EARLY MODERN LITERARY STUDIES

Destroying Things on the Early Modern English Stage

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One of Shakespeare's most famous props does not make it out of its scene intact. After Richard surrenders in *Richard II* (1595–97), he requests a 'looking-glasse' to examine his face.[1] Disgusted by what he sees, he breaks the mirror and expounds upon the destruction:

> A brittle Glory shineth in this Face,
> As brittle as the Glory, is the Face,
> For there it is, crackt in an hundred shivers.
> Marke silent King, the Morall of this sport,
> How soone my Sorrow hath destroy'd my Face.[2]

Bolingbroke disputes Richard's analysis, suggesting instead that 'The shadow of your Sorrow hath destroy'd / The shadow of your Face'. For both characters, the mirror signifies not merely in what it reflects but also in its destruction. The 'morall' of its shattering requires glossing: to Richard, it symbolizes the fragility of his glory and his mortal body; to Bolingbroke, the mirror is merely a material object and its destruction therefore void of symbolic meaning. Their conflicting interpretations of the destruction emphasize the differences between them; as James Calderwood observes, 'Unlike Richard, [Bolingbroke] has never accepted the bond between word and thing, the bond that enables the word to create, or as in Richard's practice to destroy, the thing. When in the deposition scene Richard flings the mirror to the floor Bolingbroke makes a typical

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[1] Places of publication are London unless otherwise indicated. Dates refer to likely first performances and are from Martin Wiggins, *British Drama 1533–1642: A Catalogue*, 9+ volumes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012–).

[2] William Shakespeare, *King Richard the Second*, in *Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (Edward Blount and William and Isaac Jaggard, 1623), d2v.

distinction between symbols and things'.[3] For Richard, the broken mirror conveys meaning as a semiotic object; for Bolingbroke, it is merely material.[4] Just as Bolingbroke uses the mirror's destruction to distinguish between the 'symbol' and the 'thing', destroying a prop like Richard's mirror on stage distinguishes for the audience the material, theatrical thing from the fictional, dramatic object that it represents – or, more precisely, such destruction conflates the two, reminding the audience that the fictional, dramatic object *is also* the material, theatrical thing. The 'mirror' smashed by 'Richard' is also a mirror smashed by the actor playing Richard. If, as John Garrison argues, 'the mirror makes for an intriguing stage prop because it operates in a way that resembles the function of the performance itself', by breaking the mirror, both the character Richard and the actor playing Richard deliberately 'break' the 'performance itself'.[5]

Contrary to Mark Dahlquist's claim that 'the destructive act itself was rarely depicted, discussed, or even referred to in the drama of the period', the deliberate destruction of things occurs frequently in early modern plays, across nearly all genres and performance contexts.[6] These acts are usually accompanied by attempts, like Richard's and Bolingbroke's, at managing audience understanding of the meaning of such destruction – not only what it means within the play, but also what it means about the play. These

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[3] James Calderwood, *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p. 171. On the use of mirrors as this kind of metaphorical trope in the period, particularly as a *memento mori*, see Deborah Shuger, 'The "I" of the Beholder: Renaissance Mirrors and the Reflexive Mind', in *Renaissance Culture and the Everyday*, ed. by Patricia Fumerton and Simon Hunt (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999), pp. 21–41. John Garrison also examines Shakespeare's mirrors as 'a problematic tool for predicting the future or for gaining self-knowledge'; see 'Mirrors and *Macbeth's* Queer Materialism', in *Shakespeare's Things: Shakespearean Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance*, ed. by Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 53–65, (p. 61).

[4] Garrison notes specifically that Richard uses the mirror 'to contemplate [his] own destruction'; when he destroys the mirror, he thus enacts the very destruction he imagines that he perceives (p. 63). Hanh Bui makes a similar point, noting that when 'Richard dashes it against the ground' he is 'thereby reconciling it with his own shattered identity'; see 'The Mirror and Age in Shakespeare's *Sonnets*', in *Shakespeare's Things: Shakespearean Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance*, ed. by Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 66–78 (p. 66).

[5] Garrison, p. 54.

[6] Mark Dahlquist, 'Love and Technological Iconoclasm in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*', *ELH* 78 (2011), 51-77 (p. 51). Chloe Porter, *Making and Unmaking in Early Modern English Drama: Spectators, Aesthetics, and Incompletion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), pp. 129–54, and Sophie Duncan, *Shakespeare's Props: Memory and Cognition* (New York: Routledge, 2019), pp. 195–229, provide sustained discussions of the destruction of props, though Porter's focus is primarily on the brazen head from Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and Duncan's is on destroying props in modern productions of early modern plays.

attempts aim principally at constraining interpretation of the things and their destruction to the world within the play, signaling an awareness of how destruction on stage reveals the porous boundary between representation and reality. Props are an ideal site for interrogating that boundary because, as Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda point out, they 'encode networks of material relations that are the stuff of drama and society alike'.[7] It is for this reason Catherine Richardson notes that 'getting to grips with early modern drama means confronting its essential materiality as a practice' – part of which must mean confronting the fact that what is material is also, by definition, subject to destruction.[8] Harris and Korda evaluate how props display a 'power to puncture dramatic illusion' by exposing 'alternate social dramas of economic production, exchange, and ownership'; by surveying a wide range of the props and costumes destroyed on the early modern stage, this essay argues that the destruction of things – their breaking, burning, tearing, and visible consumption – also punctured 'dramatic illusion' and, by doing so, was drawn upon to make dramatic meaning.[9] The objective of this essay, then, is to contribute to Kurt Schreyer's call for a 'history of early English drama' that is not simply another 'canon of influential authors but… a history of theatrical objects', and specifically, a history of destroying those theatrical objects and how the plays, playwrights, and players made such destruction productive.[10]

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[7] Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda, 'Introduction: Towards a Materialist Account of Stage Properties', in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 1-34 (p. 1).

[8] Catherine Richardson, '"More things in heaven and earth": Materiality and the Stage', *Shakespeare* 15.1 (2019), 88–103 (p. 88).

[9] Harris and Korda, p. 15; on props as materials, see p. 13, though Harris and Korda draw a perhaps too tidy distinction between critical approaches to props that consider them as 'symbolic' (the semiotic frame) and critical approaches that consider them as materials (the phenomenological frame), since, as destroyed props make clear, the two identities necessarily overlap; see Freddie Rokem, 'A chair is a Chair is a CHAIR: The Object as Sign in the Theatrical Performance', in *The Prague School and Its Legacy*, ed. by Yishai Tobin (Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 1988), pp. 275–88. On 'objects' and 'things', see Bill Brown, 'Thing Theory', *Critical Inquiry* 28.1 (2001), 1–22; on this distinction in a theatrical context, see Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy, 'Introduction: Object Lessons', *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*, ed. by Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), p. 3; on 'things' in the context of Shakespeare, see Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky, 'Introduction', in *Shakespeare's Things: Shakespearean Theatre and the Non-Human World in History, Theory, and Performance*, ed. by Brett Gamboa and Lawrence Switzky (New York: Routledge, 2020), pp. 1–20; see also Duncan, pp. 27–28 and 208; for a broader consideration of the idea of 'things' in early modern European culture, see Paula Findlen (ed.), *Early Modern Things: Objects and their Histories, 1500–1800*, (second edition, London: Routledge, 2021).

[10] Kurt A. Schreyer, *Shakespeare's Medieval Craft: Remnants of the Mysteries on the London Stage* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2014), p. 6.

The destruction of things on stage punctures illusion because props operate under an implicit agreement that they are *not* things but, rather, the signs of things.[11] J.K. Curry suggests that the 'malfunctioning prop destroy[s this] illusion'.[12] Kee-Yoon Nahm likewise notes,

> when and where physicality [on stage] overwhelmingly calls attention to itself, such as when an actor unintentionally stumbles, the signifying link is momentarily broken so that only the actor is visible. The same observation can be made for props that malfunction in various ways; when a table's leg unexpectedly breaks off, it no longer signifies a table in the drama.[13]

However, a prop for which destruction is not a '*mal*function' but its intended function also breaks that agreement. An object on stage, as Keir Elam puts it, 'acquires, as it were, a set of quotation marks' marking it as a 'semiotic unit'; destruction, whether accidental or intentional, strips those quotation marks and asserts the prop's status as a thing, producing moments when 'theatrical semiosis is alienated, made "strange" [and thus] the spectator is encouraged to take note of the semiotic *means*, to become aware of the sign-vehicle and its operations'.[14] To use Elam's terms, while intact, Richard's mirror's status as an object within the world of the play – as a dramatic *end* – is maintained; when destroyed, its status as a thing within the performance of the play – as a theatrical *means* – is brought to the fore. If, as Marvin Carlson argues, what the 'Elizabethans' sought to imitate on stage was not 'observed reality' but 'a reality behind observed reality', the moment an object on stage is destroyed – after, like Richard's mirror, it has served to establish the accepted fiction that what is being seen is that 'reality behind observed reality' – the frame of reference shifts and 'observed reality' comes into focus.[15] Carlson argues that 'audiences are so accustomed to stage properties being imported from the

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[11] Rokem, pp. 279–80.

[12] J. K. Curry, 'Introduction', *Theatre Symposium 18: The Prop's the Thing*, ed. by J. K. Curry, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2014), p. 5. Consumed props provoke 'questions about the relationship of stage reality to reality outside the theatre'; see Eleanor Margolies, *Props* (London: Palgrave, 2016), p. 123.

[13] Kee-Yoon Nahm, 'Props Breaking Character on the Naturalist Stage', *Performing Objects and Theatrical Things*, ed. by Marlis Schweitzer and Joanne Zerdy (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), pp. 187-99 (p. 191).

[14] Keir Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 6–7 and 15; see Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003), pp. 7 and 25, and Margolies, p. 125.

[15] Marvin Carlson, *Shattering Hamlet's Mirror: Theatre and Reality* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), p. 2. This 'conflation of verisimilitude and mimesis' is not exclusively a practice of the modern theater: as Carlson notes, 'the conscious mixing of reality and fiction [dates back to] near the beginnings of theatre history' (pp. 12 and 84).

outside world that unless their attention is called to that importation, it is absorbed into the general acceptance of the theatre's world of fiction'; witnessing a 'real' thing destroyed on stage calls attention to that 'importation' by returning the prop to its status as a real, tenuous object.[16] Doing so underscores the 'material connection between stage practice and everyday life', further eliding whatever border might be thought to exist between audience and performance.[17] Richardson argues that 'props tie reality and illusion together, asking their audiences to see the one against the other and to make sense of the illusion in relation to the quality of their lived experience', but when a prop is destroyed, rather than see reality and illusion as 'one against the other', the audience is compelled to see how the two are in fact one and the same.[18]

Taking a somewhat different, but equally useful, approach to thinking about the meaning of objects on stage, Frances Teague argues that props possess a 'dislocated function': 'the property has a function, but it is not the same function as it has offstage (though it may imitate that ordinary function)'.[19] To use Teague's terminology, destroyed props re-locate their function and thus cease to be signs. Destroying an object on stage destroys both the signifier and the signified, both the material thing of the performance and what the thing represents within the world of the play. That destruction thus reveals to the audience how 'theatrical objects [are] things with material lives surplus to the 'fictive worlds' into which they have been enlisted'.[20] Bert States alludes to this when he describes how, when props fail to remain within the fiction of the play, 'something indisputably real leak[s]… out of the illusion':

> the floor cracks open and we are startled…by the upsurge of the real into the magic circle where the conventions of theatricality have assured us that the real has been subdued and transcended. We suddenly see the familiar in the defamiliarization.[21]

This is what Bill Brown describes as one of the 'occasions of contingency – the chance interruption – that disclose a physicality of things'.[22] Interpretive language accompanying

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[16] Carlson, p. 83.

[17] Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 16.

[18] Ibid, p. 31.

[19] Frances Teague, *Shakespeare's Speaking Properties* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1991), pp. 16, 17–18; see also Duncan, p. 202.

[20] Harris and Korda, p. 14.

[21] Bert O. States, *Great Reckonings in Little Rooms: On the Phenomenology of Theater* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 30–31 and 34.

[22] Brown, 4.

the destruction of a prop, such as Richard's reading of the broken mirror, attempts to curtail this re-familiarization – Brown's disclosure of physicality – by limiting the destruction, and the object, to the world of the play, thus maintaining the status of the event as 'play'. What is at stake, then, is the authority to delineate and discern the constructed boundary between what is play and what is real, between what is fictional and what is material – an authority that the play's act of interpretation implicitly acknowledges to be shared between the performers and the audience.

When the simpleton Peregrine, in Richard Brome's *The Antipodes* (1638), finds himself among the props in a tiring house, his confusion over that line between what is play and what is real is the very cause of his destruction of the theatrical objects: thinking himself in 'some inchanted Castle', he grabs a prop sword and 'Kils Monster, after Monster; takes the Puppets / Prisoners, knocks downe the Cyclops, tumbles all / Our jigambobs and trinckets to the wall' and 'cut[s] the infernall ugly faces' of the 'divells vizors'.[23] That these objects succumb to his fury confirms for Peregrine their materiality, and thus reinforces his delusion that he has 'justly gaind the Kingdome by his conquest'.[24] As the character Letoy puts it, Peregrine's delusion is 'fancy': his overactive imagination reads the representational as real; when the players' materials come to pieces as he attacks them – indeed, *because* they come to pieces, because they demonstrate to him their materiality by succumbing to real destruction – that fancy is fed.

Breaking the Binary

Chloe Porter notes that early modern plays often 'focus intently on images of visual incompletion and faultiness as a means through which to acknowledge and sometimes transgress limitations perceived to be associated with mimetic representation'.[25] As a material object, the broken prop exceeds the bounds of mere visual imagery and becomes a substantive incursion of the real into the mimetic – a demonstration that no rigid binary distinguishes the two domains. As such, the destruction of things on the early modern stage and how characters respond to those moments challenge another reductive binary: that often invoked to distinguish modern, 'realistic' theater from its early modern, 'non-realistic' precursor. Conventions that frame the destruction of things on the early modern stage speak to the degree to which those performances were real – not 'realistic', to use the anachronistic modern term meaning '*like* reality' or 'an imitation of reality', but in

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[23] Brome, G1v.

[24] Ibid, G1v–2r.

[25] Porter, p. 11; see also Duncan, p. 203.

that they reinforce the *actual* reality of live performance, the lack of a divide between the worlds of the play and its audience. This differs from much modern realism, which assumes a fictional world hermetically sealed within the preservative bottle of the proscenium arch. When things are destroyed in performance, audiences are made aware that the world within the play exists on a continuum with their own world. Conventions associated with the act of destroying things on stage signal this acknowledgment by attempting to manage it.

In imposing upon the smashed mirror their competing interpretations, for example, Richard and Bolingbroke adopt a convention that might be described as the 'dynamism of the sign', reading the change in the object as manifesting a coordinated change in a person or relationship.[26] This calls attention to the arbitrariness of the object's status as a signifier by using the act of breaking the object to change also its semiotic function. 'In the theatre', Gay McAuley observes, 'objects can be transformed at will, by a word or gesture, into other objects': the prop left in pieces becomes a new 'object' created in the moment of performance.[27] Indeed, as the examples explored below show, things on stage operate under a fundamental inability to be fully destroyed: material pieces always remain perceivable – shattered glass, torn paper, cracked ceramic, residues of smoke, ash, and aroma, often then used by characters in new interpretive acts. Lina Perkins Wilder observes how props might be understood 'phenomenologically, as material objects perceived through the senses; semiotically, as signs; and culturally, as products in a system of exchange which extends into the playhouse and onto the stage'.[28] She posits that calling attention to the 'flimsiness' of props 'is to draw attention to their physical presence and away from their semiotic function'.[29] The ultimate demonstration of the

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[26] On the 'dynamism of the sign', see Elam, p. 11; see also Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Semiotics of Theater*, trans. by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), p. 107. Richardson explicitly ties material objects to the idea of the 'dynamism of the sign' by discussing 'the dynamism of things on stage' (2019, p. 90); Gamboa and Switzky allude to this also by noting how 'the temporal contract of props is undergirded by a belief in the instability and dynamism of matter' (7). On props as signifiers of relationships, see Douglas Bruster, *Drama and the Market in the Age of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 63.

[27] Gay McAuley, *Space in Performance: Making Meaning in the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2000), p. 183. McAuley focuses on the imaginative transformation of props – moments when 'the object itself is [physically] unchanged' (p. 184) – but her conclusions remain true for moments when the object is physically changed (including destroyed). On the 'mobility of dramatic functions' in a prop, see also Elam, p. 11.

[28] Lina Perkins Wilder, 'Stage Props and Shakespeare's Comedies: Keeping Safe Nerissa's Ring', in *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespearean Comedy*, ed. by Heather Hirschfeld (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 377–94 (p. 381).

[29] Ibid, p. 393.

prop's 'flimsiness', however, that is, physically breaking a thing on stage, calls out how theatrical objects necessarily serve all three of these functions simultaneously – indeed, how each depends upon the work carried out by the others. When characters interact with, recirculate, and interpret or reinterpret the destroyed thing on stage, the play asserts the persistence of the theatrical object's semiotic status, even as it reveals its also inherently phenomenological and cultural status.

Not only is the destroyed thing transformed into a new prop, characters often speak of it, and to it, as if through its destruction it becomes a subject with a 'life of its own'.[30] In this, destroyed props demonstrate how impossible it is 'for subjects to cut themselves off from objects' and how, instead, 'the subject passes into the object [and] the object slides into the subject'.[31] The prop's subject-status provokes questions, and concern, about its survival – one of the conclusions Frank Coppieters comes to about audience perception in the theater is that 'inanimate objects can become personified and/or receive such strongly symbolic loadings that any anxiety about their fate becomes a crux in people's emotional experience'.[32] This signals the status of props as a species of idol, spectacular objects imbued with semiotic potency beyond the representational, indeed, capable of emphasizing the 'ambiguity between representational and presentational modes'; as such, the destruction of props is also iconoclastic.[33] Just as the destroyed thing on stage is never fully absent, iconoclastic acts 'require the erection of an alternative idol, an idol capable

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[30] Sofer, pp. 2 and 18. The idea that objects in performance can appear to acquire 'a measure of autonomy' is explained by Jirí Veltruský's concept of 'action force': 'the existence of the subject in the theater is dependent on the participation of some component in the action, and not on its actual spontaneity, so that even a lifeless object may be perceived as a performing subject'; see 'Man and Object in the Theater', in *A Prague School Reader on Esthetics, Literary Structure, and Style*, ed. and trans. by Paul L. Garvin, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1964), pp. 84, see also 88 and 90. See also Elam, pp. 13–14; McAuley, p. 172; Schweitzer and Zerdy, pp. 2–6; Douglas Bruster, 'The dramatic life of objects in the early modern theatre', in *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama*, ed. by Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 67-98 (p. 70); Duncan, pp. 27–8; and, in relation to Shakespeare specifically, Gamboa and Switzky, pp. 2–3. Wilder observes this effect of letters specifically: 'when they become stand-ins for the bodies of other actors, letters and rings trace a continuum between object and (partly, in some lights) quasi-subject' (pp. 383–4).

[31] Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass, 'Introduction', in *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*, ed. by Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 1–16 (p. 2; see also p. 5).

[32] Frank Coppieters, 'Performance and Perception', *Poetics* Today 2.3 (1981), 35–48 (p. 47).

[33] Wilder, p. 381; 'In a sense – a semiotic one – all props are "trumpery". Like Autolycus's goods, they invite iconoclasm' (Wilder, p. 393). On props as 'idols' subject to iconoclasm, see also Harris and Korda, p. 5.

of disguising and disowning its status as idol'.[34] As a form of iconoclasm, destroying things on stage is 'a productive mode of interacting with spectacle in which 'new' images are produced as a result of image-breaking'.[35] As Sophie Duncan notes, 'the breaking of *all* props carries iconoclastic potential in the creation of "new" images'.[36] Crucially, and compellingly, Duncan argues that 'characters' destructions of props enact but struggle to fulfil desires for forgetfulness' because 'broken props refuse to forget'; as the following survey of destroyed things on the early modern stage shows, we can also see how such refusal – and the ways that plays attempt to manage and mitigate it – is not merely about characters' desires but also, as with any act of iconoclasm, about asserting the existence of a boundary between what is representational and what is real.[37]

A good example of how subjectification of the stage object makes its destruction into an iconoclastic act that produces a new idol appears in James Shirley's *The Traitor* (1631), when Lorenzo reveals '*the Dukes Picture, a Ponyard sticking in it*' and, collapsing the Duke into the sign of the Duke, declares, 'every day / I kill a Prince… / Which though it bleed not, I may boast a Murder'.[38] Stabbing the portrait is a rehearsal, so 'That when I come to strike, my Ponyard may / Through all his charmes as confidently wound him, / As thus I stab his Picture'.[39] Lorenzo employs the deictic language typical of prop destruction, correlating words and actions ('thus I stab'), and he continues to collapse the sign into the signified:

> Me thinkes the Duke should feele me now: is not
> His soule acquainted; can he lesse then tremble
> When I lift up my arme to wound his counterfeit?
> Witches can persecute the lives of whom
> They hate, when they torment their sencelesse figures,
> And sticke the waxen modell full of pinnes.
> Can any stroke of mine carrie lesse spell
> To wound his heart, sent with as great a malice?[40]

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[34] James Simpson, *Under the Hammer: Iconoclasm in the Anglo-American Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 85. See also Porter, p. 135.

[35] Porter, p. 129.

[36] Duncan, p. 195.

[37] Duncan, pp. 196 and 221.

[38] James Shirley, *The Traitor* (William Cooke, 1635), K2r.

[39] Ibid.

[40] Ibid.

Lorenzo acknowledges the magical thinking of his fantasy and flags the fallacy of displacing the signified onto the signifier: the 'senceless' figure may be destroyed, but the Duke still lives. Yet, oblivious to this, Lorenzo still directly addresses the image as if it were the Duke:

> I will digge
> Thy wanton eyes out, and supply the darke
> And hollow Cells with two pitch burning Tapers:
> Then place thee Poster in some Charnell house.[41]

The 'Poster', of course, always 'smiles', and, in Lorenzo's plan, always will. His desire for revenge, displaced upon the newly subjectified object, likewise remains unrealized.

Not all moments of destruction, of course, are accompanied by such explicit attempts to interpret them. Occasionally, destroyed props are presented in exclusively practical terms, but even these serve to reinforce the reality of performance. In George Peele's *Old Wives' Tale* (1588–95), Zantippa '*strikes hir Pitcher against hir sisters, and breakes them both*'.[42] Doll, in Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610), separates the brawling Subtle and Face by '*catch[ing] out Face his sword: and break[ing] Subtle's glasse*'.[43] When Seawit '*Breaks [a] Can o'er [Furious Inland's] head*' in William Davenant's *News from Plymouth* (1635), the destruction instigates a brawl.[44] In Phillip Massinger's *The Renegado* (1624), Donusa '*breakes the glasses*' and wares Vitelli sells ('Christall glasses', a 'looking glasse', 'Corinthian plate', '*China* dishes').[45] Assuming that actual pitchers, glasses, plates, and dishes were broken when these plays were staged, such spectacles demonstrated the theater industry's dependence upon the growth of an English marketplace driven by conspicuous consumption. In this, they, too, reminded audiences of the real, material nature of performance.

Presentational Destruction

Occasionally, breaking a prop on stage was presentational and the damage not real – the thing's 'destruction' a function merely of artifice. When characters 'break open' a locked

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[41] Ibid, *Traitor*, K2r–v.

[42] George Peele, *The Old Wives' Tale* (Ralph Hancock and John Hardie, 1595), D4v; see also E1r.

[43] Ben Jonson, *The Alchemist*, in *The Works of Benjamin Jonson* (William Stansby, 1616), 2E5r.

[44] William Davenant, *News from Plymouth*, in *The Works of Sr. William Davenant* (Henry Herringman, 1673), 4B3r.

[45] Philip Massinger, *The Renegado* (John Waterson, 1630), C4r–v.

chest or door, for example, the players no doubt simulated the action. In some cases, specially designed props were made to give the appearance of breaking. One of the destroyed objects most frequently cited by scholars is the brazen head in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1588–92) – Duncan refers to it as 'one of the most spectacular prop destructions in Early Modern theatre' – but it was probably designed to come apart, allowing it to be reused in subsequent performances, and so is not precisely an example of 'prop destruction'.[46] Similar artifice may have been used for the play's magical perspective glass (possibly a mirror or a telescope), which Bacon '*breakes*' to demonstrate his renunciation of the dark arts.[47] In the same play, Vandermast conjures Hercules '*to breake the branches*' of a tree, likely built with removable branches.[48] Hercules features in another sequence of staged destruction in Thomas Heywood's *The Brazen Age* (1611), '*tearing downe trees*' before he is immolated, along with his club and lion's skin, by other heroes, who '*breake downe the trees*' for the fire.[49] A tree-breaking effect was also employed in Thomas Drue's *The Duchess of Suffolk* (1624): Fox, having learned of Cluny's plot to murder the Duchess, watches him climb a tree and resolves, 'These hopes Il crosse, by cutting downe the branch / Whereon he builds this weake foundation', at which point he '*cuts the branch*'.[50]

Like Bacon's perspective glass, other smaller props were made to give the appearance of destruction, such as the 'rotten rope' that '*breaketh*' when Fortune attempts to hang Prodigality in *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* (1601) and the necklace Skink '*breaks*' up for drinking money in *Look About You* (1598–1600).[51] The fishing cane Ghismonda gives Guiscardo in John Newdigate's *Fidelia and Glausamond* (1617–42) was also designed to come apart: when Guiscardo '*pulleth a peece out of the cane*', he discovers inside a letter from her.[52] Adopting a convention that, as we will see, many characters use, Guiscardo reads the broken object as a personification of his beloved: 'This peece is like her selfe, straight *and* upright'; unlike other characters who use this convention, though, he recognizes the comparison's insufficiency: 'Pardon, dread

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[46] Duncan, p. 210; Porter also assumes that the head was actually broken (p. 149). See Robert Greene, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (Edward White, 1594), G2v.

[47] Greene, H2r.

[48] Ibid, E4v.

[49] Thomas Heywood, *The Brazen Age* (Samuel Rand, 1613), L2r and L2v.

[50] Thomas Drue, *The Duchess of Suffolk* (Jasper Emery, 1631), H1v.

[51] Anonymous, *The Contention between Liberality and Prodigality* (George Vincent, 1602), E2r. Anonymous, *Look About You* (William Ferbrand, 1600), E3r.

[52] Herbert Wright (ed.), *Ghismonda: A Seventeenth-Century Tragedy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1944), p. 155.

Princes[s], that my presumption did / Compare thy person to a brittle cane'.[53] In the Stonyhurst pageant *Samson* (1610–42), Morio states that the cords binding Samson's hands are 'stronge & sure', making it all the more incredible when the hero breaks them 'lyke flaxe burnt in the fyre, or that's quite rotten'.[54] Evidently the players had some device for the seemingly miraculous breaking of cords: later, Dalila binds Samson 'wth seven cords of undryed sinews', which he breaks 'as a man would breake a threede of tow', so she binds him again 'W[th] new cordes that were never occupied', but again he breaks the bonds, 'lyke threeds of lynnen cloth'.[55] The comparative language used to describe Samson's destruction of the bonds ('*lyke* flaxe', '*as* a man...', '*lyke* threeds') points to the artifice of the destruction: because the actor does not really break unbreakable bonds, the other actors provide the audience with appropriate representational terms for understanding the presentational action.

Just as designed objects were not actually consumed, neither were props that were brought on stage already broken or whose destruction is described as occurring off stage – the lute in *The Taming of the Shrew* (1589–92), the broken sword in *Lust's Dominion* (1600), the suit in Thomas Middleton's *The Widow* (1615–17) – and so remained available for future performances.[56] Even these 'destroyed' props, however, reinforce the reality of the performance by subverting the expectation that the world of the play ends at the stage door, or that there exists a tidy distinction between the world of the play and the world of the performance.[57] Nonetheless, both designed, presentational failure and the use of pre-damaged objects offer the potential for repeatability, unlike those moments when destruction was real and irreversible.

Legal Documents and Symbols of Office

No doubt it is because of that irreversibility that the most frequently destroyed thing on the early modern stage was paper; it was relatively cheap and tearing it sends a clear symbolic message. For example, destroying legal documents offered a visually striking way to challenge authority. The surprising connotation of defiance in such an action evidently struck the compositor for the 1657 edition of *Lust's Dominion*: when Prince Philip rips up his arrest warrant, the stage direction ends with a peculiar punctuation mark:

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[53] Ibid, p. 155.

[54] Carleton Brown (ed.), *The Stonyhurst Pageants* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1920), p. 143.

[55] Ibid, p. 145.

[56] On the cognitive effect produced by props that 'refocus spectators away from the iconoclastic action of breaking to the resulting spectacle of brokenness', see Duncan, p. 205.

[57] Duncan, p. 205.

'*Tears the warrant!*'[58] To emphasize that sense of defiance, the tearing of a commission is followed by an elaborate ritual in *George a Green* (1587–92). When Sir Nicholas Mannering produces a commission from the treasonous Earl of Kendall, George '*teares the Commission*' and forces Mannering to eat some 'pilles' – that is, the wax seals that are the symbols of the authority Kendall has arrogated for himself.[59] Mannering grudgingly complies and George sends him back to the Earl, insisting, 'Although I have rent his large Commission, / Yet of curtesie I have sent all his seales / Backe againe by you'.[60] Tearing the paper is a straightforward action that George reads as a demonstration of loyalty to the king; less straightforward is having Mannering eat pieces of wax, though this too George reads as a diagnosis of Mannering's metaphorical physiological state ('sick' with treason). George's suggestion that the Earl will again take possession of the seals implies a journey through Mannering's digestive tract: the earl will only have his seals when they are no longer contained by Mannering's body. Tearing the commission demonstrates George's loyalty to the true authority of the king, while forcing Mannering to eat the seals makes it clear that the Earl's authority is, to George, literally excrement. The king himself destroys his own warrant in Samuel Rowley's *When You See Me, You Know Me* (1604–5). When Henry learns that Bonner and Gardiner have used his warrant to arrest the queen, he demands the paper. 'We have your highnesse hand to warrant it', Gardiner answers as he turns it over; Henry tears the paper, remarking, 'So, nowe yee have both my hand [*sic*] to contradict what one hand did'.[61] Henry's calculus quantifies authority: while he used one hand to write the warrant, his use of two to tear it means the warrant's destruction has twice the authority as its creation.

A more familiar legal document is destroyed in *Greene's Tu Quoque* (1611). As a test of Spendall's affections, Widow Raysby tricks him by tearing the marriage contract they have just signed: 'looke you sir, / Thus your new fancied hopes I teare asunder'.[62] Like most characters who destroy objects, Raysby uses deictic language to ensure the correspondence of word and action ('Thus') and, most crucially, interprets the destroyed signifier as the thing that it signifies. Anamnestes employs a similar conceit in Thomas Tomkis's *Lingua* (1602–7), when he discovers a 'memorandum' by Oblivio reminding him that he owes Anamnestes 'a breeching'; speaking metonymically to Oblivio,

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[58] [Thomas Dekker, William Haughton, and John Day], *Lust's Dominion, or, The Lascivious Queen* (Francis Kirkman, 1657), F5r. The exclamation point might have been in the manuscript from which the play was printed, but that manuscript is evidently authorial and it seems unlikely that any of the play's experienced dramatists would have employed such an oddity.

[59] Anonymous, *George a Greene* (Cuthbert Burby, 1599), A4v.

[60] *George a Greene*, A4v.

[61] Samuel Rowley, *When You See Me, You Know Me* (Nathaniel Butter, 1605), K1v.

[62] Jo[hn] Cooke, *Greene's Tu Quoque* (John Trundle, 1614), L2v.

Anamnestes promises, 'Sir I will ease you of that paiment' and '*rendes the bill*'.[63] As George, Henry, and Raysby show, the destruction of props invests them with new meanings, allowing them to 'speak' through and even after their demise. For this reason, when Slightall discovers his freedom from his contract with the Devil in *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil* (1624–34), he considers its absolute destruction necessary for his redemption:

> ...give me my deed,
> That I may see it cancell'd and undone:
> Ile teare it small as Atomes, that no memory
> Of the least Letter be reserv'd as witnesse
> Against my soule when I shall resurvive;
> Nor shall I be at patience till I see
> This Parchment ashes, and this horrid Writ
> Dissolv'd to smoake and aire.[64]

Though the contract is void, Slightall feels salvation is uncertain so long as evidence of his crime remains: the document cannot merely be ripped but must be completely eradicated so that nothing remains to 'speak' of his sins. So long as the deed survives, even if torn, his soul cannot; its material substance iconographically confirms his wrongdoing.

George Chapman's *Chabot, Admiral of France* (1611–13, revised 1635) directly connects destroying a legal document with iconoclasm after Chabot is presented with a bill signed by the King. Upon reading it, Chabot tears the paper: 'for this bill, / Thus say twas shiver'd, blesse us equall heaven!'[65] Later, when 'the Torne bill' is presented to the King and he regards it with little concern, the Queen, enraged, links the King's written name, his identity, and his authority:

> *Qu*. Can you be so, and see your selfe thus torne.
> *Kin*. Our selfe.
> *Qu*. There is some left, if you dare owne,
> Your royall character, is not this your name?
> *King*. Tis *Francis* I confesse.

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[63] [Thomas Tomkis], *Lingua* (Simon Waterson, 1607), E3r.

[64] Robert Davenport, *A New Trick to Cheat the Devil* (Humphrey Blunden, 1639), I3v–I4r.

[65] George Chapman and James Shirley, *Chabot, Admiral of France* (Andrew Crooke and William Cooke, 1639), B3v.

> *Qu.* Be but a name
> If this staine live upon't, affronted by
> Your subject, shall the sacred name of King,
> A word to make your nation bow and tremble,
> Be thus profain'd, are laws establish'd
> To punish the defacers of your image,
> But dully set by the rude hand of others
> Upon your coine, and shall the character
> That doth include the blessing of all *France*,
> Your name, thus written by your royall hand
> Design'd for Justice, and your Kingdomes honour,
> Not call up equall anger to reward it?

Comparing tearing the King's name with defacing coins, the Queen equates the sign and the person it represents: the King has, she charges, 'see[n] your *selfe* thus torne'. His 'royall character' is both his signature ('character' meaning handwriting) and the quality that makes him monarch ('character' meaning person). A similar moment appears in *1 Selimus* (1591–94), when Acomat reads a letter from the king and, '*renting it*', declares, 'Thus will I rend the crowne from off thy head, / False hearted and injurious *Bajazet*'.[66] Like the Queen, Acomat interprets destroying the king's written word as emblematic of undoing his authority. Destroying a document that signifies the king's authority could also, though, be read as exposing the monarch's fallibility. In Massinger's *The Emperor of the East* (1631), Emperor Theodosius vows to give his sister Pulcheria whatever she wishes and signs a deed to that effect without bothering to read it. The deed, though, gives Pulcheria ownership of Theodosius' wife. When Pulcheria later presents him with the sealed document, he acknowledges, 'It is my deed, I doe confesse it is, / And as I am my selfe, not to bee cancell'd'.[67] Pulcheria reveals the deed's contents and uses it to warn her brother against being so overly generous: despite the emperor's earlier fusion of himself with the document, she '*Teares the deed*', declaring it 'cancel'd'.[68]

Like tearing legal documents, breaking objects that signify office is read by characters as undoing authority. In *Thomas of Woodstock* (1610–16), Richard demands his uncle surrender his council staff; to prevent 'an vpstart groome' from 'glory[ing] in the honno^r^s

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[66] Anonymous, *1 Selimus* (s.n., 1594), E2r.

[67] Philip Massinger, *The Emperor of the East* (John Waterson, 1632), G4v.

[68] Massinger, *Emperor*, H1r.

Woodstock lost', Woodstock smashes it instead.[69] As he interprets it, the destruction foreshadows what awaits England: 'ther let hime take it', Woodstock declares, 'shiuerd crackt & brooke / as will the state of England be ere longe / by this reiecting trew nobillitye'.[70] The staff the historical Woodstock carried was metal, but the players must have used one that would break easily and could be cheaply replaced. Certainly a flimsy wood was needed for Old Wallace's staff of office in *The Valiant Scot* (1607–37): after Wallace surrenders it, the English commissioner humiliatingly '*breaks [it] Over his head*'.[71] If the version of the play staged at the Fortune for 'five dayes' in 1639 followed the 1637 text, the actors would have required a ready supply of expendable staffs (oddly, the company chose *The Valiant Scot* because they suffered a shortage of props and thought it did not require many materials).[72]

Letters

The paper most often destroyed in early modern plays is a letter. In part, this is because, as single sheets of paper, they were relatively cheap and thus easily replaced for later performances, but also because letters are peculiarly rich in symbolic significance, as Lina Perkins Wilder notes, being both 'alienable' and 'conduits of meaning passed from person to person'.[73] Alan Stewart observes that Shakespeare often uses the fact that, in literary and dramatic works, the message that letters convey 'is not primarily about the text, but about… how they make [their] journey' in order to 'contradict… the text of a letter with its physical journey' through misdelivery, delay, and destruction.[74] Wilder also calls attention to how Shakespeare took advantage of the 'material quality of the letter (rippable paper) [as a means for communicating] violent erotic fantasy'.[75] Shakespeare was not alone in doing this, however, and many of the tropes Stewart and Wilder identify in Shakespeare's treatment of torn letters appear in other plays. In many instances, as Slightall fears of his torn contract, the pieces of a ripped letter continue to 'speak' after

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[69] Anonymous, [*Thomas of Woodstock*], British Library MS Egerton 1994, f. 169r; see *The First Part of the Reign of King Richard the Second, or, Thomas of Woodstock*, ed. by Wilhelmina Paulina Frijlinck (Malone Society, 1929), ll. 958–59.

[70] [*Woodstock*], f. 169r; see Frijlinck, ll. 960–63.

[71] J. W., *The Valiant Scot* (John Waterson, 1637), A4r–v.

[72] [John Mennes?], *Vox Borealis* (s.n., 1641), B2v. G. E. Bentley, however, suggests that the reference in *Vox Borealis* is unreliable (G. E. Bentley, *The Jacobean and Caroline Stage* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1941–68), 5:1235).

[73] Wilder, p. 378.

[74] Alan Stewart, *Shakespeare's Letters* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 23.

[75] Wilder, p. 384.

the document's destruction. During the trial in Jonson's *Catiline* (1611), Cethegus tears a letter that reveals his role in the conspiracy. Cicero, reading Cethegus's act as confirmation of his guilt, orders the officers to 'save the peeces'.[76] Fragments of a torn letter are also called upon in *The Revenger's Tragedy* (1604–7). The imprisoned Junior receives a letter from his brothers encouraging him to 'be merry' because they are working on a 'trick' to release him; impatient, he tears the letter.[77] When the officers arrive bearing an execution warrant, Junior protests that his brothers just wrote a letter, 'New-bleeding from their Pens', promising his release: 'Would Ide beene torne in peeces when I tore it, / Looke you officious whoresons words of comfort, / *Not long a Prisoner*'.[78] Junior analogizes the destroyed letter, first, with bodily violence perpetrated in the act of creating it and finally with his own soon-to-be-destroyed body – a reminder that, as Stewart notes, 'the most visible and brutal' action by which a letter can communicate is not by its being read but by its being torn, that is, by being rendered (literally) once more as a tenuous thing just as fragile as the human body.[79] Though not a letter, a torn *siquis* is similarly recuperated in Barten Holyday's *Technogamia* (1618).[80] Sanguis enters with a *siquis* written by Medicus, advertising services to those suffering from 'idle choler'; the character Choler thinks that Sanguis is describing him as 'idle' and tears the document.[81] After Sanguis flees, Choler picks up the pieces: 'what had the Rogue in this *Siquis*? I'll put it together againe'.[82] Finding it an advertisement for medical care, Choler repents his anger.[83]

The letters in *Catiline* and *The Revenger's Tragedy* appear in juridical contexts, but the most common letter destroyed on the early modern stage was a love letter, its tearing typically a 'gesture [meant] to renounce or deny romantic feeling'.[84] Like other letters, the torn love letter is often the focus of attempted repair, making the sundered document a symbol also of potential re-unification. In *Fair Em* (1589–91), William the Conqueror, disguised as 'Sir Robert of Windsor', writes a love letter to Mariana, but it is intercepted

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[76] Ben Jonson, *Catiline, His Conspiracy* (Walter Burre, 1611), M4r.

[77] Anonymous, *The Revenger's Tragedy* (George Eld, 1607), E3v.

[78] *Revenger's*, E4v.

[79] Stewart, p. 60.

[80] A *siquis* was an advertisement or edict (which typically began with the Latin word *siquis*, meaning 'if anyone').

[81] Barten Holyday, *Technogamia* (John Parker, 1618), C3r.

[82] Holyday, C3v.

[83] Tearing broadsides is a recurring motif in *Technogamia*. When Poeta comes upon a *siquis* advertising the opportunity to learn multiple languages; he '*teares the* Siquis' to prevent others from knowing of the opportunity (Holyday, C2r).

[84] Duncan, p. 213. On torn letters, see Stewart, pp. 60–6; Perkins, pp. 384–87; and Duncan, pp. 213–20.

by Blaunch, who also loves 'Sir Robert' and who '*teares it*'.[85] After Blaunch storms off, Mariana hopes the remnants will 'shew to me the intent thereof / Though not the meaning', and she '*gathers upp the peeces and joynes them*'.[86] Mariana is ultimately able to recover enough of the letter to learn that 'Sir Robert' is William. A destroyed love letter also continues to speak in Shakespeare's *Love's Labor's Lost* (1594–97): after Biron tears it, Dumain recovers enough to observe that it is in Biron's hand and bears his name, compelling Biron to confess that the 'rent lines' were his poem for Rosaline.[87]

Not every torn letter, of course, continues to speak, though when a torn letter remains silent, the destruction is still subjected to explicit interpretation. In John Lyly's *The Woman in the Moon* (1587–90), when Learchus discovers that Pandora has betrayed him, he tears her letter to demonstrate the breaking of his affection: 'In witnesse of my vow I rend these lines, / O thus be my love disperst into the ayre'.[88] Dekker and Middleton take advantage of the trope of the torn letter's symbolic interpretation in *The Roaring Girl* (1611). Laxton has written to his lover, Mistress Gallipot, requesting money; to trick her husband into supplying it, she feigns despair and, before he can see it, '*teares the letter*', correlating the paper with her own body by wishing, 'Would I could teare / My very heart in peeces: for my soule / Lies on the racke of shame'.[89] Mistress Gallipot's gloss is meant to mislead her husband into assuming the destruction was symbolic, a manifestation of inward grief. Instead, the destruction is tactical, to destroy evidence and swindle her husband. Her trick works because she exploits, and he expects, the trope of interpreting the destruction of the prop as symbolic rather than merely practical. Furthermore, as with Junior's gloss of his destruction of the letter he receives, Mistress Gallipot's interpretation here reverses the traditional correlation of the letter with the body of the sender (on which, see below); rather, in its destruction here, the letter stands in for the body of the recipient.

Shirley too employed the tearing of a love letter in *The School of Compliment* (1625) when Infortunio intercepts a letter he thinks his beloved, Selina, has written to Rufaldo, urging their marriage. Distraught, Infortunio asks, 'whom shall I rend in pieces for my wrongs?'; in place of such mortal vengeance, he 'has made a Taylors bill [of the letter], torn't apieces ere it be discharg'd'.[90] In his interpretation of the letter's destruction, Infortunio alludes to Greek mythology: 'This is Medias brother torne in pieces, / And this

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[85] Anonymous, *Fair Em* (Thomas Newman and John Winnington, 1591[?]), C2r.

[86] Ibid.

[87] William Shakespeare, *Love's Labor's Lost* (Cuthbert Burby, 1598), F1r–v. See Wilder, 387–89.

[88] Lyly, *Woman*, F4r.

[89] Thomas Middleton and Thomas Dekker, *The Roaring Girl* (Thomas Archer, 1611), F3r.

[90] James Shirley, *The School of Compliment* (Francis Constable, 1631), E1r.

the way where she with Jason flies, / Tow[ard] Colchos, come not neere'em, see, looke'.[91] Infortunio imagines each piece of the letter a piece of Medea's brother, Absyrtus, whom she dismembered – one piece is 'an arme rent off', others 'the hand', 'a leg o'th boy', 'head and yellow curled locks', and 'eyes'.[92] A similar instance of a torn letter appeared in William Hawkins's school play *Apollo Shroving* (1627), when Amphibius, outraged at a letter from Siren, '*teares thee letter, and stampes on it*':

> What sacrifice to Vertue can I yeeld
> More fit, then thus to teare that robe, wherein
> That poyson was convey'd, to be to me
> As was the deadly shirt to Hercules?
> So would I also her.[93]

Amphibius resolves his metaphor with a concrete association between the letter and the body of the person who wrote it. In its induction, Hawkins's play sets up this trope of the destruction of the document in place of the person it represents when a Prologue announces that the students will perform Terence's *Eunuch* and displays a banner bearing the title; this outrages one 'audience member', Mistress Lala, who '*teares the paper*' and promises that, as she tore the banner, she will 'hang, draw and quarter' Eunuchus should he appear.[94]

Perhaps the best-known examples of torn letters in early modern drama appear in Shakespeare's *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* (1587–98). Silvia reads the fragility of the material of which Proteus' letter is made as a manifestation of the flimsiness of his word. She tears his lines because they are 'stuft with protestations, / And full of new-found oathes, which he will breake / As easily as I doe teare his paper'.[95] Her tearing of Proteus's letter is prefigured in the play by Julia's tearing of Proteus's love letter to her. Julia's sudden assumption that destroying the token of Proteus's love will result in the actual sundering of his love anticipates the same inconstancy that Silvia cites as the reason she tears her letter. Unlike Silvia, however, Julia repents the destruction, rebuking her 'hatefull hands' for daring to 'teare such loving words' and, as with other torn letters,

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[91] Ibid.

[92] Ibid.

[93] William Hawkins, *Apollo Shroving* (Robert Milbourne, 1627), F6r.

[94] Ibid, B2v.

[95] William Shakespeare, *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, in *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, C6r. On how Silvia's and Viola's letters figure into the play's broader treatment of letters and letter-sending, see Frederick Kiefer, 'Love Letters in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*', *Shakespeare Studies* 18 (1986), 65–86.

attempting to make the letter speak again.[96] With a promise to 'kisse each severall paper' she sorts the scraps, responding to each as if it were the person its words signify. While Amphibius uses his destruction of the letter to enact a fantasy of violence, Julia uses hers as a stand-in for the fantasy of a sexual encounter. Her kissing of the piece with Proteus' name on it and concealing it in her breast culminates with the eroticization of the subjectified object by using the destroyed object to 'exert… a certain amount of control over her own sexuality': folding his name on top of hers and imagining the names kissing, embracing, and 'do[ing] what you will'. [97] As with other destroyed objects, both torn letters in *Two Gentlemen* become personified signifiers for the identity, even body, of the person who wrote them.[98] Wilder reads the torn letter even further, as becoming 'a doll or puppet to which Julia ascribes independent action and desire' and thus an object 'bordering on subjectivity': 'when its message is syntactically broken, the letter becomes a paper impersonator of Proteus's and Julia's bodies'.[99] Julia's ascription is, of course, flawed: like a doll or puppet, the letter is no subject of its own; it is merely subject to the agency of the sender and, by being ripped apart, the receiver.

Shakespeare returned to this device in *Troilus and Cressida* (1601–2), when Troilus tears Cressida's letter. Dismissing the emptiness of her promises as 'Words, words, meere words', Troilus tears the letter and tosses the scraps with the hope that, unlike Julia's letter and those of other characters described here, its message may never be reconstituted: 'Go winde to winde, there turne and change together'.[100] His assertion that the pieces will blow at random in the wind correlates with the letter-writer's character: like Cressida, the scraps of her letter will 'turne and change' in an inconstant and unpredictable way.[101] Though torn, Cressida's letter still communicates meaning, though that meaning is altered from what the writer intended. As Stewart demonstrates, 'letter-tearing is often adduced in narratives of all kinds to express heightened emotion, either anger or erotic passion'.[102] What distinguishes letter-tearing in other narratives, however, such as a prose romance, from letter-tearing on stage is the additional variable of the

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[96] Shakespeare, *Gentlemen*, B5v.

[97] Wilder, p. 386; Shakespeare, *Gentlemen*, B5v.

[98] See Sofer, p. 27.

[99] Wilder, pp. 385–6.

[100] William Shakespeare, *History of Troilus and Cressida* (Richard Bonian and Henry Walley, 1609), K3v. There is no stage direction, but the action is implied.

[101] Stewart notes that Troilus's invocation to the wind to blow away the scraps of the letter contrasts with Julia's appeal to the wind to be calm and not blow away a single word, both of which, on the open-air stage of the Globe, were real possibilities – a reminder of 'the practical challenges of rendering material letters on the Elizabethan stage' (p. 64).

[102] Stewart, p. 60.

document's real materiality and how that materiality functions in constructing the performance's semiotic meaning; as Stewart puts it, in a play, 'the letter must, perforce, remain in fragments – the stage prop has been destroyed'.[103] Tearing letters and 'reading' their new, destroyed form emphasizes the dynamism of the theatrical sign and shows how characters who destroy an object use that act of destruction to assign that object a new meaning.

Jewelry and Glass

Torn paper was the most common destroyed prop, but symbolically meaningful broken pieces of jewelry were also familiar enough theatrical clichés for Stephen Gosson in 1582 to mock the trope of a knight's true identity being discovered because he carries 'a broken ring'.[104] As with love letters, destroying jewelry on stage was typically read as the destruction of the relationship the object emblematized. For example, when Iphicles, in Lyly's *Woman in the Moon*, breaks the ring Pandora gave him, he glosses the action with a triple analogy in which the ring's breaking represents the breaking of his heart caused by the breaking off of Pandora's affections: 'Break, breake, *Pandoraes* ring, and with it breake, / *Pandoraes* love, that almost burst my heart'.[105] In William Hemings's *The Fatal Contract* (1638–39), after Aphelia betrays her betrothed, he dramatizes the violation of their marriage-bond when '*he breaks the Ring*' she had given him: 'thus do I break / Your broken pledge of faith'.[106] A love token is also divided in Middleton's *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman's* (1611, revised 1638), when Lady Goldenfleece, choosing her betrothed, declares, 'with this parted Gold [our] two hearts joyn'.[107] Here, though, the destruction signifies, not the relationship's destruction, but the hope of its endurance. A similar moment occurs in William Sampson's *The Vow Breaker* (1628–36), when Bateman gives Anne half a coin in an impromptu betrothal and declares that dividing the gold will 'ty, and seale a knot / A jugall knot on Earth' between them: 'When eyther of us breakes this

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[103] Ibid, p. 63.

[104] Stephen Gosson, *Plays Confuted in Five Actions* (Thomas Gasson, [1582]), C6r.

[105] Lyly, *Woman*, F4r.

[106] William Hemings, *The Fatal Contract* (John Marriot, 1653), F2r. The date range for *The Fatal Contract* is from Alfred Harbage and S. Schoenbaum (eds.), Sylvia Stoler Wagonheim, rev., *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700* (Routledge, 1989), p. 138.

[107] Thomas Middleton, *No Wit, No Help Like a Woman* (Humphrey Moseley, 1657), D7v. Possibly the ring was a 'gimmal', a ring 'so constructed as to admit of being divided into two (sometimes three) rings' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'gimmal, *n*'., 1); on gimmals and their symbolic significance in the period, see Richardson (2011), 2–3.

sacred bond / Let us be made strange spectacles to the world / To heaven, and earth'.[108] Material partition of the object thus symbolizes the lovers' connection. After Anne marries another, though, Bateman's ghost confronts her with their 'pledge, a peice [sic] of Gold. / Which when we broke, joyntly then we swore / Alive or dead, for to enjoy each other'.[109] So important is the broken gold that it features in a woodcut in the 1636 quarto, where the ghost gestures admonishingly at his half.[110]

Detail from woodcut in *The Vow Breaker* (1636) (Harry Ransom Center, The University of Texas at Austin; for permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder).

In *The Woman in the Moon* and *The Fatal Contract*, breaking rings serves as dramatic shorthand for breaking a promise, but, as in *No Wit* and *The Vow Breaker*, breaking an object could also signal the opposite. Destroying things in order to produce a bond occurs also in Dekker's *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (1619–31), when guests at Torrenti's feast pledge a health to the duke by smashing their glasses: '*Musicke, drinck, breake the glasse, they pledge it in plate*'.[111] Torrenti urges them on, punning in a manner that reverses the usual formula employed for interpreting a prop's destruction: 'Breake not our custome (pray ye)'.[112] While breaking objects is often read as a manifestation of symbolic failure, here neglecting to break the objects signals a failure to wish the Duke good health. A

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[108] William Sampson, *The Vow Breaker* (Roger Ball, 1636), B4r.

[109] Sampson, D3v.

[110] Sampson, A2r. In what might be an artist's error, the coin in the woodcut appears intact. On the woodcut, see R.A. Foakes, *Illustrations of the English Stage, 1580–1642* (Scolar Press, 1985), 141; see also Bruster (2002), pp. 75–6.

[111] Thomas Dekker, *The Wonder of a Kingdom* (Nicholas Vavasour, 1636), E1r.

[112] Ibid.

different use of breaking drinking glasses as a means of communication occurs in *The Woman in the Moon*, when Gunophilus discovers his beloved Pandora alone with Learchus and declares, 'Sic vos non vobis, sic vos non vobis' (from Virgil: 'For you but not yours'); Learchus, who does not speak Latin, asks what Gunophilus means and he responds, 'Here is a comment upon my wordes', at which he '*throwes the Glasse downe and breakes it*'.[113] In both Dekker's and Lyly's plays, the spectacle of shattering the drinking glass – a costly material for the playing company to have to replace – is read as a symbolic act that 'speaks' more than the words used by the characters.

Fabric and Costumes

Fabric might lend itself to meaningful destruction, but, due to its cost, few plays call for its destruction on stage. In Dekker and Middleton's *1 The Honest Whore* (1604), Castruccio tests the patience of the merchant Candido by purchasing a 'penny-worth' of fine lawn and requiring the piece be cut from 'just in the middle', ruining the bolt.[114] More of Candido's fabric is ruined in Dekker's *2 The Honest Whore* (1604–8), when Brian tears a piece of fine cambric.[115] The expense of ruining an entire bolt of costly fabric makes these moments all the more sensational, though presumably the actors used a cheaper fabric as a stand-in. Because of the financial value of costumes, most plays with damaged clothing call for it to be brought onto stage already ruined, as with the mantle in *Julius Caesar*.[116] For example, in *Solymitana Clades* (1588–98), Sadducee refugees enter wearing 'long coats country fashion worne and torne, [and] old shoes the toes breaking out'.[117] Ubaldo, in Massinger's *The Picture* (1629), describes a torn 'pettycote for a coverlet' in his cell 'above', though it might not even be seen by the audience.[118] In Massinger's *The Roman Actor* (1626), the miserly Philargus wears a 'nastie hat', 'tatterd

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[113] John Lyly, *The Woman in the Moon* (William Jones, 1597), D3r.

[114] Thomas Dekker and Thomas Middleton, *1 The Honest Whore* (John Hodgets, 1604), C1r–v.

[115] Thomas Dekker, *2 The Honest Whore* (Nathaniel Butter, 1630), F4r.

[116] Wiggins suggests that the cutpurse in Marlowe's *Massacre at Paris* (1593) cuts buttons from Mugeroun's coat onstage (Wiggins, 3:214): the stage direction reads, '*He cuts of the Cutpurse eare, for cutting of the golde buttons off his cloake*', which (as a literary direction) could indicate that the buttons were cut in the past, before the characters enter; see Christopher Marlowe, *The Massacre at Paris* (Edward White, [594?]), B8r. Similarly, Wiggins states that the King of Israel in the pageant *Naaman* 'tears his garment on stage' (8:75); the dialogue in which the King describes this, however, reads, 'The very sight [of Syria's suspected treachery] here of makes me my garments off to tear', which might indicate that he is merely removing them; see Brown (1920), p. 294.

[117] Dana Sutton, ed. and trans. *Thomas Legge: The Complete Plays*, 2 volumes (New York: Peter Lang, 1993), 2: p. 607.

[118] Philip Massinger, *The Picture* (Thomas Walkley, 1630), K4r.

cloke', 'rent shooe', and 'sordid linen'.[119] Like Philargus, Merefool in Jonson's *The Fortunate Isles* (1625) wears 'bare and worne cloathes, shrowded under an obscure cloake, and the eaves of an old hatt' (the King's Men staged the antimasque, so possibly this was the same outfit used for *The Roman Actor* the next year).[120]

A more costly damaged costume is the 'rustie armour' worn by the Porter of Mars in Wilson's *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (1589–93), which the Porter symbolically redeems by explaining that its 'rustines comes by peace'.[121] Written around the same time as Wilson's play, Shakespeare's *Richard III* (1591–97) calls for two suits of '*rotten Armour, marvellous ill-favoured*' so Richard and Buckingham can present themselves as harmless old men.[122] Both acknowledge the theatricality of their performance, likening their use of ruined costuming to the practices of 'the deepe Tragedian' who exploits stage objects for symbolic value.[123] As Susan Harlan points out, however, the state of Richard's armor does not conceal so much as it 'emblematizes his moral and political corruption'.[124] Shakespeare again made symbolic use of ruined armor in *Pericles* (1606–8), though for a different purpose.[125] After a shipwreck, Pericles is found by fishermen who also recover his 'rusty Armour'.[126] This was no doubt a pre-damaged costume, possibly one of the same suits used in *Richard III*.[127] While both armors serve to convey dramatic meaning about the inner quality of the characters who wear them, Pericles's paradoxically conceals

[119] Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor* (Robert Allott, 1629), D1r.

[120] Ben Jonson, *The Fortunate Isles, and Their Union* (s.n., 1625), A2r. Like the woodcut of Bateman, in Inigo Jones's drawing of the masque's costumes, Merefool wears intact, fashionable clothing (possibly Jones made his drawing before having read Jonson's script). For Jones's drawing, see Martin Butler, 'Introduction' to *The Fortunate Isles and Their Union* in *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson Online*, gen. ed. by Martin Butler (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), <https://universitypublishingonline.org/cambridge/benjonson/k/works/fortunate/facing/#> [accessed 23 December 2022], illustration 94.

[121] Robert Wilson, *The Cobbler's Prophecy* (Cuthbert Burby, 1594), D1v.

[122] William Shakespeare, *Richard III*, in *Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies*, f1r.

[123] Shakespeare, *Richard III*, f1r.

[124] Susan Harlan, '"Certain condolements, certain vails": Staging Rusty Armour in Shakespeare's *Pericles*', *Early Theatre* 11.2 (2008), 129–40 (p. 134).

[125] On Pericles's armor, see Harlan.

[126] William Shakespeare [and George Wilkins], *Pericles* (Henry Gosson, 1609), C3r.

[127] 'As the character inherited this garment from his father, so the actor almost certainly would have inherited it from previous performances or from its extra-theatrical life'; see Harlan, 130. While there is no evidence directly supporting the frequently repeated claim that nobles often gave their discarded clothing to the troupes they patronized, the troupe's rusty armors might have been given by a patron. It is unlikely that new armor – which could cost up to fourteen pounds – was ruined expressly for the purpose of being used in a play; see Charles Ffoulkes, *The Armourer and His Craft from the XI*th *to the XVI*th *Century* (Methuen and Company, 1912), pp. 50 and 68.

a virtuous interior. When Pericles joins the parade of knights – all of whom wear fine armor – his visual difference is remarked upon by the courtiers in the language of foreignness: Thaisa observes that 'Hee seemes to be a Stranger', which one lord associates with his armor: 'He well may be a Stranger, for he comes / To an honour'd tryumph, strangly furnisht'. Another reads Pericles's armor as indicating his lack of martial ability, guessing he 'let his Armour rust / Untill this day, to scowre it in the dust'. Only the wise king Simonedes recognizes the semiotic unreliability of the visual representation of ruin: 'Opinion's but a foole, that makes us scan / The outward habit, by the inward man'.[128]

Objects of Value

Expensive things were usually only broken for occasional or one-time entertainments, such as university plays and royal pageants, though writers of such performances also sometimes found ways to work around destroying valuable things. George Ruggle carefully rendered a musical instrument inoperable without destroying it in *Ignoramus* (1615), staged at Clare Hall, Cambridge, on March 8, 1615. In the play, Polla overhears her husband, Cupes, wooing Rosabella with a song accompanied by fiddles. She bursts from her hiding place and beats everyone before '*she throws down on the ground the Capo[n]s, Pheasants, and much other good cheer, [and] she poures out all the [w]ine*'.[129] A peculiar onomatopoetic stage direction accompanying this business – '*Thwick-thwack*' – is clarified when a fiddler complains, 'I am undone, she hath broke all my strings'.[130] A relatively inexpensive object was broken in Barten Holyday's *Technogamia*, performed at Christ Church Hall, Oxford, in February 1618: when Phlegmatico interrupts a conversation between Logicus and Causidicus by singing and smoking, Logicus rebukes him for his rudeness, '*takes away his Pipe, breakest it, and beates him*'.[131]

Other occasional productions, however, made a point of destroying valuable objects in front of the audience. For example, while Shakespeare carefully avoids showing a broken lute in *The Taming of the Shrew*, a lute is broken over a character's head onstage in William Drury's *Mors* (staged at Douai in 1619–20).[132] In the St. John's College, Oxford,

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[128] Shakespeare [and Wilkins], C4v.

[129] George Ruggle, R[obert] C[odrington], trans., *Ignoramus* (W. Gilbertson, 1662), L3r.

[130] Ibid, L4r.

[131] Holyday, D3v.

[132] To prevent injury, the players might have used a fake lute (the instrument is never played). In many modern productions of *The Taming of the Shrew*, Hortensio enters with the lute broken over his head; however, the text only calls for Hortensio to enter 'with his head broke' (S6r).

play *Time's Complaint* (1608), Humphrey Swallow dashes an hourglass '*against the walls*' when he discovers that it is not the kind of glass that will 'hold drinke'.[133] Robert Ward, in *Fucus* (1623), at Queen's College, Cambridge, accompanied the destruction of an expensive musical instrument with a comic lamentation. When Peasant uses Uncouth's bagpipes to attempt to woo Ballad, she, disgusted by his bad music, '*breaks the bagpipe*'.[134] Uncouth mourns over his broken instrument and when he departs to find someone to repair it, Peasant offers a dirge, calling on 'ye bagpipes' to 'mourn your fatal wound'. Fortunately, Uncouth returns with news that 'there's hope they can be repaired without damage. Even now, the bagpiper is inside applying himself to the task, it's well along'. Whether the bagpipe was actually repaired is not clear, though it seems unlikely: the two subsequent times bagpipes appear in the play, they are played by other characters, in an entirely different plot.

While the destruction of documents on the commercial stage was limited to tearing single sheets in letters and such, for the February 2, 1588 court performance of *Endymion*, Lyly took a more costly route by destroying an entire book.[135] In a dumb show depicting what Endymion sees as he sleeps, an old man presents him with a

> booke with three leaves, in which are contained counsels, policies, and pictures, and with that hee offered mee the booke, which I [Endymion] rejected: wherewith moved with a disdainful pitie, he rent the first leafe in a thousand shivers, the second time hee offered it, which I refused also: at which bending his browes, and pitching his eyes fast to the ground, as though they were fixed to the earth, and not againe to be removed: then sodainly casting them up to the Heavens, hee tore in a rage the second leafe, and offered the booke only with one leafe. I know not whether fear to offend, or desire to know some strange thing, moved me: I took the booke, and so the old man vanished.[136]

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[133] Anonymous, *Time's Complaint* ed. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/time/text.html).

[134] Robert Ward, *Fucus*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/ward/).

[135] Duncan notes that while 'letters and documents are frequently destroyed onstage, books are usually subjected to unfulfilled threats' (p. 202). For example, in *Arden of Faversham* (1587–90), Alice, to demonstrate commitment to her lover, offers to tear pages out of her prayer book, but it would have been possible to stage this business without destroying the book, since Alice only says that she 'will' tear the leaves and not that she actually does so (F1r).

[136] John Lyly, *Endymion* (s.n., 1632), E11r–v; see also C8r.

Jeremy Lopez aptly describes this moment as 'a ritual of texts', but it is also, more specifically, a ritual of textual obliteration.[137] Destroying the literal necessitates, for Endymion, an interpretive encounter with the figurative, much as Lyly's play, by moving into a dumb show, turns to the capacity of theatrical allegory to communicate through images in place of words.

Like academic plays, pageants were intended for one performance and, predicated upon spectacular symbolism, often included the destruction of expensive materials. For paramilitary performances like 'fort-takings', pyrotechnics, and barrier combats, such destruction was often the very purpose of the event. For example, during the 1616 ceremonial combat to celebrate Prince Charles's creation as Prince of Wales, Inns of Court gentlemen ritualistically broke one hundred-twenty staves and swords to symbolize the prince's martial promise. When royal gunner John Tindall staged a fireworks performance to celebrate Princess Elizabeth's marriage to Frederick of Palatine in 1613, the 'Castle of Envy' was 'utterly raced [razed], demollished, and subverted, with Rackets, breakers, blowes, and reports innumerable'.[138] Such extravagant destruction demonstrated the affluence of the monarch and exclusivity of the event: after the royal performance, the show could not be staged for another audience.

A more gruesome but also irrevocable act of destruction accompanied Jonson's entertainment for Queen Anne and Prince Henry at Sir Robert Spencer's estate at Althorp on June 25, 1603. As Anne and Henry were led through the grounds, Spencer's son John stepped from the trees dressed as a huntsman and 'a brace of choyse Deere [were] put out' which were 'fortunately kill'd, as they were meant to be; even in the sight of her Majestie'.[139] Jonson's language suggests some concern that John might not have accomplished his grisly task. Anxiety over the potential real-world effect of theatrical destruction appears also in an account of the Edinburgh glovers' entertainment for King Charles in July 1633: while five performers danced about carrying others on their shoulders, three more 'daunc[ed] through thair feet' while 'drinking wine and brekking [the] glasses', which, the witness adds, 'God be praisit wes actet and done without hurt

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[137] Jeremy Lopez, 'Dumb show', in *Early Modern Theatricality*, ed. by Henry Turner (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), pp. 291–305 (p. 303).

[138] John Taylor, *Heaven's Blessing and Earth's Joy* (Joseph Hunt, 1613), C2r. 'Rackets' were hand-held slings that threw stones or flaming darts (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'racket, *n.1*', 2). 'Breaker' is a generic term for a firework (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'breaker, *n.1*', 6). A 'report' was the sound caused by discharging an explosive and the substance that created such a sound (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'report, *n'.*, 7.a and 7.b).

[139] Ben Jonson, *A Particular Entertainment of the Queen and Prince* (s.n. 1604), B2r.

or skaithe [scathe, that is harm] till [to] any'.[140] Breaking glasses demonstrated honor for the monarch – like the smashing of glasses in *The Wonder of a Kingdom*; when combined with the acrobatic choreography, it was also dangerous. That risk of injury, though, itself demonstrated the lengths to which the glovers would go to entertain their monarch.

One of the best-known instances of a deliberately destroyed prop during a royal pageant demonstrates how such material destruction destroyed also the barrier between performed fiction and performance event. On July 11, 1575, during Robert Dudley's Kenilworth entertainment, Queen Elizabeth encountered a 'savage man' carrying 'an Oken plant pluct up by the roots'.[141] To signal his 'submissio*n*' to the Queen, he 'brake his tree a sunder [and] tost the top from him', but the broken tree 'almost light upon her highnes hors hed: whereat he startld & the gentleman mooch dismayd'.[142] The horse 'soon callmd' and the Queen assured everyone, 'no hurt no hurt' – words, William Patten observed, 'we wear all glad too heer, and took them too be the best part of the play'.[143] Patten conflated the Queen's unscripted words – which were not 'part of the play' at all – with the scripted event, identifying the prop's destruction as a point of (potentially dangerous) juncture between fiction and reality.

Burning Things

For reasons the 1613 Globe fire made clear, burning objects in early modern performances was rare and was usually accomplished by creating the illusion of fire. In Jonson's pageant for James's 1604 entry into London, the Genius of London offered as a sacrifice 'My Citties heart; which shall for ever burne / Upon this Altar, and no Time shall turne / The same to ashes'.[144] Resistance of the 'heart' to being burned suggests that the sequence was staged without actual fire. In the Stonyhurst pageant *Samson* (1610–25), Manue burns 'a kidd of goats' – presumably a prop – as an 'offer[ing] unto o^r lord', but this too was apparently a fake fire because an angel 'ascendeth wth the flame'.[145] Real fire, however, was used in some one-time shows at university and in pageants. In

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[140] Quoted in Barbara Ravelhofer, *The Early Stuart Masque* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 220.

[141] Robert Laneham [William Patten], *A Letter Wherein Part of the Entertainment unto the Queen's Majesty at Kenilworth Castle* (1575), C2v.

[142] Laneham, C3v.

[143] Laneham, C4r.

[144] Ben Jonson, *Ben Jonson, His Part of King James His Royal and Magnificent Entertainment* (Edward Blount, 1604), D1r–2v.

[145] Brown (1920), p. 137.

Abraham Fraunce's St. John's College, Cambridge, play *Victoria* (1579–83), the witch Medusa gives Victoria a wax figure enchanted so if she 'prick[s] it and warm[s] it gradually, [her] lover will come and enjoy [her] embraces'.[146] Victoria softens the wax with an oil lamp while Medusa casts a spell so that, 'just as this waxen idol melts in these lamps, so [his] heart may be melted'. Like so many destroyed props, in order to have efficacy, the sign must be erased – in this case, as Porter notes, through an 'act of ritualized image-breaking' – and, in the process, made interpretively equivalent to the person it signifies.[147] A real fire was also evidently used in Henry Bellamy's St. John's College, Oxford, play *Iphis* (1622–26), when a goose (again, like the goat in *Samson*, probably a prop) was burned as a sacrifice to Isis.[148] Real fire may have also been used in Middleton's October 29, 1613 pageant *The Triumphs of Truth*, which celebrated Sir Thomas Myddleton's installation as Lord Mayor. The entertainment ended with Zeal, crowned with 'strange Fires', confronting Error on her chariot.[149] Zeal promised that Error will 'burne in Divine wrath' and then 'a Flame shootes from the Head of *Zeale*, which fastening upon the Chariot of *Error* sets it on Fire, and all the Beasts that are joynde to it'.[150] Possibly this was presentational, but the pageant's artisans included firework-maker Humphrey Nichols. Furthermore, in his printed account, Middleton describes the 'Seate of *Error*' being left 'glowing in Imbers'.[151] In that account, Middleton notes that burning Error's chariot was 'a Figure or Type of his Lord-ships Justice on all wicked offenders in the Time of his Governement', subjecting the destruction to the explicit interpretation typical of objects destroyed in early modern performances.[152]

Such burning of objects rarely occurred on the commercial stage. Old Banks torches thatch from Elizabeth Sawyer's roof in *The Witch of Edmonton* (1621) because, he believes, 'when 'tis burning, if she be a Witch, she'll come running in'.[153] Indeed, '*As that burns*, *enter the Witch*', and Banks explicitly conflates her body with the burning object: 'You hot Whore, must we fetch you with fire in your tail?'[154] In most cases, however, commercial plays found ingenious solutions to avoid using actual flames. Evidence of how theatrical sleight-of-hand could create the impression of an object

[146] Abraham Fraunce, *Victoria*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/victoria/).

[147] Porter, p. 130.

[148] Bodleian MS Lat. Misc. e. 17, f. 19.

[149] Thomas Middleton, *The Triumphs of Truth* (s.n., 1613), D2v.

[150] Ibid, D2v.

[151] Ibid, D3r.

[152] Ibid, D3r.

[153] Thomas Dekker, William Rowley, and John Ford, *The Witch of Edmonton* (Edward Blackmore, 1658), F4v.

[154] Ibid.

burning appears in *The Two Noble Ladies and the Converted Conjurer* (1619–23). A stage direction in the authorial manuscript of the play calls for the conjurer Cyprian to burn his magical implements: '*Throws his charmed rod, and his books* ~~*into a*~~ *vnder the stage. a flame riseth*'.[155] The original wording suggests that the author was thinking of the items burned in a vessel, but, perhaps out of caution, deleted 'into a' and interlined 'vnder' before proceeding; the result is that the actor would throw his rod and books into the trapdoor and then a 'flame', possibly of cloth or wood, would rise up to signal that they had been consumed. Perhaps an identical effect was used in Dekker's *2 Fortunatus* (1588–94) when Ampedo burns his father's magical traveling hat: as he narrates his actions, he explains, 'Ile burie halfe thy pleasures in a grave / Of hungrie flames', which may refer to the trapdoor.[156]

A similar device was probably used for the most sensational, and, for modern audiences, controversial, object burned in an early modern play: the Qur'an, in Christopher Marlowe's 1587–88 Admiral's Men play *2 Tamburlaine*. After executing the Babylonian governor and ordering the drowning of all the men, women, and children in the city he has conquered, Tamburlaine culminates his subjugation of Babylon by calling for the burning of 'the Turkish *Alcaron*, / And all the heapes of supersticious Bookes, / Found in the Temples of that *Mahomet*'.[157] The 1606 quarto remains silent about how precisely this dramatic moment was performed: no explicit stage directions are provided nor does Tamburlaine in fact, as most scholars assume, call for the book 'to be brought onstage'.[158] Tamburlaine's follower, Usumcasane, king of Morocco, offers what may be an implicit direction when he tells his emperor, 'Here they are my Lord', but there is no reason to think the actor did not simply gesture offstage, thereby mitigating the need for the company to come up with the (costly) 'heapes' of books Tamburlaine demands.[159] Nothing in the quarto indicates that the books are burned on stage either: rather, Tamburlaine orders that 'there be a fire presently' and that Usumcasane then 'fling them in the fire', all of which could occur offstage far easier, and safer, than it could onstage. Sarah Wall-Randell points out that if a book was used at this moment, it would not have been an actual copy of the Qur'an, and she considers what the ramifications of burning

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[155] British Library, MS Egerton 1994, 242v.

[156] [Thomas Dekker], *Old Fortunatus* (William Aspley, 1600), K2v.

[157] Christopher Marlowe, *Tamburlaine the Greate…The second part* (Edward White, 1606), H3v.

[158] Sarah Wall-Randell, 'What Is a Staged Book? Books as 'Actors' in the Early Modern English Theatre', in *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare's England*, ed. by Tiffany Stern (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020), pp. 128–52 (p. 134).

[159] Marlowe 1606, H4r. On the divided nature of critical readings of this moment, see Joel Slotkin, '"Seeke out another Godhead": Religious Epistemology and Representations of Islam in *Tamburlaine*', *Modern Philology* 111.3 (2014), 408–36 (pp. 408–9).

any book in place of the Qur'an might have been.[160] Knowing, however, that conventional practice on the commercial stage involved only the *appearance* of burning things, rather than actually burning them, it may be more accurate to assume that when *2 Tamburlaine* was staged by the Admiral's Men, no book meant to 'play' the Qur'an was in fact brought on stage or, at the very least, burned at all – not because of religious complications but for practical reasons of cost and safety.[161]

Characters in commercial plays who do burn physical materials on stage typically do so in a controlled fashion in order to produce an aroma. During a ceremony in Jonson's *Sejanus, His Fall* (1604), a flamen 'kindleth his Gummes' to scent an altar with smoke.[162] At the Globe, the smell may have only been noticeable to those near the stage. Reaching more of the audience with the aroma would have been easier at indoor venues, which may explain why most plays that call for burning incense were staged at private playhouses. When Queen Anne's Men staged Webster's *The White Devil* (1611–12) at the outdoor Red Bull, the aroma produced when Julio and Christophero '*burne perfumnes*' would have no doubt been less effective than when the play was revived in 1630 at the indoor Cockpit.[163] Incense is burned and '*smoak [rises] from the Altar*' in Fletcher's Blackfriars play *Bonduca* (1611–14), when Bonduca and Caratch kindle an altar fire to win the favor of the gods.[164] Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (1613–14), also staged at Blackfriars, likewise calls for someone '*carrying a silver Hynde, in which is conveyd Incense and sweet odours, which being set upon the Altar her [that is, Emilia's]*

[160] Wall-Randell, pp. 135–6. Wall-Randell argues that the most likely stand-in for the Qur'an here would have been a Bible, 'the most widely distributed book in early modern England', and possibly even the same one the company used as Faustus's 'Jerome's Bible' in *Doctor Faustus* (pp. 137–8). It seems unlikely that the Admiral's Men would consent to destroy such an expensive book, however, or risk the backlash from authorities that might follow from such a blasphemous act. Perhaps a Bible was indeed used, but if so, that would be further reason to think that the players did not actually burn the book when performing *2 Tamburlaine*. It is also possible that the object presented as a book – if one was presented at all – was not in fact a codex and thus could be burned without worrying about its cost: Wall-Randell concludes that a playing company would not 'go to the expense of constructing a faux book by having a block of blank paper bound', and therefore assumes 'any book-prop onstage is an "actual" book', but in this case, because the book does not need to be opened on stage and thus no paper is required, the Admiral's Men could have simply used a block of wood fashioned to look like a book (p. 147).

[161] This, of course, is also how most modern productions of *2 Tamburlaine* handle the moment, in order to avoid offending members of the Muslim faith; see Wall-Randell, p. 149.

[162] Ben Jonson, *Sejanus, His Fall* (Thomas Thorpe, 1605), K4r.

[163] John Webster, *The White Devil* (Thomas Archer, 1612), D4v.

[164] John Fletcher, *The Tragedy of Bonduca*, in *Comedies and Tragedies* (London: Humphrey Robinson and Humphrey Moseley, 1647), 3H1r. In 1669 the play was described as having been part of the King's Men's Blackfriars repertory (see Wiggins, 6: p. 404).

maides standing a loofe, she sets fire to it'.[165] Shifting the audience's sensory engagement with the play from sight to smell collapses the distinction between what is represented and what is real by permeating the spectator's body and physically incorporating the playgoer into the play. The scent of burned things calls attention to the semiotic status of stage objects as 'ambivalent insofar as there may be no distinction between sign and referent…. [L]ike everything else onstage, it is subject to the working of denegation, it is both real and not real'.[166]

Idols and Puppets

As these examples show, the destruction of things on stage was often recognized as a potential rupture in the fabric of dramatic artifice resulting from undermining the semiotic distinction assumed by theatrical representation in a way that was, paradoxically, constitutive of new meaning. In this, the destruction of props recalls another domain in which destroying a symbolic object produced new symbolic meaning. In 1547, a wave of idol-smashing swept England, culminating with Bishop William Barlow's Paul's Cross sermon on 'the great abhomination of idolatrie in images'.[167] After Barlow spoke, he displayed a 'picture of the resurrection of our Lord' that was a mechanical Christ, 'made with vices, which putt out his legges of [the] sepulchree and blessed with his hand, and turned his heade', and he gave the object to 'boyes [who] brooke the idoll in peaces'. Destroying the 'idoll' transported it out of the dramatic/Catholic fiction, in which it seemed to be alive, and into the realm of the real by demonstrating its status, not as an autonomous subject, but merely an object. As Calvinist preacher William Perkins argued in 1601:

> An idol… is nothing in the world: because unto us there is but one God. Furthermore, it is nothing in respect of representation: for an idol sometime is nothing at all: sometime it represents as God, that which is meerely nothing:

[165] William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, *Two Noble Kinsmen* (John Waterson, 1634), L1v.

[166] McAuley, pp. 178–9.

[167] William Douglas Hamilton, *Chronicle of England during the Reigns of the Tudors* (The Camden Society, 1877), 2, p. 1. On the practice of imposing 'public humiliations [on] a local image [by having it] extracted from its site of pilgrimage and brought to the center of national power, accompanied by a sermon by a leading churchman who argued the necessity of the event', see Michael O'Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 60.

sometime it represents the true God, otherwise then he is; & in this respect also it represents nothing.[168]

To Perkins, the idol was, quite literally, 'no-thing' – void of representational or semiotic validity; thus, as Porter notes, to destroy it was to display its emptiness as a sign.[169] And yet, as with characters in plays who read destroyed props as new signs, the Reformer reads the destroyed idol as making new meaning *by virtue* of its destruction and its capacity to be destroyed. The iconoclast's denial of the thing's semiotic validity is, itself, dependent upon the assertion of semiotic validity in the thing's destruction.

Barlow's 'idoll' was not the only mechanical Christ ritualistically destroyed by the Reformers. In 1538, John Hoker described a rood in the Abbey of Boxley which 'nodded his head, winked his eyes, turned his beard, [and] bent his body to receive the prayers of worshippers'.[170] When a suspicious parishioner pulled the figure off the wall, he 'exposed the trick': 'The thing was worked by wires through little pipes'. Local officials brought it to court, 'where it was made to act amid the jeers of the courtiers'. After this pseudo-dramatic display, the rood danced alongside Bishop John Hilsey as he preached in London, after which it was thrown to the crowd, where it was 'snatched, torn, broken in pieces bit by bit, split up into a thousand fragments, and at last thrown into the fire; and there was an end of him'.[171] Just as Richard and Bolingbroke find new meaning in the mirror when it is 'crakt in an hundred shivers', the Boxley rood took on meaning for the iconoclasts when it was 'split up into a thousand fragments'. Some sense, though, of how this destruction paradoxically undermined the iconoclasts' desire to eradicate the idol's status as a subject is seen in the pronouns Hoker uses: at first the rood is 'him', defined by an embodied status ('his head', 'his eyes', 'his beard', 'his body'), but after the discovery of the 'trick', the rood is objectified as 'it', something that must be worked upon in order to perform ('made to act'); and yet, the moment of its destruction returns the rood to a subject status, with the 'end of *him*'. The usual correlation of Catholic 'idolatry' with theatrical representation and Protestant iconoclasm with antitheatricality proves too simplistic a rubric for reading these acts of destruction. Destroying the idolatrous thing was another form of theatricality that required the framing devices of performance and interpretation.

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[168] William Perkins, *A Warning Against the Idolatry of the Last Times* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 1601), A2v.

[169] Porter, p. 10.

[170] *Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, 13.1:120

[171] On the Boxley rood, see Peter Marshall, 'The Rood of Boxley, the Blood of Hailes and the Defence of the Henrician Church', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History* 46.4 (1995), 689–96; also Alexandra Walsham, 'Miracles and the Counter-Reformation Mission to England', *Historical Journal* 46 (2003), 779–815.

Theatrically, these mechanical figures were puppets – those 'high symbolic art objects' that seem to possess 'autonomous existence' and 'independent volition'.[172] As Pavel Drábek points out, 'the connection between puppet theater and religious practice (and idolatry) was long-lasting', making 'automata and marionettes [often] subject to early modern English iconophobia'.[173] Like idols, puppets produce meaning through the erasure of objectivity, when they appear to be 'lucidly present' as 'thing[s] subject to pain as well as reverie, entities with bodies such as ours are, [and] the ponderable form of a spirit'.[174] Puppets are 'objects imaginatively endowed with life': the 'artificial movement of an animated replica', Tzachi Zamir notes, 'forms a fictionalized transition from object to subject'.[175] This transition raised profound problems for Protestant theologians, not only for its association with Catholic idolatry, but, as Brooke Conti shows, the 'questions [it raises] about agency and motivation'.[176] The puppet's seeming life produces what Steve Tillis identifies as a 'double-vision' for the audience: the puppet 'creates an illusion of life that the audience knows is not real [and thus the] audience sees the puppet in two ways at one time: as a perceived object and as an imagined life'.[177] The destruction of a thing on stage produces a similar double-vision by assigning the object a fictional, or dramatic, identity as the representation of a real thing, but, in its ability to be destroyed, simultaneously asserting its material, or theatrical, identity *as* a real thing. In many ways,

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[172] Matthew Isaac Cohen, 'Puppetry and the Destruction of the Object', *Performance Research* 12.4 (2007), 123–31 (pp. 123 and 129). See also Steve Tillis, *Toward an Aesthetics of the Puppet: Puppetry as a Theatrical Art* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), pp. 23–24 and 28.

[173] Pavel Drábek, 'English Comedy and Central European Marionette Drama: A Study in Theater Etymology', in *Transnational Mobilities in Early Modern Theater*, ed. by Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), pp. 177–96 (p. 179). On itinerant Catholic 'poppett playinge', see Paul Whitfield White, *Drama and Religion in English Provincial Society, 1485–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 193–94; see also George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre*, second edition (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), pp. 63–4. On religious suspicion of puppets, see Alexander Marr, '*Gentille Curiosité*: Wonder-Working and the Culture of Automata in the Late Renaissance', in *Curiosity and Wonder from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment*, ed. by Alexander Marr (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006), pp. 149–70; also Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and 'Popular' Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1995), pp. 22–42.

[174] Kenneth Gross, 'Love Among the Puppets', *Raritan* 17.1 (1997), 67–82 (p. 82).

[175] Tzachi Zamir, 'Puppets', *Critical Inquiry* 36.3 (2010), 386–409 (pp. 387, 392, and 401). See also Henry Jurkowski, *Aspects of Puppet Theatre*, second edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 32 and 70–72.

[176] Brooke Conti, 'The Mechanical Saint: Early Modern Devotion and the Language of Automation', in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. by Wendy Beth Hyman (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 95–107 (p. 98). See also Shershow, p. 23; and Tillis, p. 52

[177] Tillis, p. 7; see also pp. 59–66.

then, things destroyed on the early modern stage became, through the repeatedly twinned acts of destruction and interpretation, puppets.

Perhaps counterintuitively – but again demonstrating the fallacy of the easy assumption linking iconoclasm strictly with Reformed theology and iconophilia strictly with Catholic theology – the plays that most directly speak to the correlation between the destruction of props and acts of iconoclasm were written, not by Protestant commercial playwrights or Calvinist academic dramatists, but by Catholic theologian Emmanuel Lobb for the English Jesuit College at St. Omers. Lobb's plays use many of the typical conventions associated with the destruction of props. In *Zeno* (1631), when Emperor Zeno hears an astrologer read a prophecy foretelling his downfall, he '*tears up the paper and crams it into the mage's mouth*'.[178] Zeno conflates the written word with the future it promises, adopting a literalist interpretation that views the sign itself as what it signifies: 'Take this, you hellish toad, eat my destiny along with these evil scraps of paper'. In *Ultio Divina* (1624–29), the Christian-persecuting Emperor Leo is presented with a book of prophecies that includes the image of a lion bearing 'the cross-shaped initial of Christ'.[179] Leo deludes himself into believing that destroying the material sign will annul the prophecy of Christianity's rise: '(*He tears the paper and its image to shreds, and stamps upon them.*) [I] will not be oppressed. I refuse to trust the Fates'. In *Vitus* (1623), the destruction of a document takes on the opposite religious connotations when a Christian destroys Diocletian's edict against Christianity: 'Bah, foul commands! A dire law! Brutal hatred! (*He tears the edict into shreds and tramples them.*) To Hell with this document. Let these pages, these cruel scribbles hateful to heaven, be torn to shreds'.[180] The destruction of a prop takes on an explicit brand of iconoclasm, however, in Lobb's *Mercia* (1624). In the play, an altar bearing a statue of Jove is '*cast down to the ground by some secret power*' when '*Christ makes his appearance*'.[181] Pagans Wulfad and Rufin discover the toppled altar and conclude that Christ 'has laid low Jove, thundering Jove, heaven's greatest god', reading the statue, not as a statue, but as the deity itself. Bishop Ceadda uses the miracle to convert Wulfad and Rufin, though in their infant faith, they continue to assume the statue's subjectivity. As Ulf '*stamps on Jove's statue*', he directly addresses it as 'you plague on this earth', and the two kick and '*pull down the altar*'. The pagan's literalist mindset returns when Werbode trips over the fallen statue and impulsively '*stabs Jove's statue with his dagger*'; Chorebus warns him to stop because he has 'done violence to

[178] Emmanuel Lobb, *Zeno*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/zeno/).

[179] Emmanuel Lobb, *Ultio Divina*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/leo/).

[180] Emmanuel Lobb, *Vitus*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/vitus/).

[181] Emmanuel Lobb, *Mercia, sive Pietas Coronata*, trans. by Dana Sutton (http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/mercia/).

Jove, Jove, the greatest of the gods'.[182] At first Werbode does not recognize the object that he is destroying, but Chorebus cites the statue's physical appearance as evidence of its divinity: 'Look at its lightning, the way it has been cultivated, its altar. Everything goes to show that this is Jove'. From a perspective that takes the sign as the signified – not 'this stands for Jove', but 'this *is* Jove' – destruction of the statue is destruction of the god. Just as the Calvinists decried Catholic belief (and also often the premise of theatrical mimesis) for such heretical thinking, Lobb's Catholic plays and their treatment of the destruction of things on stage respond with similar mockery to an identical kind of misguided idol-worship, attributed here, however, to non-Christians.

Destroying the prop re-familiarizes it, breaking the spell of signification under which the object is taken to be more than just a thing; when the Reformers staged their spectacles of destroying idols, they themselves – with, no doubt unintentional, irony – drafted this theatrical practice. Just as smashing mechanical Christs asserted that their true meaning could only be produced through annihilation, the destroyed prop obtains its ultimate meaning as it is going (or after it had gone) out of existence. As Porter argues, for example, the brazen head in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* might have spoken its final line – 'Time is past' – only after it had been broken, becoming a model of how 'post-Reformation images… generate new meanings as a result of subjection to iconoclasm'.[183] Such 'speaking after death' routinely accompanied the destruction of props. Whether in the pulpit or on the stage, making a spectacle of the object's brokenness reveals that iconoclasm is never 'capable of total erasure' of the image and is, rather, a 'productive, image-making process'.[184] As the conflicting acts of interpretation imposed on the broken mirror by Richard and Bolingbroke demonstrate, such iconoclasm, rather than eradicating representation, became itself yet another form of representation, productive of new, often competing, meanings. In this, then, the deliberate destruction of things on stage makes real the extent to which early modern theatricality provoked for its audience pleasure from the act of obliterating – and reconstituting – material icons.

Conclusion: Reading Richard's Mirror(s)

What happened to the mirror when the Lord Chamberlain's Men performed *Richard II*? For that matter, what was the mirror? A stage direction in the 1623 folio describes it as '*a Glasse*', which suggests the more expensive type of mirror available in the period: not

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[182] Lobb, *Mercia*.
[183] Porter, pp. 149–50.
[184] Ibid, pp. 131 and 142.

polished steel but silvered crystal, an imported luxury from Antwerp or Venice.[185] Possibly, however, the action was mimed. Possibly the players used a prop merely designed to look like glass. The theater did have a convention for representing glass objects: in Massinger's *The Great Duke of Florence* (1627), Sanazarro, imprisoned '*above*', carves a message into '*a pane of glasse*' which he throws to the stage; the glass cannot break, so the prop must have been something like a piece of wood painted silver or white.[186] If breaking Richard's mirror was mimed or faked, Richard's diegetic 'there it is' would make clear to the audience that, though the actual thing was not 'crakt', the object within the world of the play, the mirror represented by the thing, was understood to break. Such a staging would verify Bolingbroke's metadramatic assertion that the 'mirror' and both 'Richard's' sorrow and face are merely illusions, no more than 'shadows' – a term connoting something or someone performing within a play, 'in contrast with the reality represented'.[187] Using a fake mirror would thus move Bolingbroke – the consummate performer – a step out of the play, into a position bridging the fiction and its enactment. If this was done, however, Richard's commentary on brittleness and Bolingbroke's on reflections would be contradicted by what the audience saw. There would be, in other words, a dramatic cost for such theatrical economy: the mirror would lose its value as, to use Teague's term, a 'tangible metaphor'.[188] Would the actors, though, have destroyed an expensive object simply for a metaphor? The audacity of doing so is suggested by the fact that – except possibly for *The Renegado* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* – none of the other twenty-three plays with mirrors calls for their destruction.[189] If the actor playing Richard did smash a mirror, the costly act could speak to another puzzle in the play's history. The fact that the deposition scene is in the folio and not the quartos might indicate that it was staged only occasionally, possibly even just once.[190] As shown above, truly expensive things were usually only destroyed in

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[185] Shakespeare, *Richard the Second*, d2v. Rayna Kalas, 'The Technology of Reflection: Renaissance Mirrors of Steel and Glass', *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 32.3 (2002), pp. 519–42 (pp. 528 and 519–20).

[186] Philip Massinger, *The Great Duke of Florence* (John Marriot, 1636), I2v.

[187] *Oxford English Dictionary*, 'shadow, *n*'., 6.b. Shakespeare used the word 'shadow' in this sense in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

[188] Teague, p. 29.

[189] In Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Coxcomb* (1608–10), a broken crystal looking glass is brought on stage and declared beyond repair.

[190] Janet Clare suggests that the deposition scene was not staged in the same way as it appears in the printed text; see 'The Censorship of the Deposition Scene in *Richard II*', *RES* 41.161 (1990), 89–94 (p. 91). The question of whether the scene was originally part of the play and then removed or whether it was added later remains a point of contention. Clare advocates for the former, as do the following: Peter Ure (ed.), *King Richard II* (London: Methuen, 1956), p. 9; Andrew Gurr (ed.), *King Richard II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 9–10; David Bevington (ed.), *The Complete Works of William*

occasional performances, such as masques. Perhaps Shakespeare, knowing the scene would not always be performed and recognizing the powerful effect of destroying such an expensive thing, seized the opportunity to include a vivid, but costly, moment of pointed symbolism.[191]

What would early modern audiences have made of seeing a mirror shattered on stage? No direct evidence speaks to this question, but with our understanding of how playgoers did respond to plays and props, we might hypothesize.[192] To an antitheatricalist, such destruction would no doubt have seemed the height of arrogance – proof of 'the conspicuous consumption of superfluous, perishable commodities by actors and/or theatre companies'.[193] Even the very business practices of the industry relied upon such consumption. Among the artifacts recovered from the Curtain, Rose, and Theatre sites are the finials of clay pots used to collect money from playgoers. Coins were dropped into a slit in the pot, but they could only be removed by smashing the vessel. Like the 'cheap and disposable materials' used for many props, these pots were 'made to be broken [as] cheap, utilitarian objects that had a single and transitory purpose'.[194]

Shakespeare (New York: Harper Collins, 1992), p. 721; and Cyndia Susan Clegg '"By the choise and inuitation of al the realme": *Richard II* and Elizabethan Press Censorship', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.4 (1997), 432–48; for advocates of the latter view, see David Bergeron, 'The Deposition Scene in *Richard II*', *Renaissance Papers 1974* (1975), 31–7, and Leeds Barroll, 'A New History for Shakespeare and His Time', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 39.4 (1988), 441–64. For an evaluation of discussions about the scene's textual history, see Genevieve Love, 'Going back to that well: *Richard II*'s "Deposition Scene"', in *Richard II: New Critical Essays* ed. by Jeremy Lopez (London: Routledge, 2012), pp. 265–76.

[191] On other differences in props between the quarto and folio of *Richard II*, see Teague, pp. 46–7.

[192] On playgoers' attention to objects used in performance, see Harris and Korda, pp. 3–4.

[193] Harris and Korda, p. 6.

[194] Ibid; Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight, 'Introduction', in *Stage Matters: Props, Bodies, and Space in Shakespearean Performance*, ed. by Annalisa Castaldo and Rhonda Knight (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2018), p. 2.

Tudor-era money pot (British Museum, No. 1895,0116.9; for permission to reuse, please contact the rights holder).

At the initial point of contact between the theater industry and its audience, then, was the necessity for destroying things: if the pot remained intact, the money remained inaccessible and could not be invested into subsequent performances. For all audience members, witnessing an object destroyed on stage would have been a profound reminder of the materiality of early modern performance, and the extent to which that materiality was what bridged the fiction of the play and the reality of the performance. The destroyed prop or costume functions much differently than the prop or costume that straightforwardly maintains its material integrity throughout the production, and thus whose status as a thing remains always potentially mitigated or displaced by the boundary of mimetic representation. As Bill Brown observes, 'we begin to confront the thingness of objects when they stop working for us'.[195]

Equally as important, however, is the extraordinary amount of value, both in a monetary sense and a symbolic sense, that material objects carried in the period. Understanding the 'audience's response to the material culture of the stage', as Richardson argues, requires understanding the 'visceral appreciation of early modern possessions'.[196] Because of that profound appreciation of the material, the destruction of things on stage must have emphatically stood out as transgressive and thus sensational, particularly given a commercial theatrical culture obsessed with reusing commodities ('translating' costumes, recycling prologues and epilogues, revising plays, even the idea of actors doubling roles in a single play) and the broader cultural norm in which 'things were reused until no drop of their original substance remained'.[197] Typically, the appearance of theatrical materials is 'ghosted by previous experiences', but the destroyed prop will never re-enter the play or return in a different play as a 'relic revived'.[198] While scholars often imply such reuse by referring to props with a definite article ('*the* bloody handkerchief', '*the* skull'), a destroyed prop's 'multiplicity' disrupts such notions of the stage object as 'singular and iconic'.[199] Drawing on Herbert Blau's suggestion that performance creates temporal continuity in the feeling that 'we are seeing what we saw before', Carlson argues that '[b]ecause every physical element of the production can be and often is used over and

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[195] Brown, 4.

[196] Richardson, p. 14; 'Owning very few things gives one a different relation to them' (p. 18).

[197] Ibid, p. 19.

[198] Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2001), pp. 2, 7, and 15; Jonathan Miller, *The Afterlife of Plays* (San Diego: San Diego State University Press, 1992), p. 5; see also Carlson (2016), pp. 83–4.

[199] Duncan, p. 205.

over again in subsequent productions, the opportunities for an audience to bring memories of previous uses to new productions are enormous', but destroying those elements arrests that cycle of memory.[200] Such destruction thus requires that the audience recognize the contingent nature of performance, because the destroyed prop 'recollects the theatrical ephemerality which seems to prohibit memorialization and canonicity'.[201] It reminds the audience that the theater, as States puts it, 'is the medium, par excellence, that consumes the real in its realest forms'.[202] After a prop is destroyed, an audience witnessing another performance of that play is not 'seeing what [it] saw before' but, rather, what was *not* seen before; an audience witnessing a performance in which a prop is destroyed is witnessing what will never be seen again. As an experience restricted to one specific moment – a moment removed from the sense of 'temporal continuity' resulting from practices of repertory and reuse – the destruction of a thing in performance reminds the audience of the transient nature of the dramatic event and the permeability of the line between representation and reality. Not only did the early modern theater 'hold a mirror up to nature' to make meaning, but, like Richard, it made meaning by smashing that mirror as well.

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[200] Carlson (2001), pp. 1, 3, and 8; Herbert Blau, *The Eye of Prey* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), p. 173. Perkins calls attention to how props are 'part of a temporal structure as well as a spatial one' in performance (p. 381).

[201] Duncan, p. 19.

[202] States, p. 40.