tissue of metaphors" (*Shakespearean* 89). Adonis, in his refusal of procreation, produces a kind of linguistic chafing of his own when he opines about love:

> "I know not love," quoth he, "nor will not know it,
>
> Unless it be a boar, and then I chase it.
>
> 'Tis much to borrow, and I will not owe it.
>
> My love to love is love but to disgrace it;
>
> For I have heard it is a life in death,
>
> That laughs and weeps, and all but with a breath." (409-414)

Adonis's discourse on love imagines a grammatically resistant "it," which renders it impossible to locate love within a stable referential frame. Adonis's proclaimed anteriority to love positions him not merely prior to love, but also beyond or out-

side it when he declares he "*will* not know it." Metrically, every line prior to the couplet demonstrates Adonis's characteristic, staid loyalty to the iamb, which makes the repeated three-syllable foot on the end of each line all the more striking. The metric irregularity provides a kind of formal surfe*it*, an additional unstressed "it" which circulates in this verse in a loose referential relation to "love." Its referent is not so well-anchored as Adonis's meter. Multiple and indeterminate, the repeated "it" marks the places where "love" is *not* "love." "It" marks the place where love might be a boar; where Adonis's love *might* be love, provisionally. Adonis dismisses the question of knowledge out of hand; he consents neither to know it nor to learn to know it. Instead, as he accedes to a position of never quite knowing what "it" is, Adonis's "love" is quite simply beside itself.

I hope to have returned us, as queer critics, to some questions regarding the materiality of sex, even at a contemporary moment in the academy when some have begun to ask whether we have arrived "after sex" or "after" queer theory.[19] I hope to have suggested that the question of Adonis's sex provides an opportunity to divest the critical consensus of certain stabilizing fictions and figurations that delimit what is legible as sex. Perhaps, like Adonis, we can begin to generate paradigms for reading sex that assent, like Adonis, not to know it in advance.

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[19] See Janet Halley and Andrew Parker's edited collection, *After Sex? On Writing After Queer Theory*.

Chapter Two

Wasting Time in *Edward II*

This chapter turns to another early modern literary text that is generally thought to be foundational to the queer canon: Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*. As both playwright and political figure, Marlowe features prominently in the history of transgressive sexuality. A document commonly called the Baines note or Baines libel most famously attests to Marlowe's sodomitical leanings, though the account of Marlowe offered in the note is usually regarded as a politically expedient fiction rather than a faithful account of Marlowe's radical views on politics, religion, and same-sex desire.[20] Rather than offering historical fact, that is, the document reveals the many gaps within the historical record of Marlowe's life, which, fraught with implications about Marlowe's disorderly desires, give rise to the popular modern image of a queer Marlowe.[21] These gaps, then, mark what we cannot know for sure about Marlowe even as they open onto rich sexual and political implications about early modern sodomy and about Marlowe himself. Indeed, Marlowe's biography and his literary work have inspired far-reaching scholarly debates about the representation of nonnormative sexuality on the early modern

[20] The document is reproduced in A.D. Wraight's *In Search of Christopher Marlowe: A Pictorial Biography* (308-309).

[21] For an account of the historical and critical production of images of "the transgressive Marlowe" (562), see Stephen Orgel's "Tobacco and Boys: How Queer Was Marlowe?"

stage as well as broader cultural views of homosexuality, homoeroticism, and sodomy.

Importantly, though anal penetration and male homoeroticism are both implicated in the discourse of sodomy, charges of sodomy tend to be motivated by transgressions of social status and anxieties about cross-class mixture or impurity, rather than by the biological sex of the offenders.[22] Sodomy thus denotes no set of specific bodily acts, but rather persists as a mobilizable category with social, political, and juridical valences.[23] Jonathan Goldberg describes sodomy as a category that is negatively constituted: he explains, "In *sodomy* English society saw its shadow: the word expressed sheer negation, an absence capable of taking root in anyone, and necessarily to be rooted out" ("Sodomy and Society" 371, emphasis in original). The negativity of sodomy is my point of departure in this chapter; in particular, its paradoxical figuration as an *absence* that has the capacity to *take root* and grow unbidden. As Goldberg's formulation suggests, the discourse of sodomy is marked by its lively negativity. I am therefore primarily interested not

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[22] See Alan Bray's *Homosexuality in Renaissance England*. For a discussion of sodomy's discursive relation to difference and impurity, see Jeffrey Masten's *Queer Philologies: Sex, Language, and Affect in Shakespeare's Time,* pp. 191–210, esp. 200.

[23] In his influential exploration of the politics of sodomy, Jonathan Goldberg argues that *Edward II* is largely indifferent to same-sex desire as such, and that the charge of sodomy is warranted instead by Gaveston's sudden and disorganizing upward mobility (*Sodometries* 116-118).

in the status of same-sex desire or homoeroticism as such,[24] but instead in the border at which the organized social body is sutured, Peter-Pan-like, to the unruly shadow it casts.

This chapter continues to attend to the material of the body, not in an effort to relocate "that utterly confused category" of sodomy in any particular bodily configuration (Foucault 101), but in order to re-examine some of the ways in which certain bodily configurations in *Edward II* have been taken to materialize the discursive knot of social disorder, transgressive erotics, and sodomy. I pursue, too, the related questions of how disorder is figured on the body and what positions Edward takes up in his embodied resistance to the future-oriented movement of narrative, history, and normative sexuality. I argue that sodomy's figural association with negation, anality, and waste paradoxically animates Edward with a persistent vitality that queerly resists and prolongs the very deathliness sodomy is made to figure.

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[24] For more on how representation of male homoeroticism in the play is *differentiated* from the crime of sodomy, see Mario DiGangi's "Marlowe, Queer Studies, and Renaissance Homoeroticism," which offers an account of orderly and disorderly intimacy between men in the play. DiGangi argues that the play situates the crime of sodomy in Mortimer's regicide, *not* in the homoerotic relationship between Edward and his favorites. Other scholars argue, as Curtis Perry does in "The Politics of Access and Representations of the Sodomite King in Early Modern England," that while the charge of sodomy is politically motivated, it nevertheless "becomes impossible to separate the erotic from the political" in the play (1061-1062). Jonathan Crewe, too, cautions that to imagine male homoeroticism as comparatively unfettered in the early modern period (in contrast to more contentious and often homophobic modern-day constructions of sexuality) risks ignoring the ways in which the discourse of sodomy produces homophobic effects. See Crewe's "Disorderly Love: Sodomy Revisited in Marlowe's *Edward II*."

Back to the Future

In many ways, *Edward II* draws on a set of themes historically associated with sodomy. As Patricia Parker notes, sodomy is associated with the "preposterous," which "connotes… the reversal of *post* for *pre,* back for front, after for before, posterior for prior, end or sequel for beginning" ("Preposterous Reversals" 435-436). These figurations of sodomy posit a horizontal, linear axis on which sodomy takes shape. It is this linear axis that shapes sodomy's association with backwardness and behindness as well. In a notable divergence from this model, Jeffrey Masten's "Is the Fundament a Grave?" considers early modern figurations of the rectum as fundament, or, as he puts it, "an asshole that is not the derogated bottom of the lower bodily strata, not the backside of what should 'rightfully' be front-sided" (139). If sodomy confounds a linear and binary order (pre and post, front and back, generative womb and wasting anus), Masten's argument demonstrates that the anus is not necessarily coincident with the figuration of sodomy's behindness, though the two concepts have achieved a largely unqueried cohabitation in much prevailing early modern scholarship. Rather, in the rhetoric of the fundament, Masten finds that the anus registers not only as the back-end of the body but as a bodily foundation. Masten writes, "This is not a language of passivity; in fact, it seems largely outside or unengaged with an active/passive binary. At the same time, the fundament is imagined as originary: an offspring, a beginning—and thus at some distance from the preposterous ends of the other anal rhetorics" ("Fundament" 134). Masten troubles, here, the seemingly easy confla-

tion of the anus and the disordering force that defines sodomy by querying to what extent the anus *necessarily* figures that disordering force.

Masten glosses Marlowe's *Edward II* only briefly in "Is the Fundament a Grave?" He finds that the diverse narrativizations of the life and death of King Edward II illustrate the two different early modern ways of thinking the anus: assbackwards, on the one hand, and fundamental, on the other. With regard to Marlowe's version, Masten accords with the critical consensus: "Edward ends face down, overthrown, arsieversie, bottoms up" ("Fundament" 139). Masten contrasts Marlowe's version to a 1628 verse narrative credited to Francis Hubert, in which "Edward ends face up, ass down, the table on his *breast*" ("Fundament" 139). Masten observes that in Hubert's poem,

> Edward goes on to narrate another stanza, a kind of moral conclusion or end to his story, and with it, there comes the reader's realization that this whole text—spoken in the first person singular, as these excerpts have suggested—emerges *after*, or on the basis of, his end. The fundament again seems no grave here, at least in a narratological or discursive sense. ("Fundament" 139)

For Masten, Hubert's version illustrates a different bodily understanding of the anus and its penetration; it *dissociates* Edward's end from death, at least insofar as Edward's narrating voice persists, indifferent to his bodily end. Masten finds that Hubert's version of Edward, from a face-up position, survives after his own end-

ing, a subject whose fundament serves as foundation, as an "end" on the basis of which Edward's narrative emerges in the first place.

The fact that Masten must move past Marlowe's *Edward II* in order to locate a version of Edward II's narrative that does *not* comply with a bodily paradigm in which the anus opens onto death is not at all surprising, given the fabled scene of sodomitical retribution conjured up by the play's ending. Even scholars who consider the play to evidence, as Thomas Cartelli puts it, "Marlowe's violation of his age's heterosexual bias" (218), tend to acknowledge that ultimately *Edward II*'s queer play is circumscribed by its purgative ending, which is generally thought to eliminate the threat of social and sexual disorder and to permit the orderly ascendancy of Edward III.[25] If, however, we consider Marlowe's *Edward II* through the lens of what Lacan might designate as Edward's "attitude that the race is run" (272),[26] including the text's repeated claims that Edward is or might as well be already dead, then Hubert's and Marlowe's Edwards have more in common than Masten gives them credit for.

In Marlowe's play, Edward, having given up his crown, knowingly faces his assassination at the hand of Lightborn. To Lightborn, Edward defiantly demands, "Know that I am a king" (5.5.88), but Edward's use of his title immediately gives

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[25] In *Sex, Gender, and Desire in the Plays of Christopher Marlowe,* Sara Munson Deats suggests that the play produces an undecidable ambiguity, calling it a forceful "interrogation of obligatory heteroeroticism" even as she concludes that "the radical subversion of the play is contained in the return to normality in the denouement" (201).

[26] For more on the play's "mood of resignation," see Constance Brown Kuriyama's *Hammer or Anvil: Psychological Patterns in Christopher Marlowe's Plays,* pp. 193.

way to self-doubt. Edward continues helplessly: “Oh, at that name / I feel a hell of grief. Where is my crown? / Gone, gone! And do I remain alive?” (5.5.88-9). Edward expresses astonishment that he “remains alive” after the loss of his crown, the object without which his identity as king begins to unravel. Living past and in spite of a loss that splits him from himself, Edward poses a question that marks his uneasy position at the limit of his own life. His question thus troubles Masten’s understanding of Edward’s facedown position in death as the play’s straightforward analogy of the anus and the grave.

Further attention to Edward’s anticipation in advance of his death indicates that perhaps Marlowe’s ending is not quite as “bottoms up” as criticism has been wont to believe. Prior to his assassination, Edward is made to stand in the “mire and puddle” of the castle (5.5.58), imprisoned with the castle’s literal excess and excrement. In such a setting, the command “Know that I am a king” echoes hollowly, as though the title of “king” itself is leaking as freely as the castle drains. The uncertainty about Edward’s kingship is, of course, not unfounded, as Mortimer Jr. has already seen to it that Edward’s son is crowned even before his father has been put to death. Edward’s effort to exert his power as “a king” founders, Gregory W. Bredbeck argues, as “the ending of the play creates a bifurcated world in which the rhetoric of the kingly body politic exists simultaneously with a world that does not allow it to mean” (76). After losing the crown, Edward’s linguistic alienation extends to an inability to feel his own body: imprisoned in the muck expelled from the castle, he states, “My mind’s distempered and my body’s

numbed, / And whether I have limbs or no I know not" (5.5.63-4). As Edward nears his death, the fragmentation and alienation of meaning and body further confuse the position of his body as well as the location of his ending.

Edward complains, "The dungeon where they keep me is the sink / Wherein the filth of all the castle falls" (5.5.55-56). In the sunken bowels of the castle, then, the figural resonance of Edward's fate might seem fairly evident; he is meant to sink with the rest of the castle waste into the death he deserves.[27] Constance Brown Kuriyama notes that the stench of excrement is Marlowe's alteration of Holinshed's account, in which the stench of carrion pervades the scene of Edward's imprisonment (194). Marlowe's text, then, maps the depth of Edward's fall from power onto the body, a revision that places particular emphasis on the discursive association of Edward's sodomitical crime with anality. Further, Marlowe's revision of Holinshed anatomizes the purgative logic that secures the social order by excrementalizing Edward. The healthy social body, in other words, depends upon the smooth movement of digestion and waste management.

Something surprising, however, stops up the smooth functioning of the allegory through which Mortimer Jr. hopes to flush Edward down the drain. That is, Edward's own body proves too resilient. Matrevis remarks on how, against all expec-

[27] Edward takes up the figure of sinking, of an untroubled slide into death, earlier, in the abbey just before his capture, when he pleads, "Good father, on thy lap / Lay I this head, laden with mickle care. / Oh, might I never open these eyes again, / Never again lift up this drooping head, / Oh, never more lift up this dying heart!" (4.7.39-43). When he is captured, however, Edward is not nearly so compliant in the face of imminent death. He actually rises up again and compares himself to a lion (5.1.15), kenneled and raging against being contained.

tation, Edward's is "a body able to endure / More than [they] can inflict" (5.5.10-11).[28] Matrevis remarks,

> Gurney, I wonder the King dies not,
> Being in a vault up to the knees in water
> From whence a damp continually ariseth
> That were enough to poison any man—
> Much more a king brought up so tenderly. (5.5.1-6)

As the dampness and filth seep "up" to Edward's knees, Matrevis recalls the way in which Edward was "brought *up* so tenderly." The symmetry between the two marks a congruity of Edward in the dungeon and Edward in *life*, as opposed to the downward directionality of death. Upwardness is the opposite motion from the "sink" that is meant to be Edward's punishment. Even as Edward complains that, "there in the mire and puddle have I stood / This ten days' space" (5.5.58), his "standing," however unwilling, resists the clean purgation of the castle. Further, the persistence of his body even against his will turns Edward's body to a site which, in a material way, resists the smooth functioning of the figurations of purgation with which it has been freighted.

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[28] Thomas P. Anderson comments on Edward's uncanny persistence to argue that the scene "explore[s] the limits of the mysticism that is most often assumed to be the primary element of the concept of the king's two bodies" (601). Anderson suggests that Edward's unexpected survival suggests the impossibility of separating "Edward's royal dignitas… from its profane context" (601). Deats, too, comments on this scene in order to suggest that Edward blurs gendered expectations, since "this final bravery conforms more to the feminine pattern than to the masculine, as Edward demonstrates the passive courage of endurance rather than the active valor of defiance" (185).

In *Powers of Horror,* Julia Kristeva describes a scene much like Edward's mire and puddle when she writes,

> These bodily fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life *with-stands*, hardly and with difficulty, on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border. Such wastes drop so that I might live, until, from loss to loss, nothing remains in me and my entire body falls beyond the limit… If dung signifies the other side of the border, the place where I am not and which permits me to be, the corpse, the most sickening of wastes, is a border that has encroached upon everything. It is no longer I who expel, 'I' is ex-pelled. (3, emphasis mine)

Edward thus stands, or *with*stands, at the brink of death, enduring beyond his own life expectancy, in such a way that he encroaches on the zero-sum life-death economy Matrevis describes, in which Edward's life and his death are fitting complements of one another, the one proceeding in such a way that neatly follows the other. We might share in Matrevis's surprise, then, and attend to the way in which it marks an ill fit, an indeterminate gap, between the living matter of Ed-ward's body and his symbolically fitting death. Importantly, this is the king previ-ously so confident about his ability, regarding the movement of the King of France into Normandy, to "expel him when we please" (2.2.10). In Act Five, Ed-ward's thoughts of expelling another (or, equally, an Other) king are supplanted

by a scene of abjection in which Edward's "I," or his ego, is expelled as he hovers on what Lacan calls "the boundary between life and death, the boundary of the still living corpse" (268).[29]

Pace Masten, Marlowe's Edward, like Hubert's, persists even after death, though with one crucial difference. Marlowe's Edward persists not to narrate his story, as in Hubert, but rather to resist an already-decided narrative. Judith Haber indicates the way in which *Edward II* casts the final "straightening out" that occurs at the end of the play as a brutal, violent, and yet inevitable resolution. She remarks, "Not only does Edward get the point here, we all do; we are unable finally to avoid it" (35). When Edward is imprisoned, Leicester asks a question that seems to support this perspective: he asks, "why waste you thus the time away?" and thereby distinguishes Edward's *un*productive (pointless) use of time in opposition to the productive forward movement represented by the succession of Edward III (son of Edward II) to the throne. For Leicester, time is future-oriented, while wasted time is not properly time at all; it is dead time—time in which Edward II is already dead—which is unproductive in that it only delays the inevitable.

Haber's analysis aligns with Lee Edelman's consideration of reproductive futurism in his reading of the location of the queer in Shakespeare's *Hamlet.* Edelman understands futurism "as a sort of proleptic behindsight: the father's

[29] "I think King Edward will outrun us all," comments Prince Edward (4.2.68). Edward might be out of the running and soon to be usurped, but he nonetheless seems to threaten to overcome the properly human boundaries of "us all."

penetration from behind, from the back, of what he thereby conceives as the future in an act of self-affirmation by which the Child, like Hamlet, gets screwed" ("Against Survival" 161). The joke, for Edelman, is on the Father: the future-oriented, (hetero)reproductive social order turns out to look quite a bit like sodomy, insofar as sodomy is associated with preposterousness. Edelman short-circuits the forward-looking reproductive commandment of the Father with its seeming (and constitutive) opposite: an anal configuration that goes the wrong way, refuses the future and replaces it with the (back)end. Such a figure is, in an appropriately preposterous way, borne out by Haber's reading of *Edward II,* in which she proposes that Edward III is the "point" that *Edward II* (both the play and the person) cannot avoid. The "question of positioning," to borrow Leo Bersani's phrase (23), is not, that is, about who is in front or back (or, in dated but still common parlance, top or bottom), but rather about the position of the preposterous in relation to the resilient and structuring fantasy of proper reproductive sexuality. What Edelman and Haber's bodily figurations make apparent is that entering (as well as taking) from behind is precisely the position of a body looking forward, anticipating the future and the Child who bears it. If sodomy is "that enemy not only of nature but of the order of society and the proper kinds and divisions within it" (Bray 191), then the back-door penetration by the Father that Edelman describes is precisely *not* sodomy; or, sodomy, that set of arsieversie bodily configurations, is both intrinsic and inimical to the order of the Father.

Even prior to his ultimate placement in the muck of Berkeley Castle, Edward dithers and defers as much as he possibly can, which is all the more striking for the way in which he does so—not, that is, as though he has any hope of survival, but rather with an air of delaying the inevitable. Edward dramatically vacillates over whether to hand over the physical crown to Winchester and Trussel when they come to retrieve it even though it is already obvious that his authority and political power are irreparably lost. First, he removes the crown, crying, "Here, take my crown—the life of Edward, too," but he immediately hesitates, deciding, "But stay awhile. Let me be king till night" (5.1.59-60). The reason he gives is simply that he wishes to "gaze upon this glittering crown" for a few hours longer (5.1.61). Edward changes his mind six times in sixty lines, replacing the crown on his head, commanding Winchester and Trussel to leave, calling them back again, and beginning again to hand it over, all only to hesitate further.[30] Such agony over the object itself seems unfounded, given that he has already lost the political power it is meant to signify. Early in the scene, prior even to the first of Edward's six changes of heart, Leicester delivers the emblematic question to which I have alluded already: "Why waste you thus the time away?" (5.1.50). The question bespeaks Leicester's certainty about the inevitability of what is to come next: the new king has been crowned and Edward's imprisonment in the bowels

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[30] Catherine Belsey, in "Desire's excess and the English Renaissance theatre: *Edward II, Troilus and Cressida, Othello*," remarks upon a similar back-and-forth movement in Edward's relation to Gaveston, describing Edward's displays of desire as "a form of conspicuous, unproductive expenditure which far exceeds utility (87).

of the castle makes his death seem imminent. For Leicester, the time is wasted, not because Edward's decision matters one way or the other, but precisely because his decision doesn't matter at all.

Edward's ensuing monologue does respond to Leicester's question, however obliquely, insofar as it resists the passage — indeed, the purgation — of time toward which Leicester attempts to push him. Edward's request to "but stay awhile" and "let [him] be king till night" blossoms into a series of much grander gestures (5.1.59). He goes on,

> Let never silent night possess this clime;
>
> Stand still, you watches of the element;
>
> All times and seasons, rest you at a stay,
>
> That Edward may be still fair England's king. (5.1.65-7)

The passage begins with his command to "but stay awhile," and the following alternation of "stay" and "still" weaves stasis throughout his grandiose entreaty to the heavens. He shifts his position, however, after nearly handing over the crown a second time. The second rebuttal acknowledges the loss of his political weight by referring to the looming figure of "a new-elected king" (5.1.78). The added acknowledgement transforms Edward's repeated demand, "let me wear it yet awhile" (5.1.83), from a metaphysical plea to a deferral of something already decided. His language inflates only to deflate again, from the titanic and abstract "watches of the element" to the physicality and specificity of "feel[ing] the crown upon [his] head" (5.1.82). Edward's dithering dilates, in a spatial as well as a tem-

poral sense, to insist on stoppage and on waste in the face of every sign that, to recall Lacan, "the race is run." In order to keep from being dead, to keep from acceding to a position of nonbeing, Edward takes refuge in dithering. He rises up amidst the castle's refuse to refuse the arrival of an ending that, as far as the rest of the kingdom is concerned, might as well have already come to pass.

Edward's dithering takes the form of a narrow and relentlessly repetitive vocabulary of deferral. The words "let," "yet," "stay," and "awhile" recur in various permutations not just in the scene in which Edward surrenders his crown, but in Edward's speech throughout the play.[31] Even as Leicester intervenes to call Winchester and Trussel back, saying "the king is willing to resign," Winchester replies skeptically, "If he be not, let him choose" (93-94). Edward rejoins,

> O would I might, but heavens and earth conspire
> To make me miserable. Here, receive my crown.
> Receive it? No, these innocent hands of mine
> Shall not be guilty of so foul a crime.
> He of you all that most desires my blood,
> And will be called the murderer of a king,
> Take it. What, are you moved? Pity you me?
> Then send for unrelenting Mortimer,
> And Isabel, whose eyes, being turned to steel,

[31] Indeed, Edward's cry just before he is killed at last repeats his favored litany: "Oh, let me not die yet! Stay, oh stay awhile!" (5.5.100).

> Will sooner sparkle fire than shed a tear.
>
> Yet stay, for rather than I will look on them—
>
> Here, here! (5.1.95-107)

After sixty lines of speech, a final "yet stay" moves the action forward as it brings about Edward's uncrowning at last. His final "yet stay" simultaneously echoes both his "but stay awhile" and his "let me wear it *yet* awhile" from earlier in the scene. That is, the earlier iterations of this phrase work to defer the very act that the final "yet stay" inaugurates. Edward's final "yet stay" metrically parallels his earlier entreaty of "but stay," as each proceeds after an end-stopped line, and comprises the first foot of its respective line. The shift from his "but stay" to his "yet stay," however, is a shift between opposites: from Edward's attempt to halt Winchester and Trussel to his capitulation to them. The recurrence of the word "yet" produces a similar shift in meaning. In the first instance, "Let me wear it yet awhile," Edward's "yet" pleads for them to continue what they are currently doing—that is, allowing him to wear the crown. In this instance, "yet" gestures backward in time as Edward asks for the present moment to continue, prolonged, in spite of the looming future. The second "yet," however, signals "an additional fact or circumstance which is…the contrary of what would naturally be expected from that just mentioned" ("Yet"). In this usage, "yet" marks a turn away from what comes before; it signals the "additional" or the new.

The latter is crucial to what I want to emphasize here. Edward's monologue is usually understood to be an elaborate effort to convey the former sense of "yet":

Edward, perhaps sensibly, wishes to delay the unpleasantness of relinquishing an object that identifies him as king. David Thurn, in this vein, considers Edward's monologue to be a scene of identity crisis. Thurn writes, "The order of sovereignty gives way as Edward struggles vainly to preserve his name as king, grasping in violent agitation at the crown that he feels slipping away, hoping to find some last moments of comfort" (135). Thurn considers it a scene of hopeless deferral in the face of an inevitable loss, but such a reading overlooks what I argue is actually Edward's labyrinthine poetics of indecision. Edward, by dithering, does not merely lament the imminent loss of the name encapsulated in the crown. Indeed, Edward acknowledges even before launching into his lengthy rehearsal of giving and taking back the crown that relinquishing his crown to his son would ensure that "Edward's name survives, though Edward dies" (4.7.49). A brief consideration of Shakespeare's Richard II, who images the loss of the crown as the unmaking of his body, provides an illuminating counterpoint. Asked if he is "contented to resign the crown," Richard replies,

> Ay no no ay, for I must nothing be;
>
> Therefore no no, for I resign to thee.
>
> Now mark me how I will undo myself;
>
> I give this heavy weight from off my head
>
> And this unwieldy sceptre from my hand,
>
> The pride of kingly sway from out my heart;
>
> With mine own tears I wash away my balm

With mine own hands I give away my crown. (4.1.191-198)

Richard's punning "ay no no ay" negates his cherished identity with a pun: I know no I. He marks his undoing in a catalogue of physical losses, mourning the loss of his title and a coherent identity in one.[32] Poetically, Richard masters his fall into nonidentity by mapping it in neat, ceremonial negations—and, finally, in the absolute terms of life and death. He imagines a direct exchange of his title and his life when he concludes, "Long mayst thou live in Richard's seat to sit / And soon lie Richard in an earthly pit" (4.1.208-209). Faithful pentameter throughout his speech and his finish in rhyming couplets show Richard, in the face of his undoing, as poetically contained as he is mewed in by death's "earthly pit." Edward's speech, in contrast, seems to stretch the space between the assenting "ay" and the resisting "no" that is collapsed in Richard's only briefly indecisive "ay, no, no, ay." By suspending his audience in the indeterminate space of his shifting *yet stay*, Edward's dithering strains the *or* that would seem to organize his choice to be *or* not to be a king. In short, Edward's dithering turns on a more radical symbolic and temporal ambivalence than criticism has previously recognized.

Stephen Greenblatt identifies "in Marlowe's plays a powerful feeling that time is something to be resisted" ("Marlowe" 49). Greenblatt finds that Edward "struggles vainly to arrest time with incantation. At such moments, Marlowe's celebrated line is itself rich with irony: the rhythms intended to slow time only consume it, magnificent words are spoken and disappear into a void" ("Marlowe" 49-50).

[32] Richard goes on to demand a mirror, in which he claims he cannot recognize himself.

Here, Greenblatt, it seems, sees time through Leicester's eyes and finds that Edward merely consumes and "wastes the time away." But such a reading gives short shrift to the way in which Edward stands up in resistance of precisely the *voiding* that his accession to death would provide. In a sense, Edward does not waste time so much as he resists its smooth metabolization.

Edward's Open Secrets

Edward II condenses historical events that spanned thirteen years into a much shorter timeframe, collapsing both geographical and temporal space in the interest of narrative expediency. The indeterminate spatial and temporal dimensions of the play enable the compression of events as well as the seemingly immediate circulation of knowledge *about* those events. Between 2.4 and 2.5, the king and Gaveston part ways, Gaveston is caught by Warwick and Lancaster, and almost immediately upon Gaveston's apprehension, the Earl of Arundel arrives to pass on the following message from the king:

> …His Majesty,
>
> Hearing that you had taken Gaveston,
>
> Entreateth you by me yet but he may
>
> See him before he dies. Forwhy, he says,
>
> And sends you word, he knows that die he shall;
>
> And if you gratify His Grace so far,
>
> He will be mindful of the courtesy. (2.5.32-38)

The immediacy with which Edward hears of Gaveston's fate and dispatches his messenger calls attention to the fact that the play occupies a universe in which narrative shapes space, not the other way around.[33] Despite the immediacy with which news travels, however, the play's dramatization of the struggle for political power is haunted by a pervasive epistemological uncertainty, which takes root, I argue, in the play's circulation of equivocal language.

In the delivery of his message from the king, Arundel's syntax marks out the circuit of his message in a compressed network of pronominal substitutions: the king "entreateth *you by me yet but he may / See him* before he dies." After Edward's earlier insistence about his own self-identification with his favorite, including his cry that "[Gaveston] from this land, I from myself am banished" (1.4.118), the "he" of Arundel's message is unclear, divided as it is between the king and Gaveston.[34] It is not grammatically clear whether the "he" that "knows that die he shall" is the same as the "he" who shall die, but given Edward's repeated comments on the imminence of his own death, it may not matter one way or the other. The profusion of pronouns here traces in miniature a more

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[33] Viviana Comensoli argues that Marlowe's alterations to chronology serve to render the political unrest under Edward's reign as a direct result of his homoerotic relationship with Gaveston; thus, she argues, Edward's "punishment is rooted in a form of paranoia—specifically, homophobia—that is fostered and encouraged by a society that is in crisis precisely because the structures of patriarchy (an orderly body politic, compulsory heterosexuality, and strict allegiance to the law) are no longer tenable" (180).

[34] In addition, when he is reunited with Gaveston in the beginning of the play, Edward effuses, "Why shouldst thou kneel? Knowest thou not who I am? / Thy friend, thyself, another Gaveston" (1.1.141-142).

general paradigm for the circulation of knowledge in the play: short-circuited as well as equivocal, as in the case of the referent of the masculine pronouns.

Karen Cunningham identifies Marlowe's theatrical use of equivocality as a method of resisting the "univocality" of the dominant narrative.[35] Cunningham considers the ambiguity of language in *Edward II* by tracing the ways in which the play's characters dissemble, "speak fair," and use theatrical asides to comment on and undermine a "monological version of events" (217). As the play's use of irony splits the narrative from itself, in other words, the authority of language comes into question. Mortimer suggests as much when, after the earls succeed in banishing Gaveston, Isabella approaches him to request that he call Gaveston back to England. He rebuffs her until she proposes, "Sweet Mortimer, sit down by me a while, / And I will tell thee reasons of such weight / As thou wilt soon subscribe to his repeal" (1.4.225-227). Mortimer's subsequent assent is dubious: he declares, "It is impossible: but speak your mind" (1.4.228). Most obviously, Mortimer's claim articulates his certainty that "it is impossible" that he will be convinced. The line also suggests, however, an "impossibility" of speaking one's mind that the scene bears out visually. Mortimer and Isabella move out of earshot, as the stage direction puts it, to "talk apart." The remaining nobles narrate the scene, doubling what we can see onstage but not hear. "Mark how earnestly she pleads!" comments Warwick (1.4.234). "And see how coldly his looks make de-

[35] Cunningham argues, "Ultimately, Marlowe's treatment of theatricality pits his equivocal dramas against the univocal spectacles of power they seem to reflect, spinning subversion from what begins as imitation" (214).

nial!" Lancaster rejoins, and so on (1.4.235). Eventually, Mortimer returns with the news that he will comply with Isabella's wishes. Isabella brings about her intended aim, then, from which we can conclude that the rhetorical act of persuasion was successful, but the staging of the scene effectively displaces the rhetorical act itself. Isabella's language effects action, that is, but the actual scene of her enunciation occurs only at an inscrutable distance.

Edward's contrasting *in*effectuality is marked by his repeated use of the conjunction "if." In one illustrative instance, Edward rails against his disapproving friends by threatening, "*If* I be king, not one of them shall live" (1.4.105, my emphasis). Rhetorically, of course, the condition of Edward's kingship is meant to be a given. Still, Edward's repeated rehearsals of his status, as we have seen, and his repeated turn to the conditional "if" render the enunciating "I," and its command of kingly authority, radically uncertain.

Mortimer's speech, which often chops the pentameter into brief, direct sentences, contrasts with Edward's more complex, equivocal syntax. When Warwick, for example, commands, "Bridle thy anger, gentle Mortimer," Mortimer replies, "I cannot, nor I will not; I must speak" (1.1.120-121). Mortimer demonstrates a characteristic assertiveness in his response, which cites an "I" unfettered by Edward's indecisive "if." Propelled beyond restraint, Mortimer frames his own speech as a form of taking action. Later, his "must speak" evolves into simply "must" when Isabella pleads, "Forbear to levy arms against the king," and Mortimer responds, "Ay, if words will serve; if not, I must" (1.2.82-83). Persuaded by

Isabella, that is, Mortimer agrees to attempt at first to bring the king to reason with words rather than force, but he remains unconvinced of the power of words to "serve" his purposes. Here, Mortimer's "must" is left unspecified at the end of the line; it opens out to encompass the entire "service" in which he implies words can and will fail. Mortimer's twice-repeated "if" echoes Edward's use of the conditional, but in Mortimer's deployment, the conditional *if*s are bracketed by the homonymic assertions of *ay* and *I*. Mortimer thereby contains or circumscribes the linguistic uncertainty of *if* by imagining himself to be able to supersede the uncertain authority of language.

Mortimer's commanding manipulation of language, however, is not proof against the disorienting ambivalence with which Edward infects the play. Just as Mortimer adopts and redeploys Edward's characteristic "if," Edward repeats Mortimer's "must" when he is apprehended with his new favorite, Spencer, which results in the following exchange:

> KING EDWARD. Spencer, ah, sweet Spencer, thus then must we part?
>
> SPENCER JR. We must, my lord, so will the angry heavens.
>
> KING EDWARD. Nay, so will hell and cruel Mortimer,
>
> The gentle heavens have not to do in this. (4.7.72-75)

Edward adopts the straightforwardness of "must" only when forced; unlike Mortimer's assertive "*I* must," Edward's imperative is brought about by "hell and *cruel Mortimer*." As a result, Marjorie Garber sees Edward as a "helpless victim" of

the "hortatory mode" that characterizes Mortimer's speech (14). It is my contention, however, that Edward's reluctant compliance turns Mortimer's own language against itself as he goes on. Edward admits,

> Well, that shall be, shall be. Part we must,
> Sweet Spencer; gentle Baldock, part we must.
> [*He throws aside his disguise.*]
> Hence feignèd weeds! Unfeignèd are my woes.
> Father, farewell! Leicester, thou stay'st for me,
> And go I must. Life, farewell, with my friends. (4.7.94-98)

The repetition of "part we must" follows his fatalistic acceptance of "That shall be, shall be," but the unnecessary repetitions themselves defer the act of parting even as Edward seems to articulate his resignation to his fate.[36] Edward's repeated "part we must" is both twisted grammatically and lengthened substantially in comparison to Mortimer's "I must speak." Edward goes on, in fact, to pair "go I must" with the theme he returns to later in the bowels of the castle: "thou stay'st for me." Further, Edward's "and" refrains from drawing a clear causal sequence between the two halves of the sentence. Perhaps, that is, Edward means that the imperative "go I must" follows *because* "thou stay'st for me," but it is equally

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[36] Greenblatt considers repetition in Marlowe through the lens of self-fashioning, which he suggests is "set against the culturally dominant notion of repetition as warning or memorial. …This idea of the 'notable spectacle,' the 'theater of God's judgments,' extended quite naturally to the drama itself, and, indeed, to all of literature, which thus takes its rightful place as part of a vast, interlocking system of repetitions, embracing homilies and hanging, royal progresses and rote learning" ("Marlowe" 51).

true that Leicester's action is stayed precisely because of Edward's repeated articulation of the fact that he must go.

Though he defers it, of course, Edward is eventually taken captive and he remains in captivity throughout the final act of the play. Garber notes that enclosure is a characteristically Marlovian theme, as "play after play finds its closure in enclosure; the inner stage, or discovery space, becomes a version of hell, and a place of final entrapment" (6). Edward's entrapment, however, is reiterated and rehearsed again and again, which undermines its supposed finality. When Mortimer and Isabella have captured Edward, Mortimer acknowledges that they must "remove him still from place to place by night" in order to keep his location unknown (5.2.59). Ultimately, Edward is brought "at the last… to Killingworth / And then from thence to Berkeley back again" (5.2.60-61), so the course of enclosures that Mortimer recommends culminates in a larger closed circuit. Mortimer's plot confirms, as Garber argues, "that enclosure poses a constant threat" (6), but it also complicates Garber's association of closure with enclosure. Mortimer's logic, precisely by working so hard to secure his prisoner, is paradoxical in its paranoia: they can only hold Edward "still," that is, if he is constantly moved. Even as he entraps Edward in dungeon after dungeon, then, Mortimer's logic of enclosure is haunted by the threat of its own *dis*closure.

Thus, despite the fact that Edward seems from a certain perspective to succumb to the play's themes of enclosure and containment, he persists in confounding the very logic on which the drama of (en)closure relies. Indeed, even as

Mortimer's shadowy machinations successfully bring about Edward's murder, the secrecy in which the murder is meant to be shrouded proves surprisingly insecure. When Mortimer writes to condemn Edward to death, it seems once again that he asserts his mastery over the instability of language. Mortimer admires his own cleverness in the letter, which, as he says, "contains his death, yet bids them save his life" (5.4.6). Mortimer reads the note aloud, explaining its double meaning:

> *Edwardum occidere nolite timere, bonum est,*
>
> Fear not to kill the king, 'tis good he die.
>
> But read it thus, and that's another sense:
>
> *Edwardum occidere nolite, timere bonum est,*
>
> Kill not the king, 'tis good to fear the worst. (5.4.6-12)

Mortimer's use of the equivocating letter to "contain" Edward's death in a seemingly benign message is, however, hardly airtight. Mortimer's hope to keep the secret message of his letter "contained" seems especially naive when, as Haber notes, "no one, in fact, has any great difficulty construing it" (35). Both Matrevis and Edward III note its double meaning on sight. Not only, that is, does the letter enclose a linguistic contradiction, it also can't help but disclose that contradiction as such.

Reopening the question of closure in *Edward II* demands some re-evaluation of the gruesome murder with which the play ends. Whether Marlowe's play is thought to give us a subversive or complicit, sympathetic or phobic representation

of Edward's desires,[37] Edward's death is generally treated as a fairly straightforward scene of sodomitical punishment. Christopher Shirley acknowledges this collective critical tendency in his study of the lack of a stage direction in Edward's death scene. Shirley notes with gentle irony, "We all know what happens at the end of *Edward II*" (279). In a certain sense, this is true. Holinshed's account of Edward's death resonates inescapably in Marlowe's,[38] and, as Jonathan Crewe puts it, "no one is left to suppose that Edward's murder could take practically any form on stage" (393). Nevertheless, the narrative absence in the place of what "we all know" opens, I argue, onto the crucial epistemological uncertainty that haunts the play.

The lack of an explicit stage direction is not the only place at which a description of Edward's murder is conspicuously absent. Lightborn, the appointed executioner, brags, "I learned in Naples how to poison flowers, / To strangle with

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[37] For more on the question of sexual transgression in the play, see Stephen Guy-Bray's "Homophobia and the Depoliticizing of *Edward II,*" in which he argues that Edward's efforts to publicly recognize his relationship with Gaveston generate "a positive homosexual discourse" that resists the dictates of compulsory heterosexuality (132). For Dympna Callaghan, in contrast, the play's homoerotics are not presented as transgressive, but are rather complicit with the continued operation of patriarchal political power. She argues in "The Terms of Gender: 'Gay' and 'Feminist' Edward II" that "homoerotic attachment and the apparatus of heterosexual alliance both enforce patriarchy in attempts to buttress their own positions" (284). Other scholars treat the play, in David Stymeist's words, as "a cleft text" that offers a sympathetic portrayal of illicit sexuality even as it "is bound… to defend the judicial and popular construction of the sodomite as an appropriate scapegoat, who may be brutally executed for flaunting a complex of early modern sexual, economic, and class strictures" (237-238).

[38] See Stephen Orgel's *Impersonations: The Performance of Gender in Shakespeare's England.* Orgel notes that "modern performances always, and critics nearly always, construe the murder scene as an anal rape with a hot spit or poker, but this is 'correcting' Marlowe by reference to Holinshed" (47).

a lawn thrust through the throat, / to pierce the windpipe with a needle's point, … But yet I have a braver way than these" (5.4.31-37). The adjective "braver" marks a kind of aesthetic pride in his method, but, pressed for more detail, he counters, "Nay, you shall pardon me; none shall know my tricks" (5.4.39). Even so, as soon as the murder has been accomplished, Lightborn immediately demands, "Tell me, sirs, was it not bravely done?" (5.5.115). Though Lightborn is set against elucidating how Edward is to be murdered, he nonetheless demands that its method be appreciated. Indeed, Lightborn can hardly keep himself from drawing attention to his work, though that attention is at odds with the very quality of subtlety for which he demands to be appreciated. The murder is thus a sort of contentless open secret, which opens not onto the particulars of the murder itself, but onto the subtlety that constitutes its very secret-ness. Lightborn is the only character to comment on the method of the murder and he only does so by detailing what it is *not* (a lawn thrust through the throat, etc.) and by insisting on the murder's invisibility and untraceability. The gruesome detail in which Lightborn enumerates his other methods of assassination limns the *absence* of detail regarding Edward's murder all the more prominently.

As I have mentioned, criticism has tended to treat Edward's end as straightforward and, furthermore, decisive, and the implications of thinking through the lacuna of his death have therefore been underestimated. Shirley addresses this gap in the critical conversation by arguing that Marlowe's omission of a stage direction suspends the resolution of Edward's death in such a way that,

without extra-textual interpretive work by editors or performers, it is impossible to univocally identify Edward's crime (and his punishment) as sodomy. For Shirley, Edward's ending, as written, is not quite so obviously an allegory of illicit sex: the limitation of a sodomitical reading here, he argues, is that the text neglects to articulate penetration and its site explicitly. Nonetheless, Shirley contends, "The murder—*if*, again, executed with the spit and in view of the audience—suddenly, shockingly binds the actions of Edward's persecutors into a single cognizable crime: sodomy" (287, my emphasis). I would argue, however, that such a reading risks making sense of sodomy by filling in its absence. The lack of a stage direction, rather than leaving the play open to becoming a straightforward visual representation of sodomy only *if* Edward is penetrated anally, instead marks the paradoxical logic of sodomy's constitutive indeterminacy.

Sodomy, as the defining limit of properly ordered forms of life, is spelled out in Edward's death, not because of a poker inserted at the anus, but because of Edward's persistent liveliness, which paradoxically resists and prolongs the very deathliness that sodomy is made to figure. Edward illustrates this when he asks, "Oh, shall I speak, or shall I sigh and die?" (3.1.122). In the perfect metrical balance of "Oh, shall I speak," and "or shall I sigh," the final foot overbalances, tacks the stopped first consonant of *die* onto the otherwise sibilant line. Garber might call this an instance of Marlowe's "aspiring foot," the upwardness of which rhymes with Edward's own tendency to stand up in spite of the "sink" in which he is meant to be enclosed. Garber considers the aspiring foot to mark places where

Marlowe's characters aspire to break out of the strictures imposed upon them, but where, ultimately, the playwright "succeeds in enclosing, where his characters fail" (20). In this case, I propose, Edward's aspiration is also a sigh; it collapses even as it expands, neither escaping nor acceding to death, but rather persisting in spite of it in the space of indecision. In a world in which, as Baldock describes, "all live to die and rise to fall" (4.7.111), Edward's "or" opens onto a disorganizing liveliness that defies the linearity of Baldock's formulation.

Chapter Three

Jonson's Orificial Play

While the previous chapter considered the waste of time, this chapter turns to a play in which there seems to be no time to waste. Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* stages a booming business in bawdry and fraudulent alchemy run by a trio of protagonists, Face, Subtle, and Doll. The play centers on the house of Lovewit, where Face has been left in charge as his master flees the plague-ridden city. In Lovewit's absence, Face, Subtle, and Doll are kept in constant motion by the recurrent and often ill-timed arrivals of their unwitting customers, which serve as constant reminders or intrusions of the outside world into the domestic space. *The Alchemist* has inspired a wealth of critical work on Jonson's highly referential and tightly controlled use of theatrical space and time.[39] Through their representation of London, Jonson's city comedies reflect on shifting social roles as well as cultural anxieties about social transgression.[40] Mario DiGangi, in *The Homoerotics of*

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[39] Scholarship on Jonson's use of the theatrical space attends in particular to the way in which Jonson's dramatic spaces make reference to the changing social and theatrical landscape of London at the time. Emrys Jones suggests that "crucial distinctions" in social status "are charted out through the ways in which wealthy characters let London into and out of their quarters" (245). See also: Anthony J. Ouellette's "*The Alchemist* and the Emerging Adult Private Playhouse" and James D. Mardock's *Our Scene is London: Ben Jonson's City and the Space of the Author.*

[40] In Adam Zucker's analysis of wit in early modern comedy, he suggests, "Much of the anger, elation, scorn, and eroticism that pulses through early modern comedy follows the branching networks of possibility carved out by wit itself during an unsettled moment in English history. As the population of London doubled twice over between 1500 and 1700, as its markets spread out and commercial exchange became a widespread way of life, as stockings and plays and ballads and satires and riffs and pins and chinaware and all kinds of goods began to pass from hand to hand, the social logic of wit began to cut across expression of political rank, gender relations, and economic status with increasing intensity. It could make masters out of disenfranchised servants and asses out of the King's knights" (11).

Early Modern Drama, tracks the ordering and disordering of the social in Jonson's satiric comedies through the eroticized power dynamics between masters and servants. He argues that *The Alchemist* "achieves a more orderly version of master-servant solidarity" than Jonson's other satiric comedies and thereby avoids the sodomitical disorder that threatens the social in *Volpone* and *Epicoene* (78). This chapter is indebted to DiGangi's influential analysis of the homoerotics that subtend Jonson's satiric association of Subtle's gulls with the ass or arse, which DiGangi describes as "the bodily locus of disciplinary/sexual subordination" (65), though I approach the question of orificial mastery to argue that the play's structuring relation between anality and mastery is not as straightforward as some criticism has considered it to be. Indeed, the bodies of the play open irrepressibly, I argue, to intrude upon the fantasy of self-mastery. I contend that Jonson negotiates the ordering and comic disordering of theatrical space and time through the figures of bodily eruptions, purgations, digestion, and excrescence.

Gail Kern Paster notes that "the relationship between bodily and domestic space, the identification of the body with the house" operates to discipline the social body and to "enforce conformity and, in particular, to focus psychic attention, both positive and negative, upon the sensations of bodiliness, especially bodily boundaries" (150). Paster's germinal work shapes a continuing critical consensus that the lack of bodily control, synonymous with a character's association with excrement, marks a corresponding lack of control over the social and domestic space of the play. I revisit here the question of bodily and social mastery, particu-

larly as it concerns the digestive tract, in light of the distinctive Jonsonian comic quality Adam Zucker describes in *Bartholomew Fair* when he remarks that “the reigning comic convention of the play is accident, or coincidence, and its vision of social mastery is tinged by absurdity and chance outcome” (75). In what follows, I chart *The Alchemist*'s comic accidents, mistakes, and absurdities alongside its figurations of the body to argue that mastery and uncontrol are short-circuited as Jonson’s comedy of orifices develops a discourse of the orifice as inexorable, repetitive, disruptive, and finally central to the movement of the play. Alenka Zupančič’s *The Odd One In* advances a theory of comedy that provides an especially useful analytic lens for such a study. Zupančič’s psychoanalytic theory of comedy is attuned to the way in which “interruptions, punctuations, discontinuities, [and] all kinds of fixations and passionate attachments” persist alongside and within the generic conventions and dramatic forms that shape prevailing historical and literary studies of comedy (3).

Famously, the play begins with a fart. Face, in the throes of an argument with Subtle, brandishes a vial of acid and threatens, “Believe ’t, I will,” to which Subtle retorts, “Thy worst. I fart at thee” (1.1.1). Following the opening altercation, Jonson’s insistence on bodily evacuation endures to the end of the play, or, as Jonson puts it in the Argument, until “all in fume are gone” (Arg. 12). Indeed, Jonson’s fixation on the excretory leads Edmund Wilson to diagnose him as an anal erotic and to locate a “hoarding and withholding instinct” in his work (218), while Joseph Loewenstein goes on to trace the “imprint” of Jonson’s preoccupa-

tion with his own bodily thresholds on his creative works (508). More recent scholarship, however, suggests that Jonson's fixation on alimentary and excretory bodily systems is not fully explicable as a neurotic obsession particular to Jonson himself. Bruce Boehrer argues, with Paster, that Jonson's texts articulate broader culturally determined experiences of bodily uncontrol and waste management in the period.[41] Boehrer argues that Subtle's opening line endows Subtle's anus with the power of speech, which "undoes the categorical distinctions that govern the farting body itself, opening up a smooth anatomical space in which one organ effectively becomes another, assuming the characteristics of the other and operating for and through it" (150). In the development of this critical consensus about Jonson's culturally determined relation to the body, however, the critical conversation remains largely focused on the orifices' excretory functions. Though indeed Jonsonian comic bodies are characterized by their products, the workings of the anatomical passages of the play are as often stopped up as they are functioning. Orificial refusals, failures, and stoppages in the play remain under-studied. This study revisits the relation between "Jonson's anal explosive celebration of the excremental," to borrow a phrase from Will Stockton, and the figure of the stopped-up orifice which would seem to oppose it (5).

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[41] In *The Fury of Men's Gullets: Ben Jonson and the Digestive Canal,* Boehrer explains, "The scatology of [*The Case is Altered*]—and most of Jonson's others—could not succeed dramatically if it were the manifestation of a single dysfunctional personality. …Jonson's preoccupation with excretory processes should arguably be viewed as culturally paradigmatic rather than individually neurotic" (14).

Contain Yourself

Though Paster's reading of *The Alchemist*'s opening altercation is invaluable to an understanding of gender, purgation, and their respective roles in early modern experiences of embodiment, it also elides some bodily significations that I call attention to here. In the opening scene, Face and Subtle spar verbally over which of them is responsible for bringing the other "out of dung," as Subtle puts it (1.1.64), and making their now prosperous shared enterprise in Lovewit's temporarily vacant household possible. Face insists, "But I shall put you in mind, sir: at Pie Corner, / Taking your meal of steam in from cooks' stalls, / Where, like the father of hunger, you did walk / Piteously costive" (1.1.25-28). Paster suggests that in this altercation:

> Subtle and Face each try to set before the other's memorializing imagination the image of an embarrassing earlier body, as if the past self-in-the-body were the inner, the naked, the irreducible self making the present construction shamefully transparent and inessential. They would reduce identity in the other to the regressive extreme of what the body inevitably and involuntarily produces and has always produced—its own excrement. (146)

Paster condenses the way in which the play's anxieties about social mastery are expressed alongside an anxiety about bodily control or self-possession. There is, however, more to say with regard to how Face describes the memory of Subtle and its association with waste. As Face insists on his role in saving his colleague

from impoverishment, the image he calls up is not one in which the salient quality of the body is its "inevitable and involuntary" excretion. Rather, Subtle's "piteously costive" body is *unable* to produce. The jibe embarrasses Subtle not precisely by conjuring the image of his body's inevitable products, but by reminding him of a time when his social and economic position was so low, he lacked even the means, as Face puts it, to "relieve [his] corpse" (1.1.41). Indeed, the image of Subtle's past self is piteous not only because it reduces Subtle's constructed identity to the "social nullity" of the body's involuntary processes (Paster 146), but more precisely because that remembered body is costive, or failing to produce anything at all. What emerges in Face's insult is an image of doubled lack: Subtle is so penniless that he can afford to consume nothing but steam, and, lacking sustenance, his body is doubly frustrated by the impossibility of evacuation.

It is true that Face's insults conjure a remembered image of Subtle that wafts the unpleasant scent of excrement in its wake. Face recalls Subtle "pinned up in the several rags / [He]'d raked and picked from dunghills before day" (1.1.33-34). The dunghill rags, however, associate Subtle with excrement only to underscore what Face has already disclosed: Subtle was perhaps reduced to smelling like it, but he was unable to produce it. The remembered image of Subtle walks the opening scene like a ghost: stopped up and penniless, he lacks a proper body. Like the rags, the other details in Face's description enumerate signs of Subtle's bodily lack. He describes Subtle's "moldy slippers," "felt of rug," and "a thin threaden cloak" which, Face insists, "scarce would cover [his] no-but-

tocks" (1.1.35-37). Notably, Subtle's nearly uncovered rear end appears only as its own absence. That is to say, the site at which his body ought to manifest its involuntary products appears as a flattened surface rather than a productive orifice. Further, his threadbare cloak manages only just to hide from view the place where his ass should be. The embarrassment of having his ass on display, then, is less the embarrassment of uncontrolled bodily production than it is the embarrassment of lacking a body in the first place. This bodily lack, brought into view precisely by just barely being hidden, continues to haunt the play even as Subtle and Face move on to the following scene.

Katherine Eisaman Maus describes the threat of scarcity which underlies *The Alchemist* as a structural feature of Jonsonian satire more generally. She writes, "The fundamental principle of what I shall call Jonson's 'satiric economy' might, anachronistically, be called the law of the conservation of matter. In the comedies and the satiric epigrams, he represents a world that contains a predetermined quantity of substance, a quantity not subject to increase" (44). The economy of scarcity that constrains Jonsonian comedy, Maus notes, results in the recycling and recirculation of commodities and other props among the characters of the play. Even as Face and Subtle offer promises of limitless wealth, the material wealth represented onstage remains resolutely finite. No sooner has Sir Epicure Mammon promised to deliver his pewter and brass possessions into Subtle's hands, for example, than the same objects are promised forthwith to Tribulation Wholesome and Ananias. Customers and commodities alike circulate and re-cir-

culate into and out of the space of the house, and the frenetic quality of their movement is underscored by the play's compliance with unities of time and space.[42] Viewed in light of the play's sustained analogy of the house with the body, the circulatory movement of objects and customers figures the digestive movement of the body, and Jonson's satiric economy materializes the passage of matter through the alimentary tract. The frenzy of constant transactions, however, is never fully insulated against the digestive stoppage imaged by the specter of Subtle, which marks the absence that occasions the action of the play.

Face goes on to taunt:

> All your alchemy and your algebra,
> Your minerals, vegetals, and animals,
> Your conjuring, cozening, and your dozen of trades
> Could not relieve your corpse. (1.1.38-41)

Face's teasing makes reference to Subtle's characteristic tendency to employ seemingly inexhaustible lists of materials and alchemical procedures in order to to dupe his customers into purchasing his services. Subtle's performance of mastery over the alchemical arts is, though perhaps assisted by the use of props and disguise, fundamentally incantatory: his gulls are not duped, ultimately, by the visual or physical proof of his work, but rather by his mystifying descriptions of alchem-

[42] Ian Donaldson notes in *Jonson's Magic Houses: Essays in Interpretation* that "The action of *The Alchemist* is played out within strict limits both of time and space. …The acting area itself… is confined: no use is made of the inner rooms or upper stage for acting purposes, allowing for a concentration of effect" (74).

ical processes. What appears as encyclopedic knowledge of his materials is also, crucially, a display of wit and poetic mastery. Surly, a skeptic, refers to this practice as "a pretty kind of game" designed to "cheat a man / With charming" (2.3.180-181).

Formally, Face's taunt about Subtle's appearance at Pie Corner repeats the comical bluster of Subtle's "charming." As though the law of the conservation of matter applies here, too, the first syllable of "alchemy and algebra" is recycled in "minerals, vegetals, and animals." The circulation of syllables from the beginning to the ending of his nouns circumscribes a sort of sonic space, a closed loop of syllabic material. The closure of this sonic space and the fact that only the three protagonists demonstrate sufficient wit to enter it circumscribe the position of social mastery that sets them apart from their gulls. Zucker considers the social distance created by being "in on" the joke to suggest, "The distances between characters who successfully manage places and materials and the characters who do not – the distances that help create wit in comedy – are shown to compete with, to collaborate with, and, at times, to overturn entirely other status hierarchies, including those organized by wealth, gender, and political rank" (18). Subtle's witty manipulation of the linguistic material of the list thus serves a dual purpose: it stands in for his purported manipulations of the alchemical materials he summons and it generates the social distance that structures the social hierarchy of the

play.[43] There is, I propose, a third and related effect of Subtle's alchemical language, which is that the circulation of syllabic material resonates with the digestive movements of the satiric economy. Subtle's abject specter at Pie Corner, after all, suffers not only a digestive blockage but a linguistic one as well: neither Subtle's no-buttocks nor his "conjuring, cozening, and dozen of trades" can produce the relief of his corpse. His lack of a body thus coincides with the failure of the spell-like power of "charming" Subtle uses to materialize his gulls' desired objects.

The piteously costive, disembodied Subtle who is conjured to walk "like the father of hunger" through the opening scene of the play contrasts starkly with his later, much livelier incarnation – a contrast marked with the exuberant assertion of "I fart at thee" (1.1.1). His reincarnation replaces no-buttocks with a "speaking asshole" (Boehrer 150), which, by farting at will, boasts of his renewed control over his body's products. The speaking hole opens to release Subtle from the immobilized state of having no-buttocks; it signals his propulsion into a renewed world of meaning, a world in which his conjuring *can* relieve his corpse. Yet, though the cooperation of mouth and anus announces the revivification of Subtle's language, Subtle's spoken "I fart at thee" nevertheless suggests that the orifice is not fully able to speak for itself. The doubled utterance introduces a split

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[43] For more discussions of the spatialization of social hierarchy in and as the space circumscribed by witty exchange, see Lorna Hutson's "Liking Men: Ben Jonson's Closet Opened." See also Michelle O'Callaghan's *The English Wits: Literature and Sociability in Early Modern England.*

within the renewed bodily coherence it simultaneously produces. At once excessive and insufficient, the utterance of the fart is split from itself.

What a Drag

Face, Subtle, and Doll have no shortage of interested customers to ply with lively linguistic play. One such customer, Abel Drugger, calls upon Face and Subtle to request a sign for his shop to guarantee success. Subtle describes a series of images he envisions for Drugger:

> SUBTLE. He first shall have a bell, that's Abel;
>
> And by it standing one whose name is Dee,
>
> In a rug gown; there's D, and rug, that's Drug;
>
> And right anent him, a Dog snarling "er"—
>
> There's Drugger, Abel Drugger. That's his sign. …
>
> FACE. Abel, thou art made. (2.6.19-25)

Maus notes that the sign-making scene demands the recycling of materials which constitutes Jonson's satiric economy. She writes, "Subtle takes a name that suits its druggist owner perfectly, splinters it into meaningless bits, and then recompiles the scraps into a bizarre and fortuitous array" (47). Subtle's operation on Drugger's name treats the matter of language as interchangeable with the matter of Mammon's brass and pewter—as material that can be recycled to generate profit. Drugger's sign, like the rebus Freud describes in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, provides an image that fails to cohere into a pictorial whole. The fragmentary image which remains nonsensical in the visual register is justified, or made sense of,

by the “poetical phrase” that the rebus translates (278). The final product, Face claims, will prove “a thriving sign” (2.6.7). Here again, Subtle’s alchemy grants a kind of vitality to the material that he recycles; and further, the sign is animated *by* the very figurative operation that “splinters it into meaningless bits.”

Drugger has it made, then, because he has been made: the pieces of his name have been reassembled into an image that both promises a thriving business and stands in for Drugger himself. Subtle asserts this twice: “There’s Drugger, Abel Drugger. That’s his sign.” Such a decisive claim might seem comical in part because the strained metonymies that intervene between Drugger’s name and the image Subtle constructs to represent that name, of course, verge on the absurd. From a Zupančičean perspective, however, sheer absurdity does not fully account for the comic structure of the scene. Zupančič suggests that a comic scene stages “the impossible sustained encounter between two excluding realities” (57), which she likens to the sides of a Möbius strip. Zupančič writes,

> The *intrusion of the other side,* which is one of the most common comic procedures, is not simply about the other side undermining, even destroying, this side. Although this destruction may occur at some point, it never constitutes the heart of a comic scene. The first and the main comic purpose of the intrusion of the other side lies in what it enables in terms of juxtaposition of the two sides, their contemporaneity, their “impossible” joint articulation. (Zupančič 58, emphasis in original)

Indeed, it is not the case that Subtle's translation of Drugger's name simply gives way to nonsense. Rather, Subtle's doubled assertion of, "There's Drugger," on the one hand and, "That's his sign," on the other insists on the "thriving" synonymy of Drugger's name and his sign. Their joint articulation enfolds Subtle's meaning-less, fragmentary syllabic translations into the production of an impossible syn-onymy.

Mammon, one of the most memorable of the gulls, also voices a desire for an image in which he sees himself, though where Drugger's aims are purely eco-nomic, Mammon elaborates grandiose descriptions of the erotic pleasures he will be able to afford when he has procured the philosopher's stone:

> I will have all my beds blown up, not stuffed;
> Down is too hard. And then, mine oval room
> Filled with such pictures as Tiberius took
> From Elephantis, and dull Aretine
> But coldly imitated. Then my glasses
> Cut in more subtle angles, to disperse
> And multiply the figures as I walk
> Naked between my succubae. (2.2.41-48)

Mammon's desire to effect the proper "cut" of his mirrors bespeaks a desire to replicate the images of himself and his partners perfectly and indefinitely. In addi-tion, he peruses an imagined panoply of erotic images as though to insist on his own discerning taste. He differentiates his preferred scenes of desire by claiming

that they possess more immediacy and liveliness than mere "cold imitations." Mounting pictures from Elephantis alongside reflections of his own erotic acts, Mammon articulates a fantasy of closing the gap between imitation and life, or of endowing imitations with life. In contrast to the production of Drugger's sign, which is a figurative, fragmentary image of Drugger's name, Mammon produces a fantasy of surrounding himself with representations of embodied acts that are so perfect as to transcend "cold imitation" and take on a life of their own.

Mammon visits his life-giving fantasy upon another imagined body when he avers, "I'll make an old man of fourscore a child… Nay, I mean / Restore his years, renew him, like an eagle, / To the fifth age; make him get sons and daughters" (2.1.53-56). Here, Mammon imagines the generative motion of his own "making" as at once restorative and reproductive. As when he imagines the erotic images of Elephantis to be more lively than those of Aretine, Mammon imagines generating life as the re-embodiment of a lost past state of wholeness. Importantly, for Mammon, the body to which life has been fully restored registers as a coherent image. Mammon's fixation on perfect wholes avoids, by virtue of remaining in the register of pictorial images, the fragmentation and linguistic play that endows Drugger's sign with, to recall Maus's phrase, "bizarre and fortuitous" vitality.

Subtle underscores the contrast by offering a variation on the very theme that so fascinates Mammon: reproduction. As he explains the alchemical process of making gold from other metals, Subtle argues:

> Nor can this remote matter suddenly
>
> *Progress* so from extreme unto extreme
>
> As to grow gold and leap o'er all the means.
>
> Nature doth first *beget* th'imperfect; then
>
> *Proceeds* she to the perfect. Of that airy
>
> And oily water, mercury is *engendered*. (2.3.155-160, emphasis mine)

As Subtle describes it, the material transformations wrought by alchemy rely on a kind of genealogical production in which the "perfect" is begotten from "th'imperfect." In contrast to Mammon's verbs of return and recovery, however, Subtle's metaphorical figures mount a narrative of progression. Subtle insists that each object to be transformed already contains the thing it becomes within it, just as an egg "is a chicken *in potentia*" (2.3.134). Subtle's figurative narrative of reproduction tells a circular story of transformation in parts, while Mammon eschews figurative fragmentation in favor of a literally reproductive fantasy of perfect reduplication. Mammon's fantasies of giving life, too, fail to thrive with the comic vitality that animates Subtle and Face's alchemical incantations. The play makes a fool out of Mammon as, despite his fervent belief in his own beneficence, he succeeds only at "creating spurious abundance" (Maus 49).

Mammon's expansive, appetitive mood differs starkly from the demeanor of his companion, Surly. Throughout a discussion of Mammon's possessions, which Mammon intends to have transmuted into gold, Surly remains skeptical:

> MAMMON. Then I may send my spits?
>
> SUBTLE. Yes, and your racks.
>
> SURLY. And dripping-pans and pot-hangers and hooks,
>
> Shall he not?
>
> SUBTLE. If he please.
>
> SURLY. To be an ass.
>
> SUBTLE. How, sir!
>
> MAMMON. This gent'man you must bear withal.
>
> I told you he had no faith.
>
> SURLY. And little hope, sir,
>
> But much less charity, should I gull myself. (2.3.119-124)

Surly, no less than Mammon, articulates a fantasy of bodily control, though Surly's takes a negative form in contrast to Mammon's vision of plenitude and bodily perfection. The list of Surly's traits enumerates three things Surly *lacks*—faith, hope, and charity—in contrast to the long list of things Mammon possesses. The contours of Surly's character are thus not "blown up" as Mammon's are, but rather thrown into relief by the qualities he lacks. Surly believes himself immune to the charms of alchemical cant. Proudly, he claims he "is, / Indeed, sir, somewhat costive of belief" and "would not be gulled" (2.3.25-27). His vaunted immunity to Subtle's tricks expresses itself in the form of a phobia of bodily openings: he will not be gulled, or stuffed, and so he remains costive, or stopped up. As though Surly reincarnates Subtle's remembered costive specter at Pie Corner,

then, it seems Subtle's conjuring, cozening, and dozen of trades will not relieve *Surly's* corpse so long as Surly gets his way.[44]

Surly, as he denounces the false practice of alchemy, parrots Subtle's rhetorical strategy. He demands:

> What else are all your terms [if not charming],
> Whereon no one o'your writers 'grees with other?
> Of your elixir, your *lac virginis*,
> Your stone, your med'cine, and your chrysosperm,
> Your sal, your sulfur, and your mercury,
> Your oil of height, your tree of life, your blood,
> Your marcasite, your tutty, your magnesia,
> Your toad, your crow, your dragon, and your panther,
> Your sun, your moon, your firmament, your adrop,
> … And worlds of other strange ingredients,
> Would burst a man to name? (2.3.182-198)

Surly's imitation is meant to sound like nonsense and to make the alchemist's lists, by association, appear to be nonsense as well. In order to do this, Surly omits the figures of movement and transformation that impel Subtle's distinctive sonic

[44] Surly goes so far as to imagine how he would punish himself if he were to allow Subtle's tricks to work on him: he would engage a prostitute to relieve *herself* on his eyes, which he imagines as the bodily site of his imagined cozening. He claims, "If my eyes do cozen me so… I'll have / A whore shall piss 'em out next day" (2.1.44-46). Paster notes, "He hypothetically constructs his own self-shaming ritual as the consequence of failing in cognitive self-control and shrewdness" (50).

circulations. In the absence of Subtle's purification and progression metaphors, Surly's list insists, all that is left are "terms / Whereon no one o'your writers 'grees with other." Without consensus, that is, Surly sees only nonsense, or the absence of sense. For Surly the multiplicity of meanings that constitutes the language of alchemy marks the absence of meaning; alchemy's multiplicity is antithetical to truth, which Surly conceives of as unitary or singular. Surly replaces Subtle's stylistic tendency toward repeated syllables and internal rhyme with the repeated use of "your"—which is to say, he reiterates a singular, unchanging syllable to contrast the fragmentation and re-appropriation that characterizes Subtle's poetic play.

In Surly's delivery, the rhetorical repetition becomes a way of disavowing the language he parrots. He circumscribes his own knowledge of alchemical ingredients by attributing ownership to Subtle, thereby cordoning off alchemy's nonsense as the sole property of the Other. The overflow of nonsense terminology, Surly claims, threatens to "burst a man," which re-figures alchemy's untrustworthy multiplicity as a threat to the coherence of the body. Surly's costiveness thus figures his unwillingness as a stoppage or blockage of the bodily circulations that structure the Jonsonian comic economy. Even as the figure of costiveness refers to Surly's lack of belief, rather than a literally embodied lack, the metaphor of being stopped-up describes his refusal to participate as a refusal to be gulled, or stuffed, or penetrated. In order to maintain the impenetrability of his body, Surly refuses to enter the world of Subtle's "strange ingredients" (or, perhaps more to the point,

to allow it to enter him). To do so would be to risk "bursting," or puncturing the bodily coherence Surly anxiously maintains.

Zupančič describes

> the way in which comedy manages to stretch the momentariness of the short circuit, how it manages to *faire la comédie,* to "make a (whole) scene" out of this structural moment, by not simply letting it go, by insisting on it "beyond reason," and exploring it from different angles—by refusing to "cut the comedy." (65-66)

The movement "beyond reason" that structures comedy for Zupančič describes a crucial relation between Surly's costive logic and Subtle's response to Surly's mockery. Surly articulates a unitary logic of truth, within which the multiple meanings of dissonant alchemical texts can only signify nonsense. Subtle, however, reunifies the multiplicity of meaning Surly protests when he replies, "And all these named / Intending but one thing, which art our writers / Used to obscure their art" (2.3.198-200). The truth of alchemy, according to Subtle's calculus, emerges in its doubled articulation—or, in the mystifying gap between the two "arts" he describes. Rather than denying Surly's claim altogether, Subtle keeps the comedy going by agreeing that the logic of alchemy fails to cohere and, further, by suggesting that it makes sense anyway.

Surly voices skepticism in the form of snide asides throughout Face and Subtle's negotiations with Mammon. He positions himself as an aloof commentator rather than a participant in the exchange. When Subtle muses, "The work

wants something" (2.3.70), Surly is quick to announce, in an aside, his own foreknowledge of the request Subtle is about to make. Surly declares, "Oh, I looked for this. / The hay is a-pitching" (2.3.70-71). He continues to mock Mammon as Mammon offers money to supply what's missing from the formula for the philosopher's stone. "Be cozened, do," Surly comments derisively (2.3.94). In finding confirmation of his suspicions—namely, that Face and Subtle aim to trick Mammon into giving them more money—Surly is happy to avow that he was "looking for" it all along. Surly's presumption of being "onto" Face and Subtle's deception thus supports his conviction that he has fully mastered the Other's desire and his own desire at once: he finds what he "looked for" by having already known what to look for in the first place. For all his efforts to *stop* the funny business, that is, Surly is nevertheless dragged along, like Mammon, by his relentless effort to confirm what he claims already to know: that, as he says, "this is a bawdy house" (2.3.226).

Surly's steadfastness ultimately does not win him a position of social mastery. In the final act of the play, in fact, Lovewit wins the hand of the widow Surly had hoped to woo, which Lovewit attributes to the fact that Surly "did nothing" in contrast to Lovewit's unhesitating action (5.5.54). Lovewit mocks, "What an oversight / And want of putting forward, sir, was this!" (5.5.54-55). Stopping short instead of "putting forward," Surly fails in his various attempts to outwit the practitioners of false alchemy and to reassert coherence and order. His foresight, Lovewit points out, is an *over*sight, which renders him blind to the machinations

within the house he has been scrutinizing all along. Surly's association with Subtle's costive specter marks, to borrow a phrase from Zupančič, "precisely the point at which the subject is pinned to the Other, where she is pinned to the lack in the Other by her own lack" (85). Surly's unshakeable belief in his own foreknowledge of alchemy's duplicity, in other words, guarantees the consistency of the costive lack to which he is attached. Indeed, the word "costive" is used repeatedly throughout the play in reference to Surly, and the reiteration of Surly's lack becomes a passionate attachment or repetition compulsion in its own right. For all that Surly provides a straight man in contrast to which the extravagant desires of the other characters appear all the more extravagant, and even as he repudiates the money changing hands and the illusions of luxury that sustain the rest of the action of the play, Surly is unable fully to exempt himself from the comic machinery of the play. He appears, rather, to be the biggest fool of all by being the most affixed to the consistency of his own character. Surly's costiveness of belief, in short, maintains nothing so much as his fervent belief in his own costiveness.

The Other Knocking[45]

Writing of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair,* Zucker remarks upon "a word that functions as both the name and the principle of theatrical entertainment in the play. That word is 'motion'" (95). For Zucker, Jonson's plays stage "unruly motions" and "propulsive craving[s]" that constitute a theatrical comic movement in

[45] This section title draws from a stage direction in the Norton anthology, which heralds Mammon's entrance in Act 3 as "the other knocking" (3.5.58 s.d.).

opposition to the stasis of a traditional social order (96). *The Alchemist* suggests a similar opposition, most obviously in the contrast between Mammon's insatiable desire and Surly's fixation on bodily borders. The conclusion of the play elaborates the figuration of the domestic space of Lovewit's house as bodily space and, further, extends the principle of Jonson's comic motion to the movement of digestion.

The dramatic motion of *The Alchemist* is largely comprised of interruptions and intrusions, usually by unexpected or ill-timed visitations by clients at the front door. Subtle and Face are so frequently put out of sorts by their clients' arrivals, that the play gives the impression of it proceeding through the very impossibility of a scene functioning smoothly. One notable interruption issues not from the front door, but from a far more private location within the house, and it arises in the form of Dapper, a clerk who comes to the house in search of a familiar spirit to help him at horse-racing. In Act 3, Dapper's quest to meet the Queen of Faery and, from her, gain the familiar he seeks, leads him to follow Face and Subtle's elaborate instructions for a ritualistic purification of his body. After he obeys the elaborate instructions, Paster argues, Dapper is finally "destined for the privy *because* Face and Subtle have *already* reduced him to "a human waste product—the whole become the fecal part" (159, emphasis mine). Dapper's unfortunate fate draws on "the identification of the body with the house" (Paster 149), insofar as Dapper's body is reduced to bare abject material and consequently excreted by the house-cum-body. Certainly, from the perspective of the affects and abjections that

structure the discourse of bodily shame, Dapper's banishment to the privy might appear as the natural telos of the series of mortifying bodily exercises he is made to endure. Yet such a reading does not fully account for the way in which Dapper's relocation to the privy is not a predestined outcome of his gulling. Rather, Mammon's arrival at the door interrupts the false ceremony, and Face, Subtle, and Doll are made to improvise. If Dapper can be said to be "destined" for the privy, then, he only fulfills that destiny because an accidental, improvised detour produces his destination.

Reconsidering the preordination of Dapper's descent into the privy provides an opportunity to reopen the temporal closure that produces Dapper's destination as his destiny. Within an organizing social logic that rewards self-possession and self-mastery, Dapper's eager consent to Face and Subtle's bodily manipulations appears to take Dapper's body out of his control in a way that reduces him to disembodied parts. If the joke at Dapper's expense is that he was meant for the privy all along, however, that outcome emerges only from a causal discontinuity, an interruption, that takes the form of Mammon's arrival. Mammon's knock at the door is an entirely unwitting intrusion of an Other who, paradoxically, brings about the fate that retroactively appears as the inevitable culmination of the bodily embarrassments that precede it. . In other words, it is a moment of failed closure, an unwitting interruption by the Other who demands a change of scene, which induces the downward digestive movement that deposits Dapper in the privy.

Further, to read Dapper's movement into the privy as the sign of his primarily anal or excretory relation to the house is to neglect the scene's emphatic interest in the opening of Dapper's mouth. Upon Mammon's arrival, Face, Subtle, and Doll resolve to "lay [Dapper] back awhile / With some device" (3.5.56-57). Subtle promises Dapper that the Queen of Faery, played by Doll, "has sent [him], / From her own private trencher, a dead mouse / And a piece of gingerbread to be merry withal / And stay [his] stomach, lest [he] faint[s] with fasting" (3.5.64-67). Even so, Subtle urges Dapper not to eat the gingerbread until the Queen of Faery calls for him. This directive seems in keeping with the Queen of Faery's litany of demands, which have included other forms of purportedly purifying self-deprivation. Subtle assures him, "If you could hold out till she saw you, she says, / It would be better for you" (3.5.67-68). Permitted neither to break his fast nor to faint from his lack of food, Dapper is meant simply to "hold out." The gingerbread thus holds Dapper's body in abeyance; the closure of his scene is suspended as the gingerbread serves both to temper and to amplify his craving.

In the negotiation of Dapper's detour, Face then engineers a pun which extends the figural relation between Dapper's body and the house beyond the anal and excretory associations on which criticism tends to focus. Subtle, in the hope of clearing the stage to make space for the gulling of Mammon, suggests that Dapper "must nor see nor speak / To anybody" until the Queen of Faery comes to him (3.5.72-73). To ensure this, Face makes a suggestion:

> FACE. For that we'll put, sir,

A stay in's mouth.

SUBTLE. Of what?

FACE. Of gingerbread. (3.5.73-74)

Though the gingerbread is offered initially as a way to "stay," or quiet, the fasting Dapper's stomach, Face's pun turns the gingerbread into a gag intended to quiet Dapper himself. The gingerbread, by staying Dapper's body, simultaneously keeps Dapper from intruding on the ensuing scene. The stay, so long as it is held in Dapper's mouth, enables the circulation of bodies and transactions within the house to continue smoothly; or, put another way, as long as the stay stops Dapper's digestion, it ensures the house's economy continues smoothly. Thus, though more critical attention has been focused on the anal excremental implications of the analogy between Dapper's body and the house, the gingerbread stay locates the initial figural point of contact between Dapper's body and the house at the mouth. Further, in the play of the stay in Dapper's mouth, the figural relation between the body and the house is sustained even as the two mutually interrupt one another's functioning.

In Act 5, Lovewit returns to find neighbors clamoring at his door to complain about the traffic into and out of the house in its master's absence. The crowd of neighbors is soon augmented with a succession of disgruntled gulls that arrive to batter at the door in search of Subtle. For Katherine Eggert, the spatial shift from inside to outside the house introduces a limit to the seeming endlessness of Face and Subtle's transformative capacities. Eggert argues,

> Alchemy is confined to Lovewit's house, which facilitates the con artists' schemes through their brilliant use of its exits, entrances, and unseen rooms. …As *The Alchemist* draws toward its conclusion, however, we come to see the house less as having seemingly infinite interior space and more as having a perimeter past which the con artists' fantastical schemes are no longer tenable. This perimeter is established upon the return of Lovewit to his house in act 5, a shift in scene that is also a reduction in the con artists' command both of linguistic malleability and of the alchemical enterprise. (224-225).

Indeed, Act 5 sees Lovewit's return to the house, the subsequent banishment of the rogues (save for Face, who returns to his position as butler), and the marriage of Lovewit to Dame Pliant, all of which might invite us to conclude that, as Eggert says, the scene has shifted; the game is up. One further interruption, however, suggests that though alchemy's charm wears off when we are no longer confined to the space of the house, the comedy's linguistic play is not yet through. Upon Lovewit's return, the succession of knocking, clamoring people at the door is not sufficient to convince Lovewit that his house has been used in his absence. The cacophony, in fact, merely incites Lovewit to marvel, "The world's turned Bedlam" (5.3.54). Face, now clothed as Jeremy the butler, attempts in spite of the crowd to assure his master that "the door has not been opened" in weeks (5.3.34), and it is not until Dapper, long since forgotten in the privy, calls out from within

the house that Lovewit finally calls an end to Face's prevarications. The illusion of the house's closure is finally punctured, then, not by the others knocking at the front door, but by Dapper's intrusion from within.

When scolded for eating his gag, Dapper argues, "The fume did overcome me, / And I did do't to stay my stomach" (5.4.5-6). In Dapper's repetition of the word "stay," the pun outlives the actual gingerbread, which, Dapper explains, "crumbled / Away [in his] mouth" (5.4.1-2). That the gingerbread pun is sustained in this way recalls Zupančič's "intrusion of the other side." Zupančič suggests that while a momentary gag or joke may "[display] the nonrelation between two linked facets of reality," "comedy proper" sustains the "structural moment" of the pun by insisting upon it, or refusing to let it go (65). As the gingerbread crumbles, so too does the harmonious cohabitation of the two punning purposes of the stay: to quiet Dapper's stomach on the one hand, and to keep the house quiet on the other. Once put to use in service of the former, it cannot do the latter. What the comic interruption of one figural "facet" into the other "produces in place of this imaginary Unity is a short circuit between the two facets which involves a comical decomposition of the Unity" (65). Dapper and the house, both seemingly contained, are undone by the comic split that opens up within the pun: the fume of the privy enters and discomposes Dapper's stopped-up body and he in turn punctures the house's semblance of orderly closure. Instead of keeping conflicting plot-lines from crossing, Dapper's stay in the privy exposes the intrusion of one figural level onto the other. *Pace* Eggert, the linguistic play that generates the unrelenting en-

ergy and motion of the comedy persists in excess of the command of the individual protagonists.

The Argument of *The Alchemist* introduces the action of the play as a jam-packed business of "casting figures, telling fortunes, news, / Selling of flies, flat bawdry, with the stone" (Arg. 10-11). According to the Argument, the chaos of Face, Subtle, and Doll's comedy draws to a close only when "it and they and all in fume are gone" (Arg. 12). Cheryl Lynn Ross argues that the play associates the invasion of the home by rogues with the infection of the plague, and she suggests that this line "refers both to the alchemical operation of volatilization and to the plague-preventive technique of burning fragrant wood, herbs, and spices to purify the infected air" (441). Ross acknowledges, however, "Such attempts at cleansing the atmosphere, consisting of burning wood, herbs, coal, sulphur, virtually anything combustible, rather than purifying the air, generally befouled it further" (442). In short, though the fume is thought to be purifying, that purifying effect is achieved only by the addition of another unpleasant stench. Likewise, cleansing the stage of "it and they and all" is marked by a lingering fume. The play's lively trade in the impure, unfinished, and imperfect persists even in the comedy's narrative closure. Indeed, in Face's closing monologue, we might rightly understand that his claim to have "clean / got off" is only as clean as the fume-tinged absence that marks the end of the play (5.5.159-160).

Chapter Four

Seeing Sex in *The Revenger's Tragedy*

The final act of Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* opens as Vindice, the titular revenger, and his brother Hippolito arrange the corpse of the murdered Duke in a seated position so that he appears to be asleep from drink. The scene is a masterful feat of dramatic irony: the corpse is to play the role of a man called Piato, whom Lussurioso, the Duke's son, has hired Vindice to kill. The task, however, is impossible, since "Piato" has been none other than Vindice in disguise all along. When the brothers have transferred the disguise of Piato onto the body of the deceased Duke, they regard the Duke's corpse while Vindice muses: "I must kill myself. Brother, that's I; that sits for me. Do you mark it? And I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder—I must sit to be killed, and stand to kill myself. I could vary it not so little as thrice over again; 't has some eight returns, like Michaelmas term" (5.1.3-9). Vindice, like the protagonists of *The Alchemist*, is an improvisatory virtuoso. Just as he can "vary" his wordplay "not so little as thrice over again," so can he adjust the course of his revenge plot against the Duke and his family to make use of the constantly shifting political terrain of the court. The revenge plot of *The Revenger's Tragedy* takes to an extreme a version of the economy of objects I discuss in the previous chapter: not only are objects and language fragmented, repurposed, and recirculated, but human bodies and identities, too, can be detached, broken into parts, and recycled to

dupe the unwitting. As Karin Coddon suggests, *The Revenger's Tragedy* treats the body as a prop with "infinite utility" (137).

Moreover, the endless utility of the body-as-prop has a vivifying effect on the objectified body. The seemingly endless movement of recirculation and reanimation of the body and its parts forestalls death; it enables Vindice to "stand ready here" even as he prepares to be killed "yonder." The play's uncannily animated objects defy oppositional logics of active/passive, open/closed, and inside/outside, which structure and stabilize sexual discourse. The bodies and the language of the play are animated by a kind of persistent comic vitality that refuses closure and refuses to "cut the comedy" (Zupančič 66). This chapter explores the erotics of the play from a queer perspective which, to borrow from Sue Ellen Case,"imagin[es] sexual objects and sexual practices within the realm of the other-than-natural, and the consequent other-than-living" (4). *The Revenger's Tragedy*'s comic economy of objects, I argue, produces scenes of sex that trouble affective and generic classifications and, further, challenge a penetrative model of sexuality that shapes the critical consensus on the play's sexual politics. This chapter aims to revisit certain figurations of bodily orifices and the limits of sexual knowledge, topics that remain understudied insofar as a penetrative paradigm continues to dominate critical discussions of desire in the play.

This chapter builds on scholarship that explores the gendered cultural anxieties that plague the (mostly male) characters of the play. Scholarly conversations regarding gender and sexuality in *The Revenger's Tragedy* place particular em-

phasis on the play's commodification and fetishization of female chastity,[46] and while the construction of chastity as such is not the primary focus of my analysis here, its central place in critical work on the play provides the terminology which guides my argument. Scholarly consensus tends to hold that Vindice's anxious masculine identity is constructed through the anxious policing of bodily borders and the debasement of women's bodies, thought to be incontinent and untrustworthy. Much scholarship tends to view the circulation of desire in the play as an economy of (w)holes, determining the borders of the early modern body through the lens of negotiations among men that depend on taxonomies of penetrable, impenetrable, and not-yet-penetrated bodies. In what follows, I draw on these existing discussions of early modern gender anxieties and economies of desire, though I shift my focus from the economy of (w)holes to the circulation of and contact between partial bodies and body parts, bodies that are fragmented, out of place, or in two places at once.

Pinning Down the Duke

When he is poised to exact his revenge on the Duke for poisoning his wife, Gloriana, Vindice observes, "Now nine years' vengeance crowd into a minute!" (3.5.121). The description expresses the enormity of his excitement in temporal terms: the culmination of nine years' work is to produce a moment of

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[46] For more discussion of the fetishization of Castiza's virginity, see Haber 66-68. See also Jennifer Panek's discussion of the economic value of Castiza's virginity in "The Mother as Bawd in *The Revenger's Tragedy* and *A Mad World, My Masters*." For another perspective on the position of the (female) virgin with regard to her resistance to a patriarchal sexual economy, see Theodora A. Jankowski's *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama*.

revelation and vengeance that lasts no longer than a minute. The build-up is not itself pleasurable, Vindice seems to suggest, except that it "crowds" into the potent release of the "minute" of revelation. Vindice repeatedly formulates his revenge plot in terms that, for many scholars, reverberate with phallic figurations of erection, penetration, and ejaculation. Indeed, as Judith Haber argues, "[Vindice's] revenge is imagined as an act of sexual dominance, of entering and undoing (unswelling, unfilling, and unmanning) the other" (64).[47] Vindice's triumph over the Duke, importantly, is accomplished by objectifying the female body: the culmination of Vindice's nine years of plotting vengeance is a startlingly graphic scene of poisoning and torture in which Vindice invites the Duke to kiss the poisoned lips of Gloriana's skull, which Vindice disguises as a sexually available woman. In this section, I reconsider the role of the mouth in that scene in order to suggest that the active/passive positional vocabulary that has characterized critical readings of the scene does not fully account for the scene's oral figurations.

Having administered the poison to the Duke, Vindice and Hippolito immobilize him by pinning his tongue to the floor with a dagger. Then, they force him to look on as his wife and illegitimate son, Spurio, share an incestuous kiss. For Peter Stallybrass, the scene shows "the trope of the female seducer, imperson-

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[47] Haber's thorough analysis of the play's self-defeating masculine erotics builds on a rich body of scholarship that explores the hermeneutic function of penetrative sexual figures in the play's bodily landscape. The text is widely discussed in literary and cultural studies of the early modern stage in terms of the construction of male-bodied sexuality as well as concomitant cultural anxieties regarding the female body.

ated by a tongueless skull, insemin[ating] the Duke with poison" (215). Stallybrass argues that

> In this inversion of sexual and social hierarchy, the silent mouth of woman transfixes the tongue of masculine authority. And as the Duke lies, speechless, with a dagger through his tongue, he is forced to watch his Duchess replace his own tail/tale with that of his bastard son. The nailing of the Duke's tongue, in other words, suggests his impotence to prevent his insertion into an "illegitimate" narrative in which… the poisonous/unruly woman dismembers the tales of masculine authority. (Stallybrass 215)

For Stallybrass, these various oral configurations provide a way to index the social transgressions at stake in the scene. Indeed, the question of who is penetrated by whom is a recurrent one within the play's critical history, as the answer is often considered to be a dense nexus of gendered meaning.[48] Following J.L. Simmons's argument that the tongue is figured as phallus in the play's portrayal of rhetorical mastery,[49] Stallybrass argues that the tongue operates as a phallic stand-in at a ma-

[48] For Steven Mullaney the primary recipient of penetration is the skull, as "the dead queen is proved 'all woman' at last, not only entered by the duke's tongue as he kisses her 'like a slobbering Dutchman' but also possessed and mastered by Vindice, who thus proves himself all male, not at all dependent upon or in the hands of women" (161). Emily Griffiths Jones, like Stallybrass, sees the Duke's penetration of Gloriana reversed when she argues, "The grotesquely masculine patriarch's latent femininity is simultaneously revealed and ravished when his intended violation of Gloriana is symbolically performed on him in turn. He might penetrate the skull with his tongue, but its poison enters his mouth as well" (344).

[49] Simmons' analysis of persuasion and seduction in the play applies a penetrative framework to the mouth and tongue to suggest that the mouth is a site at which "the art of penetrating eloquence reverberates into the art of phallic conquest" (64).

terial, embodied level as well. The penetrative paradigm that undergirds Stallybrass's reading crystallizes in the use of the metaphor of insemination to describe the movement of poison from Gloriana's skull into the body of the Duke. Seen from the perspective of an active/passive sexual binary, which suggests that to be the recipient of penetration is to be "transfixed," unmanned, and thereby rendered impotent, the delivery of poison into the body of the Duke appears as the figural insertion of a penis. Such a reading enables Stallybrass to map the Duke's experience as a reversal between the poles of masculine authority, which is conflated with bodily impermeability, and feminine subordination, associated with an orificial openness to penetration. The gendered valences of such a reversal provide valuable insights, but scholarly fidelity to the penetrative metaphor threatens to overlook and oversimplify other bodily configurations available in the scene.

The question of the Duke's impotence, in particular, might be complicated by some further attention to the role of the Duke's tongue beyond and in spite of Vindice's best efforts to transfix it. After ingesting the poison, the Duke persists in hurling accusations of "Traitors, murderers!" (3.5.194), leading Vindice to complain, "What? Is not thy tongue eaten out yet?" (3.5.195). As Vindice's complaint illustrates, the Duke's tongue endures well past the point at which Vindice claims it should have been eaten away by the poison from Gloriana's skull. Additionally, even after Vindice and Hippolito "invent a silence" by impaling the Duke's tongue (3.5.196), the Duke stops speaking only temporarily. He cries out again as he dies, twenty lines later. It is true, then, that the Duke is removed from a posi-

tion of power, but it is nevertheless not the case that he wholly loses control of his tongue. In fact, it rather seems he retains command of his tongue against all odds. The Duke's persistent vocalizations fracture the presumptive conflation of the tongue with the penis, as not only does he continue to speak after being displaced from a position of authority, but further, his tongue persists in resisting Vindice's intended domination of him. Prevailing criticism tends to condense the Duke's fall from power into a singular and seemingly irreversible penetrative motion. Yet some further attention to the Duke's persistent tongue reveals what might instead appear to be a more drawn out and altogether less decisive battle over linguistic authority as well as a richer and more indeterminate field of sexual configurations.

When the Duke first realizes he is under attack, he turns to Hippolito for help, demanding that Hippolito "call treason" (3.5.155). Hippolito responds with heavy irony, saying, "Yes, my good lord.—Treason! Treason! Treason!" (3.5.156), all while "stamping on" the Duke's body (3.5.156 s.d.). The Duke's command to Hippolito presumes his own position as the arbiter of the meaning of that word, the definition of which depends upon who is seen to wield the authority of the state. Hippolito's response displaces the Duke from that position and renders him the guilty party, subject to the punishment Hippolito and Vindice dole out. Even as Vindice and Hippolito assert their own definition of treason over the Duke's, however, their punishment remains a private act of retribution, and not, say, a

public governmental coup.[50] Rather than a straightforward reversal of authority, then, Hippolito's redeployment of the word "treason" opens onto a vacuum in the place of the Duke's former authority. Indeed, as Vindice points out after they succeed in killing the Duke, "The dukedom wants a head, though yet unknown" (3.5.226). The beheaded court persists in its unknowing through Act 4, in fact, as the Duke is not publicly discovered to be dead until the beginning of the final act. The linguistic tug-of-war that is staged at the site of the Duke's body thus underscores what Jonathan Dollimore calls the persistent "involuntary action" animating the bodies of the play (146).

Vindice takes great pleasure in revealing lack—like the court's lack of a head—to those he deems deserving of punishment. The Duke's belated realization, "Oh, 't has poisoned me!" (3.5.150), for instance, prompts Vindice to mock his lack of understanding, as Vindice taunts, "Didst not know that till now?" (3.5.151).[51] When Vindice reveals to the Duke that he has just kissed the skull of Gloriana instead of the shy "country lady" he was expecting (3.5.132), the

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[50] See Lars Engle's introduction to *The Revenger's Tragedy* in *English Renaissance Drama: A Norton Anthology.*

[51] Haber comments on Vindice's enjoyment of revealing what others do not know to suggest that Vindice's compulsion to reveal the truth complicates his desire to maintain the masculine impermeability with which he is associated. Haber notes that Vindice's apparent pleasure in (and even inability to keep himself from) revealing the truth verbally at once asserts a masculine identity, as when he declares, "'Tis I, 'tis Vindice, 'tis I" (3.5.170), and undermines it (66). In a similar vein, Steven Mullaney sees Vindice's verbal ejaculations as a failure to keep his mouth shut, which "undo[es] the sheer differentiation between the closed body and world of men and the porous and leaky realm of womankind" (161). Vindice's uncontrollable impulse to unveil uncomfortable truths troubles the gendered maxims he elsewhere espouses, such as his famous claim that if you "tell but some woman a secret overnight, / Your doctor may find it in the urinal i'th'morning" (1.3.82-83).

revelation of lack manifests in a parody of a sexual encounter. Vindice urges Hippolito to "place the torch here, that his affrighted eyeballs / May start into those hollows.—Duke, dost know / Yon dreadful vizard?" (3.5.146-147). The Duke, in order to understand what has happened, is made to "start" into the "hollows" left by Gloriana's decayed eye sockets. The invitation mocks the Duke's erstwhile desire to bed the lady with whom he thought he was being presented. Instead of gaining pleasurable entry to her body, the Duke encounters an unexpected, frightening "hollow" in that body. Additionally, instead of gaining intimate knowledge of the lady, the Duke is made to encounter an unknowable, unrecognizable face. Vindice here displaces the anticipated sexual encounter with another scene of contact; and moreover, the scene of contact, even in its graphic materiality, defies the Duke's ability to "know" the lady, though as Vindice emphasizes, he has known her already.

Visuality is crucial in the orchestration of Vindice's revenge. In revealing the incestuous adultery of the Duchess and Spurio, too, Vindice stresses the importance of the visual encounter with evidence of the incestuous relationship, though Vindice has already revealed it to the Duke verbally. Vindice outlines his plan in advance to Hippolito, taking care to explain that

> The Bastard and the Duchess have appointed
> Their meeting too in this luxurious circle—
> Which most afflicting sight will kill his eyes
> Before we kill the rest of him. (3.5.21-24)

Affliction, with its sense of continued physical or mental distress, suggests that the excessive suffering induced by witnessing a liaison between his wife and illegitimate son is intended to anticipate and supplement the death by poisoning that repays the Duke's murder of Gloriana by poison. Vindice even apportions the two pieces of his revenge according to different pieces of the Duke, fracturing the Duke's imminent death into multiple deaths: first through the eyes and then throughout the rest of his body.

Vindice carries out his plan as stated: first, he tempts the Duke into kissing the poisoned skull of Gloriana, then he reveals his identity as Gloriana's revenger, and then he proceeds, as he puts it, "to make / [the Duke's] spirit grievous sore" (3.5.177-178). He discloses that the Duke is "a renownèd, high, and mighty cuckold" and that the Duke's "bastard rides a-hunting in [his] brow" (3.5.181, 183), which incites the Duke's cry, "Millions of deaths!" (3.5.184). Not even the Duke's millions of deaths, however, are sufficient for Vindice. He goes on, "Nay, to afflict thee *more*, / Here in this lodge they meet for damnèd clips. / Those eyes shall see the incest of their lips" (3.5.184-6, emphasis mine). Visual proof of the Duchess and Spurio's affair might seem to perform the function of supporting the veracity of Vindice's claim. Such a logic relies on the implication that visual evidence of a sex act renders it irrefutable, whereas sex acts merely narrated leave

space for doubt.[52] Vindice, however, remains less concerned with proving his claim and far more interested in the potential of the visual register, as he says, to "afflict thee *more.*" In other words, *knowing* the incest of their lips has happened or will happen causes the Duke to suffer millions of deaths, but the *sight* of it exceeds even that. As when he forces the Duke's face-to-face encounter with Gloriana's skull, Vindice's goal is an eye for an eye, and then some.

Afflictions of the I

As Vindice and Hippolito pin the Duke down in order to force him to watch the Duchess and Spurio kiss, Vindice urges, "If he but wink, not brooking the foul object, / Let our two other hands tear up his lids / And make his eyes, like comets, shine through blood" (3.5.203-205). The crux of the scene is the making-explicit of "the foul object," as Vindice's graphic description of how they will keep the Duke's eyes open suggests. What, precisely, constitutes the foul object of the Duke's horror and disgust, however, warrants some further critical attention. Following Stallybrass, we might understand the kiss—or, in Vindice's words, "the incest of their lips"—to function, like the skull's "insemination" of the Duke, to materialize an act of bodily penetration by the tongue, which figuratively undoes his authority as a husband and renders his body penetrable by association with his wife's body. The duke, prevented from closing off his body by "winking," is thus

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[52] As Linda Williams' well-known analysis of the money shot in pornography suggests, of course, producing irrefutable visual evidence "of the mechanical 'truth' of bodily pleasure" is a process of representation and substitution that is stubbornly irreducible to a single act or a single scene of bodily contact (101).

forced to allow the "foul object" to enter him. Such a reading employs the hermeneutic tools Valerie Traub describes as "figurative condensation and *translatio*, whereby one word-thing becomes or stands in for another" (176). For Traub, the critical practice of decoding early modern sexual language in this way evinces a scholarly tendency to "view our pedagogical and hermeneutic task exclusively in terms of the imperative to clarify," but such a methodology risks eliding "the constitutive role of vagueness, imprecision, and illegibility" in early modern sexual discourse (176). Taking up the question of the zones of "vagueness, imprecision, and illegibility" that may be collapsed by the prevalence of phallic penetration in critical interpretations of the scene requires revisiting the status of the "foul object," which, once seen, will outdo the "millions of deaths" the Duke suffers at hearing of his wife's infidelity.

Vindice's most graphic bodily language, of course, dwells on the detailed particulars of how he and Hippolito aim to use one hand each to hold the Duke down, while their other hands wrench apart his eyelids. The foul object, in contrast, is most explicitly described as a kind of bodily contact between the Duchess and Spurio's lips, but even then, Vindice shifts into a metaphorical register when describing it. Despite Vindice's insistence that the most painful part of the entire episode is that the Duke must witness his wife's sexual contact with his illegitimate son, the "incest" which Vindice intends to materialize before the Duke is only ever "of their lips." The phrase at once articulates the illicit sex act and qualifies it: the Duke does not, for example, find them "hasped within his

bed" (3.5.218), but rather witnesses a kiss and a brief conversation before the pair removes to dine together. The kiss functions at once as the act of incest and as its representative. The status of the foul object with which Vindice afflicts the Duke includes this indeterminacy: the "foul object" both is and is not sex, and both is and is not a kiss. Vindice's revelatory impulse is to fill in the blanks, to pin the Duke down with the whole truth; yet his efforts to *produce* the whole truth open instead onto the constitutive indeterminacy of the sexual encounter.

Even as we and the Duke witness what may or may not amount to the Duchess and Spurio having sex, the Duchess and Spurio imagine an alternative sexual encounter in the following exchange:

> DUCHESS. 'Tis the old Duke, thy doubtful father;
>
> The thought of him rubs heaven in thy way.
>
> … Forget him, or I'll poison him.
>
> SPURIO. Madam, you urge a thought which ne'er had life.
>
> So deadly do I loathe him for my birth
>
> That, if he took me hasped within his bed,
>
> I would add murder to adultery,
>
> And with my sword give up his years to death. (3.5.212-220)

Ignorant of the fact that the Duke is already poisoned, already witnessing their adultery, and even already pinned by a blade, Spurio and the Duchess outline the contours of the very scene that Vindice is attempting to create. Spurio's description redoubles Vindice's earlier insistence on the dangers of witnessing a scene of

illicit sexual congress. Following this exchange, the Duchess and Spurio retire offstage and the Duke at last confesses, "I cannot brook—" just before he succumbs to death (3.5.223). It is not immediately clear which aspect of the several tortures Vindice designs is ultimately and finally too much for the Duke to "brook," or bear. His final unfinished line, lacking an object, leaves unclear whether he is brought to his limit by the poison, by being deposed, by the sight of the incestuous kiss, or by some other factor among the many contributors to his punishment. In the multiplication of these tortures, a singular cause is perhaps beside the point. As the Duke suggests, of course, his ending is the culmination of millions of deaths. My aim here is not to perform an unnecessary autopsy on the unfortunate Duke, to pin down what precisely it is that proves too much for him to bear. I do, however, want to dwell for a moment on the absent object of that final line, the untimely end of which stops the Duke, who otherwise appears quite persistent indeed.[53] In his final line, he appears to reach the limit of his endurance; indeed, he cannot even endure long enough to finish the line itself. The space generated by that lack, or the unbearable limit of the Duke's endurance, resists being reduced to a single "foul object," or even one singular point of contact among the several bodies implicated in the execution of his torture.

Of particular interest is the unfinished line's proximity to the short conversation that the Duchess and Spurio unknowingly inflict upon the Duke. In the

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[53] The Duke acknowledges his own incongruous liveliness when he remarks, "In my old days I am a youth in lust. / Many a beauty have I turned to poison / In the denial, covetous of all. / Age hot is like a monster to be seen; / My hairs are white, and yet my sins are green" (2.3.129-133).

ironic reiteration of the scene, the Duchess and Spurio produce a doubled image not only of their own sexual congress but also of the Duke himself, bearing witness to their sexual contact. Spurio's description performs an operation of multiplication that leaves the Duke in a position of bearing witness to a conversation about him witnessing the Duchess and Spurio together. Spurio thus presents the Duke with an image of his own torture and death even as he is enduring it. In the vertiginous space produced by this doubled encounter, the Duke is torn asunder, unable to endure. The Duke's failure to withstand such a scene contrasts starkly with Vindice's approach to the conundrum of being hired to kill himself. Recall that Vindice imagines himself in two places at once when he announces, "I must stand ready here to make away myself yonder—I must sit to be killed, and stand to kill myself." Vindice's adept linguistic play multiplies and repositions his "I" in such a way that shows his indifference to death and simultaneously enables him to evade it. The content of his "I" shifts as the pronoun vacillates between Vindice himself and the role of Piato, encompassing even the inanimate corpse. For the Duke, however, the heightened irony of the Duchess and Spurio's discussion brings about a relational crisis that his "I" cannot brook.

Many scholars suggest that Vindice's linguistic play displays a detached relation to his own identity, a detachment that leads Charles and Elaine Hallett to conclude that Vindice's identification with the persona of Piato suggests that "eventually there is no longer a real Vindice" and that "to put on the role of Vindice again is to put on a new disguise" (239). For Coddon, Vindice's multiple po-

sitions in relation to his own "I" are produced by his indifference to the difference which divides the binaries of life and death, subject and object, animate and inanimate.[54] Indeed, in Vindice's energetic performance of being split from himself in order to execute himself, he treats his own "I" as a rather capacious position, or even a prop that can be multiplied and recirculated in order to accomplish and at the same time withstand his own death. Whereas the Duke's "I" is stretched to breaking by the excess of millions of deaths, Vindice's appears resiliently elastic in contrast. Vindice's capacity for self-contradiction both shows his wit and enables his survival in a material way, as his masterful skill at conveying roles enables him to endure a split which for the Duke is unbearable.

Vindice himself suggests his own indifference to his death in the first act, when he claims, "My life's unnatural to me, e'en compelled, / As if I lived now when I should be dead" (1.1.120-121). Of this passage, Coddon writes,

> The conflation of the 'unnatural' or artificial with life is striking; if a corpse is a body without subjectivity, then Vindice is on a certain level 'dead'. Indeed, his assumption of the role of Revenger, of Piato the bawd, and even of his 'actual self' after the Duke's murder is not fundamentally different from Gloriana's skull dressed up in tires. To an extent, then, the profound sexual nausea of the play may be seen to derive not only from the destabilised discourse of

[54] See Coddon 129-130.

> misogyny, but also from the fact that in this 'unnatural' realm, all the players are vampires and necrophiles. (127)

The undead energy that animates Vindice and infects the play as a whole, for Coddon, fuels its "sexual nausea," or a sense of unease with regard to the act of sex and the movement of desire. That sense of unease, I argue, is compounded by Vindice's relentless insistence on the representation of the sexual encounter as such, which produces fissures of indeterminacy within a scene that otherwise seems oriented toward producing sexual certainty. Though nine years' vengeance crowd into a minute, then, even within the space of that minute Vindice's climactic revenge (and the Duke's death) are drawn out to the point, as Michael Neill puts it, of "comic extravagance" (397).

Indeed, the play's exceptionally gruesome and elaborate murders, for many critics, add a comic dimension to Vindice's revenge plot. For Dollimore, the play's constant, violent activity suggests a flamboyance that produces what he terms "a subversive black camp" (149). I argue that the witty recirculation of language and the persistent, undead drive that impels the characters are central to the play's construction of a comic economy of language and objects. This is not to suggest that *The Revenger's Tragedy* is, generically speaking, a comedy rather than a tragedy, but rather to query how its use of the comic circulation of partial bodies, fragmented identities, and visitations of the undead complicate the discourse of likeness, difference, and sexual knowledge in the play.

The confrontation between a deceased Gloriana and a sexually unprincipled Duke suggests, as scholars have noted, some allegorical resonance with the succession of James I following the death of Elizabeth I.[55] For Emily Griffiths Jones, the play's characterization of the Duke's line of succession as decaying offers a potentially radical commentary on Jacobean propaganda that attempted to portray James as the right and proper successor to Elizabeth's vacated throne by constructing their relationship as one of close kinship.[56] Jones stresses that *The Revenger's Tragedy* offers a bleak portrayal of kinship, as familial relations produce murderous inclinations in nearly all of the Duke's varied biological and adopted progeny. The play, she argues, "illuminates and magnifies the morbidity inherent in hereditary monarchy and in all comparable forms of succession: the system may be constructed from the vital bonds of kinship, but its engine runs always and only on death" (338). The "engine"-like system of inheritance that organizes the social structure of the play constructs an opposition between the embodied vitality of kinship ties and an inhuman social structure that is fueled by, and thus necessitates, death.

Jones's mechanical metaphor echoes Simmons, who characterizes the dramatic action of the play as an engine when he argues, "Despite the evil that it depicts, an evil at the very root of human dignity, [*The Revenger's Tragedy*] manifests a comic vitality from beginning to end. Vindice and his creator ironically

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[55] See Jennifer Woodward's "Images of a Dead Queen."

[56] See Jones 327-328.

derive their exhilaration from the very engine of evil that the play discovers" (66). In other words, the play's lively comic energy buoys up what would otherwise seem to be a darkly pessimistic portrayal of political hypocrisy and corruption. Simmons argues, for example, that repetition renders evil absurd in "a comic series of exit lines" in Act 5, when Lussurioso, Spurio, Supervacuo, and Ambitioso each in turn declare intentions to murder the preceding character as they depart the stage (65). While the self-reproducing mechanism of a corrupt aristocracy infects, or parasitically strangles, the social body, the salubrious "comic vitality" of the play, in contrast, counteracts that evil by exposing it. The presumptively opposing poles of life and death, human and inhuman, however, can be remapped in light of a continued reconsideration of bodily openings and the penetrative paradigm in the play's sexual economy.

Conveying the Body

Vindice's tendency to assume the role of playwright, as in his various references to acting, implies a kind of metatheatrical awareness of his own manipulations of the conventions of his genre. Most notably, Vindice's entreaties to heaven, in which he demands thunder and lightning to condemn the corruption of the court, position him as the playwright of his own revenge tragedy.[57] While some critics interpret Vindice's invocations of the divine as confirmation of the play's

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[57] Dollimore points out: "It gives an intriguing flexibility to Vindice' role, with the actor momentarily stepping through the part and taking on—without abandoning the part—a playwright's identity. This identity shift is instrumental to the parody: at precisely the moments when, if the providential references are to convince, the dramatic illusion needs to be strongest, Vindice (as 'playwright') shatters it" (140).

conservative, inflexible moral framework, many others take the perspective of Dollimore, who argues that Vindice's incitements to heaven offer a parody of the genre, the result of which is that "the convention linking 'heaven', 'thunder' and 'tragedy' is, together with its related stage effects, rendered facile" (140). The way in which the play ironizes its own generic conventions leads Neill to characterize the play as "mongrel," as "a kind of literary bastard-work … in which elements of tragedy, satire, and history are violently and sometimes confusingly yoked together" (400). In its violent yoking-together of ill-fitting parts, for Neill, the play takes up a generic position analogous to Spurio's familial position, as illegitimate offspring. Vindice's efforts to produce thunder, however, open onto yet another encounter with Vindice's comically outsized drive to reveal.

Though scholarship frequently notes that Vindice's calls for thunder and lightning to resound with divine affront are rewarded in Act 4, his fruitless prior attempts to incite the heavens to anger receive less attention. He demands in Act 2, for instance, "Why does not heaven turn black, or with a frown / Undo the world?" (2.1.255-256). Vindice's sense of heaven's belatedness is reiterated as the play goes on. When Lussurioso gives a false account of how Piato encouraged him to bed Castiza, Vindice's chaste sister, Vindice demands in an aside, "Has not heaven an ear? / Is all the lightning wasted?" (4.2.161-162). Even as he invokes the drama of stage effects, then, those very stage effects which are meant to confirm heaven's intervention are absent and unsatisfying until Vindice finally snaps:

VINDICE. Oh thou almighty Patience! 'Tis my wonder

That such a fellow, impudent and wicked,

Should not be cloven as he stood,

Or with a secret wind burst open!

Is there no thunder left, or is't kept up

In stock for heavier vengeance? [*Thunder is heard.*] There it goes!

HIPPOLITO. Brother, we lose ourselves.

VINDICE. But I have found it. (4.2.199-205)

In his queries to heaven, Vindice articulates a desire for the external world to register what he sees happening in the court. He wavers between possibilities: is it the case that Lussurioso's treachery is too *much* for heaven, which has "wasted" all its lightning already and has none left to spare, or is it rather that Lussurioso is of too *little* consequence to heaven, which keeps its thunder "in stock for heavier vengeance"? In the absence of heavenly confirmation, Vindice is left to guess, or "wonder," at how Lussurioso's misdeeds measure up on a divine scale. As Vindice's wonder gives way to thunder, his ambivalent internal drama of fascination and revulsion is replaced by a renewed sense of certainty. "Finding it" reorients Vindice even as Hippolito worries that they risk "losing themselves," or overextending their plot by agreeing to kill Piato for Lussurioso.

The pronoun "it" becomes further embroiled as the scene continues:

HIPPOLITO. Brother, we lose ourselves.

VINDICE. But I have found it;

'Twill hold, 'tis sure. Thanks, thanks to any spirit

> That mingled it ‘mongst my inventions!
>
> HIPPOLITO. What is’t?
>
> VINDICE. ’Tis sound and good; thou shalt partake it.
>
> (4.2.205-208)

The elusive “it” after which Hippolito inquires promises a “sure” and “sound” anchor against the threat of dissolution, or “losing ourselves.” Vindice’s “it” promises to bind what would otherwise dissolve—to “hold” the plot together and enable the brothers to continue their revenge. Vindice’s very insistence on “it,” however, renders the pronoun confounding and indeterminate. Initially, “it” refers to the thunder, as Vindice calls out, “There it goes!” In the next line, “it” returns as something he says he has “found,” presumably a stroke of wit which will solve their quandary. Over the course of the following two lines, “it”—even as Vindice claims it is “sure” and “will hold”—becomes something else again, an “it” which has been mixed in among Vindice’s “inventions.” Prompted by Hippolito, Vindice provides descriptions of its solidity, which only delay the answer to the question of what “it”is. In this scene, Vindice’s irrepressible resilience in the face of death involves again a kind of linguistic play that, through the recirculation of a pronoun, displaces the referent of that pronoun. Here, Vindice’s efforts to account for what is happening produce, to borrow a phrase from Lee Edelman, an “unac-

countable excess" (78), an "it" that traverses and disorganizes the boundaries of inside and outside, self and other.[58]

Vindice's descriptions of "it," along with Hippolito's appreciative exclamation, "Firmer and firmer!" (4.2.228), which he makes a few lines later, are seen by critics such as Dollimore to suggest figures of phallic tumescence within Vindice and Hippolito's discussions of their wittily improvised plot.[59] This phallic interpretation leads Dollimore to argue that Vindice's witty machinations are motivated by "an incessant drive for self-fulfillment through domination of others" (Dollimore 146). The genital focus in critical commentary on this scene, while illuminating, decodes "it"s metaphoric sexual meaning at the risk of collapsing the rather capacious field of referents that "it" encompasses in the course of Vindice's efforts first to find it and then to touch it, or to convey his perception of it. Vindice continues to describe "it" in a tactile register when he offers thanks a second time a few lines later: he insists, "Oh, thanks! It is substantial" (4.2.223). As "it" mingles with his inventions, then, Vindice's encounter with "it" might productively be read through the lens of Eve Sedgwick's discussion of the sense

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[58] In this way, Vindice's "it" anticipates the "it" that Edelman discusses in *Sex, Or The Unbearable*, in which Edelman describes "the endless mutations of an 'it' that takes on and casts off each particular referent that we… would give it. In that sense 'it's negativity, 'it's resistance to fixed definition, sustains us. It keeps us coming back… to the narratives whereby we would square our accounts and make everything add up, but in which we encounter the persistent pressure of an unaccountable excess that breaks out from—and, in the process, breaks down—our efforts to break 'it' down" (78).

[59] See Dollimore 145. Haber, too, comments on the sexual valence of Hippolito and Vindice's language of revenge in order to argue that, though Vindice's masculine anxieties lead him to avow his own impenetrability, "the ideal of inviolability is necessarily involved – is ultimately identical to – forced entry and violation" (65).

of touch in *Touching Feeling*. Sedgwick terms "besideness" to describe the way in which multiple relations between an agent and and object can be available in a single scene of touching; in any relation of touch, that is, an object may, equally, be touching the agent who touches it (23).[60] Sedgwick argues that that "the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity" (14). Vindice's encounter with "it" promises to organize, or to give shape to, the mess into which he has gotten himself, even as it simultaneously produces an encounter that resists the active/passive binary which supports the prevailing critical consensus.

Furthermore, as Vindice feels his way around the contextualizing conventions of his own genre, his use of the verb "mingle" conveys a sense of admixture that, Jeffrey Masten points out, plays a significant role in the discourse of early modern dramatic genre. In his recent exploration of the language of kinship and sexual reproduction in the classification of early modern genres, Masten notes the way in which the discourse of genre draws on cultural beliefs regarding purity and genealogical lineage in constructing a given text's relation to its generic forebears. Masten observes that the mixture—or, "mingling," as Sir Philip Sidney describes it—of genres inspires taxonomic concerns that "are articulated within particular

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[60] Sedgwick identifies what she calls "modern assumptions about the centrality of sexual desire to all human contact and feeling" to caution that "reducing affect to drive in this way permits a diagrammatic sharpness of thought that may, however, be too impoverishing in qualitative terms" (18).

and overlapping discourses of social class, breeding, and cross-breeding" (194).[61] The implication of sexual impropriety that attends the word "mingling," for Masten, pervades contemporary concerns about the mixture of genres. As a result, Masten argues, "mingling—within a rhetoric interested in whole bodies properly distributed—thus mangles" (196), producing queer offspring by dismembering the body and redistributing its parts improperly.

Women's bodies, as many scholars note, are made the object of much of *The Revenger's Tragedy's* explicit discussion of the dangers of mingling. In his analysis of how the play figures reproduction as the coining of currency, Neill identifies a pronounced anxiety in the play regarding the problem of "the female body… which constitutes a dangerous kind of opening in the otherwise impermeable edifice of patriarchal power and property-holding, a conduit of pollution, debasement, and usurpation that requires constant regulation" (Neill 407). Concern about sexual impropriety and women's capacity for infidelity is bound up in the very process of reproduction, as Patricia Parker notes in her analysis of the language of conveyance in *Hamlet*, a play often cited as a progenitor of *The Revenger's Tragedy.* Parker argues that concerns with the reproductive fidelity of women are implicated with "a pervasive contemporary concern with the problem

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[61] Masten quotes Sidney's *Defense of Poesie,* in which Sidney protests, "[B]esides these grosse absurdities, all their Places bee neither right Tragedies, nor right Comedies, mingling Kinges and Clownes, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the Clowne by the head and shoulders to play a part in maiesticall matters, with neither decencie nor discretion: so as neither the admiration and Commiseration, nor the right sportfulnesse is by their mongrell Tragicomedie obtained" (qtd. Masten *Queer Philologies* 192).

of faithful representation, reproduction, or seconding and the faithful bearing or transporting of a commission, will, or script" (182-183). She indicates that the language of conveyance links the transfer of property with the function of a go-between or representative to convey a message, and, further, that this network of meanings is tainted with the word's alternative sense of "trickery, treachery, and infidelity" (150).

The discursive construction of the female body as "dangerous kind of opening" in a patrilineal sequence results in the figuration, as Neill and Parker emphasize, of the female body as conduit through which the pollution of difference may pass into the "the edifice of patriarchal power," the foundations of which rely on its internal consistency, its self-sameness. As a discontinuity in a surface that would otherwise remain unbroken, the bodily orifice thus threatens to splinter the survival of the patriarchal line into "millions of deaths." In its comic, repetitive insistence on the undead animacy of the bodies onstage, I argue, *The Revenger's Tragedy* mingles with the threatening specter of unwhole bodies improperly distributed. In this light, then, I return to the question Coddon suggests the play is posing: what if the body is no more than a prop? But I want to invert Coddon's discussion of the play's unsettling objectification (or corpse-ification) of the living body in order to consider what I characterize as the unsettling liveliness of the corpse, or its persistent living-on, in relation to the problem of conveyance.

As Act 5 opens on Vindice and Hippolito arranging the Duke's body in the guise of Piato, Vindice compliments the corpse's performance, saying, "So, so, he leans well. Take heed you wake him not, brother" (5.1.1-2). The comment is delivered in jest, of course, but Vindice's habit of interacting with or addressing dead bodies as if they are living people is evident from the opening monologue of the play, when he addresses Gloriana's skull as though it retains the identity and memory of Gloriana in life. He recounts to it: "Thee when thou wert appareled in thy flesh / The old Duke poisoned" (1.1.31-32).[62] As Coddon notes, Vindice's opening monologue reads as a kind of "[paean] to the woman's corpse" (132). Mullaney argues that Vindice's treatment of the skull is representative of Vindice's misogynistic perspective on women, whom Vindice characterizes as unavoidably deceitful.[63] Indeed, Vindice later expounds on the "false forms" of women's bodies (3.5.96), which only serve to obscure the "bare bone" that underlies them (3.5.53). Vindice seems to suggest that the virtue of the woman as a corpse lies in the fact that she is finally incapable of deceit.

Vindice's misogynistic rhetoric employs both a spatial and a temporal logic. First, from a paranoid, penetrative perspective, the skull's spatial position, internal to the body, suggests a hidden truth; it materializes Vindice's paranoid conviction that "a lady can, / At such, all hid, beguile a wiser man" (3.5.50-51). Second, he claims, the skull represents the inevitable end of the body, as he chides:

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[62] See also: 1.1.46-47.

[63] See Mullaney 160-161.

> Does the silkworm expend her yellow labors
>
> For thee? For thee does she undo herself?
>
> Are lordships sold to maintain ladyships
>
> For the poor benefit of a bewitching minute? (3.5.71-74)

The finality of the skull, in other words, outweighs the swift passage of a "bewitching minute." The skull represents an inevitable and single eventuality on the temporal horizon: the truth, Vindice promises, is out there. Further, it is "out there" precisely because it has always been "in her(e)," underlying the fleshly form that, while living, proves too changeable to be trusted. Yet Vindice's inability to let his beloved go, literalized in his refusal to let go of her skull, unravels his own fantasy of the skull as singular, unchanging, and final. Indeed, Vindice remarks, the skull "shall bear a part / E'en in it own revenge" (3.5.100-101). That is to say, the skull will continue to act in the course of its own revenge. The skull of Gloriana is promoted from the status of a stage prop, or "useless property" (3.5.100), to a fellow actor with a part to bear.

Vindice's compliment to the Duke's corpse, too, refers to its performance of "leaning well," or convincingly conveying drunkenness. Even prior to this display, however, the problem of conveying animates the dead Duke's body. Recall that the plot to employ the Duke's body as a drunken Piato is an unplanned outcome of the Duke's death; his reincarnation is necessitated only by Piato's fall from favor with Lussurioso. Hippolito brings Vindice (in the persona of himself) to Lussurioso only to find that Lussurioso unwittingly wants to hire Vindice to kill

Vindice's own alter-ego. When Lussurioso sends Hippolito to fetch Piato to be killed, then, Hippolito is forced to return empty-handed. Hippolito improvises the excuse that Piato is "not in case now to be seen" (4.2.187); he explains, "The worst of all the deadly sins is in him: / That beggarly damnation, drunkenness" (4.2.188-189). Lussurioso agrees to defer Piato's murder temporarily, and Vindice praises his brother's misdirection: "'Twas well conveyed, / Upon a sudden wit" (4.2.190-191). This sense of the verb "to convey," as improvising or performing a part, echoes in Vindice's repeated use of the word a few lines later. As Vindice begins to formulate the plot to reuse the Duke's body, that is, he reminds Hippolito of "the old Duke being dead but not conveyed" (4.2.210), by which he means that the Duke's body has not yet been carried off and disposed of. The word, then, yokes together two activities: carrying off the dead body and carrying out a role. Both the Duke and Gloriana are available to convey the parts Vindice assigns them precisely because they have not been conveyed. In short, they make nonsense out of the active/passive binary.

In its repetitive motion, *The Revenger's Tragedy* relentlessly recycles the claim of *Edward II*'s Baldock: "all live to die and rise to fall" (4.7.111). Vindice's intention to eliminate the Duke's successors echoes just such an up-and-down movement when he suggests to Hippolito, "As fast as they peep up, let's cut 'em down" (3.5.227). The play's repetitions, however murderous, animate a cast of undead characters who nevertheless persist in and in spite of death, insisting on an irrepressible excess that undoes the smooth functioning of a patrilineal social or-

der. Vindice, beautifying Gloriana's skull, tells her, "Thou hadst need have a mask now; / 'Tis vain when beauty flows, but when it fleets / This would become graves better than the streets" (3.5.113-115). Out of place and unbecoming in death, Gloriana takes up an uneasy position, an unwhole body improperly distributed. Her refusal of the Duke's sexual advances, nine years prior to the beginning of the play, motivates a drama which returns again and again to the question of determining what a sexual encounter consists of and how to produce it. In redressing her body, Vindice's efforts to redress his loss produce ambivalent, comically exaggerated scenes of revelation that provide generative opportunities to retheorize the representation of sex as such and the production of sexual knowledge.

Conclusion

Exit, Pursued by the Unbearable

In the movement from Adonis's orificiality to the reanimated dead bodies of *The Revenger's Tragedy*, this dissertation has explored queer matter that obstructs and disrupts the smooth functioning of the social body. At once moribund and excessively animated, the wasteful bodies of this project are bodies whose relation to their supposed function isn't quite right: they are barely used, ill-used, and overused. Wastefulness, in short, describes their queer relation to utility. As the orderly social body works to reproduce itself, the wasteful body interrupts, dithers, drags, and refuses to move things along.

In resisting the faithful reproduction of the social order, the partial, fragmentary, and wasteful bodily matter theorized in this project precipitates unbearable encounters that split subjects from themselves. The Duke's cry, on the brink of death, that he "cannot brook" the "foul object" Vindice sets before him condenses the bodily and affective dimensions of such a split in the figure of "brooking" (3.5.223, 203). To "brook" denotes both to withstand and to stomach; being unable to brook the foul object, then, figures the unbearable in terms of an object one cannot digest or cannot *incorporate into the body*. In chapter three, Dapper's handling by Face and Subtle brings him to the limit of the unbearable and comically literalizes the digestive metaphor: subjected to the sensory invasion of the privy's odor, Dapper attempts to endure by digesting the gingerbread stay Face and Subtle left in his mouth. His failure to stomach it precipitates his outburst

from the privy, which arrests the orderly ending of the play. These scenes mark places where the body comes apart at the seams, where the organization of the body, and by extension a social order that relies on disciplines of bodily containment, unravels. This project contends that these scenes of bodily opening trouble the organizing borders between human and inhuman, self and other, activity and passivity, movement and stasis, thereby opening up new ways of thinking and seeing early modern figurations of the body.

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In looking toward the future lives of this analysis, I propose that a further extension of this study of the early modern orifice might be brought to bear on trans and disability studies, both fields of scholarship motivated by the politically drawn borders of the body and its imagined futures and histories. As I argue in chapter one, Adonis's pointlessness, or his failure to bear out Venus's future-oriented reproductive exhortations, raises critical questions about the figuration of Adonis's sex and his position in the erotic economy of the poem. From a trans perspective, the prevalence of a penetrative paradigm in criticism might be said to *cis*figure Adonis by anchoring readings of his sexual positionality in a presumptively male-bodied sexual vocabulary. An orificial reading of Adonis, in contrast, has the potential to transfigure the erotics of the poem. Such a project need not require grafting a contemporary trans identity onto Adonis; rather, a trans lens invites us to imagine sexual figurations that are not sutured to binaristic logics of gender and sex.

I have attended in particular to scenes of incorporation and digestion in which characters encounter and endure beyond the limits of the body. As I note in chapter two, when Edward II is caught in the untenable position of surviving in spite of his imprisonment in the depths of the castle, he protests, "My mind's distempered and my body's numbed, / And whether I have limbs or no I know not" (5.5.63-4). Held captive at the limit of the organized social body, Edward experiences a sense of alienation from his own body that is at once physical ("my body's numbed") and epistemological ("I *know* not"). Thus split from himself, Edward opens up avenues for theorizing dysphoria. In a trans context, dysphoria most often refers to gender dysphoria, a psychological diagnosis that is popularly thought to describe the discomfort of inhabiting the "wrong body," or a body that does not match one's internal sense of one's gender. Drawing on the archive of early modern texts in this project, I propose to shift the terms of dysphoria and trans affect in order to move away from "wrong body" narratives, which often reproduce normative fantasies of bodily coherence and sexual difference.[64] I propose a theory of trans affect that attends to the encounter with bodily matter that refuses to be incorporated and refuses our "knowing." Approaching the affective structure of dysphoria from the perspective of its root sense (that which is difficult to bear), I aim to open up new possibilities for theorizing how dysphoric affects attach to bodily indeterminacy. Such an extension of the current study has the po-

[64] Sandy Stone's "The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttransexual Manifesto" convincingly argues that "wrong body" narratives can reinscribe normative ideologies of bodily wholeness.

tential to generate new trans hermeneutic approaches within the burgeoning field of queer affect studies.

Insofar as my research concerns partial, fragmentary, and wasteful bodies, along with bodily matter that survives and persists in spite of a social order that forecloses its futurity, this project also demands to be put in touch with emerging conversations in queer studies, and particularly at the intersection of queer studies and crip theory, that query how and why the nonnormative body animates itself in spite of being made to signify immobility and unliveliness. How might the disorienting, lively persistence of the wasteful body, in Alison Kafer's words, "articulate a queercrip time that does not oppose queerness to longevity yet maintains a critical stance toward hegemonic expectations of (re)productivity?" (44). In short, I hope that this project's inquiry into how bodily matter is figured as living, dead, active, passive, productive, and wasteful invites us to continue to ask, as Subtle does, "And when comes vivification?" (2.5.25), and, further, to ask how and why it queerly follows, as Face replies, "After mortification" (2.5.25).

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