ABSTRACT

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In late medieval and early modern England, magic was everywhere. Although contested, occult beliefs and practices flourished among all classes of people, and it appeared regularly as a subject of early English drama. My dissertation focuses on staged magic in early English drama, demonstrating the ways in which it generates metacritical commentary. It argues that magic in drama serves more than just a symbolic function, but rather, some early English drama saw itself as performing a kind of magic that was also efficacious. To this end, this project theorizes that drama participated in forms of contemporary magic that circulated at the time. This dissertation focuses on representations of magic in early English drama, specifically in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (ca. 1471), Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* (1588-92), William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1), and John Milton's *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle* (1634). These early English plays stage their magic as socially and personally beneficial, not just illusory, flawed, or

demonic. Whether staging magic as a critique or apology for its own medium, however, the plays suggest that theater draws upon magic to depict itself as efficacious.

This project thus reads magic as both a metaphoric, literary convention and its own entity with accompanying political and cultural effects. Examining magic and its representation as part of a continuum—as contemporary audiences would have done—offers a clearer picture of what magic is doing in the plays and how early observers might have apprehended its effects. This dissertation offers a textually based cultural context for the magic found within its central plays, bringing extraliterary magical texts into conversation with literary, dramatic texts. Because the borders between natural philosophy, religion, and magic were not clearly defined in early modern England, this project draws as well upon scholarship and primary materials in the histories of science and religion. The "darker purpose" of this project is to reanimate early English theater with a sense of wonder and magic that it historically offered and that it continues to bring to readers and audiences to this day.

STAGED MAGIC IN EARLY ENGLISH DRAMA

By

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Dedication

To my little wonders, Cora and Eviva. To my parents, who first introduced me to magic in the world. And, especially, to Josh.

Acknowledgements

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Introduction: Staged Magic in Early English Drama

> "The magic of drama is infinitely more powerful than the magic of trickery."
> --Henning Nelms[1]

In his introduction to Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, David Wootton proclaims, "to stage the Faustus story is to perform magic; and to perform magic is to show the power of illusion."[2] But just what does it mean for a play to perform magic? What is the difference between magic and illusion? Just what sorts of magical deeds can a play perform? The slipperiness of Wootton's terms reflects the instability of the categories of magic, illusion, and performance, particularly in the world of early English theater, which was especially attuned to the powers, the limitations, and the dangers of performance. Explicitly linking magic and drama, *Doctor Faustus* capitalizes on contemporary antitheatrical and anti-magical discourses in order to demonstrate just what it is that theater can—and cannot—do. As the poster child for early modern magical drama, the play stages widespread cultural beliefs about magic and theater. Although contested and satirized, occult beliefs and practices flourished nonetheless among all classes of people. The pervasiveness of magic is evident in the abundance of occult texts in all forms, from receipt books to grimoires to books of secrets to alchemical treatises. Magic also flourished onstage. This dissertation focuses on representations of magic in early English drama, specifically in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* (ca. 1471), Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar*

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[1] Henning Nelms, *Magic and Showmanship Journal* 23, no. 3 (Autumn 1992): 492-3.

[2] David Wootton, introduction to *Doctor Faustus With the English Faustbook* by Christopher Marlowe (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2005), xx.

Bungay (ca. 1588-92), William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* (1610-1), and John

Milton's *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle* (1634). The plays examined in this

dissertation celebrate theater's potential to heal and to reform individuals, to restore

social bonds, and to move characters to experience mercy and reconciliation. The

staged magic in the plays is revelatory; it reveals inner truths so they can be purified

and tempered, and it reveals the wonderful possibilities of human nature and the

divine. At some times prophetic and at others inspiring conversion within their

worlds, these early English plays stage their magic as socially and personally

beneficial, not just illusory, flawed, or demonic. Whether staging magic as a critique

or apology for its own medium, however, theater suggests that at its base its magic

efficacious.

The plays considered here respond to specific religious, political, and cultural

pressures, couching their defenses of theater in terms inspired by those energies. The

plays hail from moments of intense social, religious, and political upheaval, such as

the sacramental controversies of the late fifteenth century; the international conflict

with Spain and the Reformation; Parliamentary challenges to the authority of King

James and the Gunpowder Plot; and, more locally, several sexual scandals in the Earl

of Bridgewater's life. Interestingly, these are also moments of increased interest in

alchemical, hermetic, and Neoplatonic texts, as well as grimoires, for instance:

Norton and Ripley's alchemical texts and Roger Bacon's *Magnum Opus* in the

1470's; the works of John Dee and Edward Kelley in the 1580s and 90s; Puritan

Thomas Tymme's *Practice of Chymicall and Hermeticall Physicke* (1605); and

Foster and Fludd's texts on the weapon salve controversy in the 1630s. The plays of

each era express their conflicts in magical ways. The confluence of these factors suggests that magical practices and representations offer a uniquely appropriate response to moments of intense political, social, and religious pressure. Staged magic is all about power, and it appears most intensely when power is being subverted or challenged. The anxiety about drama's powers, then, is also an anxiety about power in general: of the church, of England as a nation, of monarchical authority, and of the mind over the body.

While of course these same social pressures figure in the time between the ostensible performance of the Croxton play in 1461 and its manuscript's date of the 1530s and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* in the late 1580s, this dissertation does not include any plays from this era. Although staged magic does periodically appear, it does not have the same force as in the plays discussed in the project. Mostly, plays offer romance wizards, whose magic refers to literary traditions of magic, more than to cultural incarnations of magical forms. The magic in those plays is thus metaphoric, comic, or allegorical, rather than a nuanced reflection on actual magical practices. In the mid-fifteenth-century, the morality play was popular, with an allegorical aesthetic that resonated less with actual cultural practices of magic than other forms. The interlude, another popular mid-fifteenth century form, was also not very amenable to staged magic. Finally, sacred drama was still popular, which provided an already-existing vehicle for responding to the religious and political controversies using staged magic. For these and other reasons, few plays available from this time period use magic as a self-reflexively theatrical aesthetic statement.

Future studies on staged magic, however, will require a sustained investigation of plays from the 1530s to the 1580s.

Despite the differences among the plays and the historical moments, they all reflect on the role of theater in effecting personal and social reform, and they ruminate on theater's potential effects for healing. The social nature of theater is the source of its power, not only because of size of the audience, but also because theater purports to transform audiences, to transport them to shipwrecked islands, and to return them home tempered and healed. The source of theatrical power is in its shared communal experience. The staged magic in the plays work against claims that magic and theater lie dangerously outside the social order by insisting on the ability of staged magic to restore social bonds. The plays tap into a kind of social magic, and a set of sympathetic correspondences undergirds their aesthetic, which resonates with the play's portrayals of mercy, reconciliation, forgiveness, and love. The staged magic of the plays suggests that theater and magic are not outside the social order, but rather embedded within it.

Part of the appeal is that such staged magic cannot be explained away or controlled, only experienced as wonder. Because magic resists analysis, it can perhaps best represent the mysteries of human emotions and spiritual existence. Both theater and magic are hard to control, however, and both are associated with counterfeit. The plays, then, are equally suspicious of the magic-like powers of theater, and they stage their ambivalent responses in their continued interest in proof of the Host, of the inner self, of the reliability of personal transformation, of chastity, or of love. Despite this suspicion of drama and magic, however, the plays ultimately

celebrate their ability to transform society. Each of the plays lauds socially beneficial

and restorative forms of magic and their related dramatic effects, whereas they cast

off, admonish, or render comic the more dubious, narcissistic ones.

The Magic of the Stage

Staged magic is well suited to comment upon the theater. Like a necromancer,

a play conjures illusions, imposes its will upon observers. Staged magic highlights the

powers, limitations, and dangers of theatrical performances and of the imagination

broadly construed. Early English theater borrowed from ideas of the transformative

power of the imagination in order to present itself as magical. The theater naturally

borrowed from magical traditions, despite their vexed status, because their kinship as

transformative and performative arts offered a rich resource for advocating for theater

as a mysteriously powerful force. Unlike standard early modern defenses for theater,

which work mainly against the claim that theater inspires vice, the staged magic of

these plays offers a broader range of potential effects produced by theater. Borrowing

from the mystique of contemporary magical practices, early English theater could

offer its own apology and, as a force to be reckoned with, draw customers. Though

this dissertation focuses on plays that advocate in favor of drama as a magical force,

rather than ones such as Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* or Christopher Marlowe's

Doctor Faustus which launch a skeptical attack on both drama and magic, it also

acknowledges the many ways in which even the plays that lauded the transformative

power of theater circumscribed its potential by warning of the dangers and limitations

of such magical performances. The plays that stage magic tap into existing cultural

magical traditions, which drew equally from material and metaphysical realms and from licit and illicit sources.

Reading early English texts that deal with magic in tandem with analyzing magic found within drama reveals that staged magic serves more than just a symbolic function. Instead, drama *participated* in forms of contemporary magic.[3] Drama appropriated the rituals, objects, and language of magic because it, too, was a performative genre with seemingly instrumental as well as mimetic capabilities. Some early English drama represented itself as having mysterious, unexplainable powers. Indeed, drama not only staged magic as a trope, but it also performed acts that some observers would have understood as actually magical. Like magic, drama professed to have the ability to conjure illusions, as well as to possess, to heal, to purify, and to transform its observers and participants. Magic crosses categories, as in herbal remedies that purport to be both mystical and medicinal or alchemical treatises that straddle the line between science and the occult. Drama, too, plays with boundaries, for example, between religious ritual and representational performance. Staged magic from the period thus highlighted the power of performance, as well as its dangers and its limitations. Yet because magic appeared onstage, it became safely couched within the parameters of art. Consequently, its power was both deployed and constrained. Even more, in staging magical moments, early English drama presented itself as performing a kind of magic that was not only symbolic but also efficacious.

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[3] Critical interest in the magic of drama is on the rise. For example, a forthcoming monograph by Mary Floyd-Wilson similarly argues that drama took part in the culture of magic and experimentalism (*Occult Knowledge, Science, and Gender on the Shakespearean Stage* [Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)]).

Critical Accounts of Magic and Theater

In order to attend to the textual and cultural incarnations of magic in concert with its representation onstage, this project will explore texts of magic, such as grimoires and receipt books, in addition to literature that deals with magical subjects. This lateral reading brings culture and literature into a single field of focus. At the heart of the study is the driving question that challenged early English writers: What is magic? Why do early English plays regularly stage magic? Existing research has yet to offer a nuanced, credible account of how and why drama stages magic. To address this issue, this project reads magic as both a literary convention and an independent entity that some audiences would have taken seriously.

The problem of understanding early English magic as its own entity has vexed scholars for generations. Robert West notes, for instance, "Whether and to what extent magic and witchcraft are 'real' is one of the most enduring and fraught questions in this field."[4] Attempts to answer the question of the "real" nature of magic generate many methodological challenges. How do modern readers avoid imposing post-Enlightenment, skeptical attitudes toward magic upon earlier traditions that took it quite seriously? How can readers understand the effects of magical representations on readers and dramatic audiences? How can scholars of early English magic reckon the seeming paradoxes within magical discourses? How can we render legible the contours of multiple, often-competing modes of magic, which often appear side-by-side within the same dramatic works?

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[4] Robert West, *Shakespeare and the Outer Mystery* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1968), 81.

Scholars such as Lynn Thorndike, Frances Yates, and Keith Thomas[5] have cleared a path for tracing the influences of occult traditions in early English culture. Valuable recent scholarly work—particularly in the history of science—explores magic as a cultural phenomenon, but it generally does so in order to trace the occult origins of science or religion, as in William Eamon's *Science and the Secrets of Nature*.[6] Perhaps the most dedicated proponent of a study of magic in and of itself is Christopher Lehrich, who argues for an "emic" study of occult practices, one that takes into consideration the experience of magic described by early English people yet accepts the modern system of analysis.[7] He suggests a comparative, linguistic, and historical analysis of the occult, analyzing the linguistic and semiotic basis of magic. Lehrich revises earlier readings of magic as proto-scientific or analogous to religion, arguing that the occult calls for analysis independent of these fields. Lehrich's call to arms reflects a growing interest in the academic study of magic, as do publications on magical texts.[8]

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[5] Lynn Thorndike, *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 8 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1923-58); Frances Yates, *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (London: Routledge, 1979); Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*: *Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

[6] William Eamon, *Science and the Secrets of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

[7] Christopher Lehrich, *The Occult Mind: Magic in Theory and Practice* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007).

[8] See, for instance, Owen Davies, *Grimoires: A History of Magic Books* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) or Richard Keickhefer, *Forbidden Rites: A Necromancer's Manual of the 15th Century* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 1997).

Stuart Clark's *Thinking with Demons* is perhaps the most significant historical work on magic. The goal of Clark's exhaustive historical analysis of early modern witchcraft and demonology is to take the beliefs of the time seriously rather than to pass judgment upon them. Clark rests his investigation upon language, arguing that the problem with previous research on witchcraft is that it aimed to rationalize magic by looking for its referent in world, which he claims is an "extralinguistic fallacy."[9] Ignoring ontology, Clark claims, allows scholarship to attend to structure, in order to demonstrate the relations of difference that were "everywhere at work" in witchcraft.[10] Clark's study is of tremendous importance to occult studies because it attempts to isolate witchcraft as a force in and of itself rather than as merely a product of social or political forces.[11]

Scholarship about the occult in early English literature has long centered on its symbolic function and its literary roots. Brian Vickers notably argues that what he

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[9] Stuart Clark, *Thinking With Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), 5-6.

[10] Ibid., 8-9.

[11] There is also, of course, a large body of literature on witchcraft, mostly historical and sociological in bent. Though witchcraft is not a central component of this project, the dissertation benefits immensely from studies which bring together the drama and literature of witchcraft with the large body of textual records associated with witchcraft, such as trial records and first-hand accounts by the accused and accusers. Among many others, see, for example, Frances Elizabeth Dolan, *Dangerous Familiars: Representations of Domestic Crime in England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994); Marion Gibson's *Reading Witchcraft: Stories of Early English Witches* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Diane Purkiss *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations* (New York: Routledge, 1996); and James Sharpe *Instruments of Darkness* (University Park, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996).

calls the "occult mentality" is a symbolic discourse.[12] Robert Reed's landmark work

traces, among others, Greco-Roman and native English sources of the occult,

including literary predecessors of occult figures.[13] He organizes occult influences

broadly into three categories: sorcerers, witches, and demons, exploring ways in

which English drama appropriates the occult for symbolic purposes and investigating

ways that the occult contributes to thematic ideas, character development, or dramatic

effect. Reed examines developments in the occult in drama as primarily literary in

nature, thus neglecting the impact of cultural changes. He also does not theorize the

metadramatic implications of onstage magic, except to note that magic is often little

more than display, therefore linking magic to spectacle. Alvin Kernan usefully

considers stage magic as a metaphor for art,[14] and Barbara Traister explores the figure

of the stage magician, investigating its literary transmission and its thematic purpose,

though she does not make an argument for its metatheatrical value.[15]

This project moves beyond representations of the stage magician to consider

multiple forms and practitioners of magic. Further, this dissertation takes into account

the occult as a practice unto itself, investigating actual magical traditions and texts

alongside the plays. John D. Cox's work on early English drama and devils revises

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[12] Brian Vickers, "Introduction," in *Occult and Scientific Mentalities in the Renaissance*, ed. Brian Vickers (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1984), 13.

[13] Robert Reed, *The Occult on the Tudor and Stuart Stage* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1965).

[14] Alvin Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theatre* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

[15] Barbara Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: Magicians in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984).

claims such as Keith Thomas's that magic declines in force through the seventeenth century.[16] Instead, Cox claims, "The difficulties that attend generic and evolutionary arguments…can be avoided by acknowledging cultural continuities throughout early drama."[17] He similarly revises scholarship that argues that drama and magic become more secularized as the century progresses,[18] suggesting that stage devils are slippery signifiers that can "represent anything opposed to individual wellbeing and the sacramental community."[19] This project adds that staged magic is more than a symbol, and complicates the distinction between religious and magical thinking.[20]

Some scholarship has begun to take the occult into account as a distinct force within drama. Joseph Roach, for instance, contends that early modern audiences perceived the theatrical arts as magically endowed.[21] Roach suggests that theater was a medium with the power to move others, and indeed, he attributes anti-theatrical

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[16] John D. Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350-1642* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

[17] Ibid., 42.

[18] Ibid., 9-10.

[19] Ibid., 2.

[20] "As a vital element of archaic dramaturgy accompanying stage devils, traditional moral thinking is complemented on the Shakespearean stage by magical thinking" (Ibid., 180).

[21] "The rhetoric of the passions that derived from pneumatism endowed the actor's art with three potencies of an enchanted kind. First, the actor possessed the power to act on his own body. Second, he possessed the power to act on the physical space around him. Finally, he was able to act on the bodies of the spectators who shared that space with him. In short, he possessed the power to act" (Joseph Roach, *The Player's Passion* [Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1985], 27).

thought to this fear of theatrical instrumentality.[22] For Roach, drama and magic are linked through their ability to move others. Building upon the work of Stuart Clark in *Thinking with Demons,* Barbara Mowat's "Prospero's Book" queries why current scholarship does not take seriously the question of magic represented by Prospero's book. Instead, Mowat claims, readers of *The Tempest* approach magic as an abstraction or metaphor for something else. Even when they do consider magic for its own sake, they limit themselves to understanding Prospero as a Renaissance magus who draws upon Neo-Platonic texts, thus obscuring the complexities of magic in *The Tempest*. Instead, she advocates for a close look at manuscript books of magic to shed light on the complex character of Prospero. According to Mowat, attending to grimoires will help to understand how the occult informed the practices and thoughts of early English people.[23] Mowat's preliminary foray into the intersections of manuscripts of the occult and dramatic literature is a welcome addition to scholarship on Renaissance drama and magic.

Recent scholarship has also paved the way more specifically for the claim that the magic *on* the stage captures a kind of magic *of* the stage. Kent Cartwright, for instance, argues that word magic in *The Comedy of Errors* suggests that theater is itself instrumental.[24] Citing Clark's work on demonology, Cartwright asserts, "Despite the play's Providential and Pauline denouement, magic acquires, I want to

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[22] "The desperate prejudice against actors in the seventeenth century was motivated in part by superstitious fears of their unnatural practices on the audience" (Ibid., 27-28).

[23] Mowat, 29.

[24] Kent Cartwright, "Language, Magic, the Dromios, and The Comedy of Errors," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 331-354.

suggest, a certain agency and validity, a truth value."[25] Cartwright draws upon Austin to explore the ways in which language in the play accrues meaning and power, saying, "Utterances have power. In fact, characters in *The Comedy of Errors* repeatedly pay tribute to the power of speech to create, to transform, or to dominate reality, a feature seldom noted by critics."[26] Though he focuses mainly on the magic of language in the play, his work may be usefully extended to consider the ways in which staged magic offers a claim for the instrumentality of theater more broadly construed.

The motivation of this project is to reanimate early English theater—and literature more broadly construed—with a sense of the wonder and magic that it offered historically and that it continues to bring to readers and audiences to this day. This project thus proposes to locate within the literary arts a place for the mysteries of human experience, mysteries such as joy, compassion, and ethical transformation. Director of the Folger Shakespeare Library, Michael Witmore, has in part inspired this approach: "One of the things that Shakespeare does best is to make life more vivid. The humanities also have a vivifying force, delivering the diversity and complexity of human experience to our collective powers of sympathy, critical thought, and imagination."[27] The goal of this project is, in a small way, to demonstrate the "vivifying force" of early English drama. To this end, the project

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[25] Ibid., 332.

[26] Ibid., 342.

[27] "Michael Witmore Named Folger Director" 11 April 2011
<http://www.folger.edu/pr_preview.cfm?prid=282>.

engages with early English theories of the magically powerful imagination in order to appreciate the equally wondrous power of the critical imagination.

The Perils of Defining Early English Magic

       To understand the role of magic in early English plays, it is helpful to have a sense of how magic operated in the period. Magic appeared in many forms, making difficult the work of defining and categorizing it. Performers of magic included healers, cunningmen, and wise women. Literary sorcerers, such as Merlin, hailed from the medieval romance tradition. The native English and Celtic traditions featured fairies, and other folk figures. Popular culture produced street magicians, often called jugglers, quacks, or charlatans. Witches abounded in the early English imagination, both contemporary ones who were burned at the stake and classical ones, such as Circe and Medea. Mages, such as Simon Forman and John Dee, called upon theurgy and natural magic to achieve oneness with God. Faustian necromancers invoked demons to satisfy self-serving ends: wealth, power, revenge, or knowledge. Astrologers wrote horoscopes for commoners and nobles alike, and alchemists attempted to turn lead into gold or to use pharmaceuticals to heal. Further complicating the problem of describing early English magic is that many of these categories overlapped. Alchemists, for instance, were also often philosophers who used alchemy as a means to ascend the scale of the heavens.

       Not surprisingly, early English magical texts are slippery in their definitions of magic. In his *Of Occult Philosophy* (1533)*,* the famous magician, astrologer, and alchemist Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa defines magic in a way that invokes natural

philosophy, saying, "Magic comprises the most profound contemplation of the most secret things, their nature, power, quality, substance, and virtues." Magic here is the study of the unknown. Agrippa carefully distinguishes this sort of philosophical, natural magic from demonic forms: "a Magician doth not amongst learned men signifie a sorcerer, or one that is superstitious or divellish [devilish]; but a wise man, a priest, a prophet…and…Magicians, as wise men, by the wonderful secrets of the world, knew Christ, the author of the world, to be born, and came first of all to worship him."[28] Magic, according to Agrippa's philosophy, is a holy art, and thus supernatural. Agrippa makes a rhetorically complex argument, advocating in favor of a form of theurgy, or godly magic, that opposes demonic necromancy. A book of conjuration that circulated widely in the seventeenth century but drew from sixteenth-century manuscripts, *The Lesser Key of Solomon* reaffirms this definition, calling magic:

> the highest most absolute and divine knowledge of Natural Philosophy
> advanced in its works and wonderfull operations by a right
> understanding of the inward and occult vertue of things, so that true
> agents being applyed to proper patients, strange and admirable effects
> will thereby be produced.[29]

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[28] Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, *Of Occult Philosophy*, Book I. (part 1), ed. Joseph H. Peterson
<http://www.esotericarchives.com/agrippa/agrippa1.htm>.

[29] *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, ed. Joseph H. Peterson (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2001), 3.

This grimoire also distinguishes white magic from necromancy. The *Lesser Key* even describes magic as a holy art, one that joins together math, theology, and natural philosophy. Similarly, in his *Book of Secrets*—a compendium of the properties, sympathies, and inclinations of herbs and stones—Albertus Magnus claims, "the science of magike is not euell [evil], for by the knowledge of it euel [evil] may be eschued [and] good followed."[30] Texts that deal with magic overwhelmingly defend it on the grounds that it is natural, socially beneficial, and theologically sound.

Anti-magic, Anti-theater: Attacking the Performance Arts

Not everyone shared this view of magic. Texts such as the *Malleus Maleficarum* and other treatises on witchcraft decried magic as subversive, dangerous, heretical, and even demonic. Skeptics such as Reginald Scot argued that magic was counterfeit and therefore cheated ignorant people of their money and time, or worse, led to widespread, false belief in witchcraft, which resulted in the persecution and death of innocent people. Others critics, such as the playwright Ben Jonson, ridiculed magic and those who believed in it. Even a quick glance at early English texts that deal with magic demonstrates two seemingly contradictory concerns with it. The first is that magic is real and dangerously powerful, and the second is that magic is counterfeit. Whether deemed real or illusory, however, magic

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[30] *The boke of secretes of Albertus Magnus of the vertues of herbes, stones, and certayne beastes: also, a boke of the same author, of the maruaylous thinges of the world, and of certaine effectes caused of certaine beastes* (1560), A.iir, 4 Jan. 2012 <http://gateway.proquest.com/openurl?ctx_ver=Z39.88-2003&res_id=xri:eebo&res_dat= xri:pqil:res_ver=0.2&rft_id=xri:eebo:citation:20179185>.

was problematic in that it had the potential to distract regular people from proper worship of God, to deceive them, or to cozen them of their valuable time and money.

It is not surprising that magical texts draw upon the language of theater when they discuss anti-magical concerns, particularly in their discussions of magic as leading to damnation or vice. For example, the preface to the *Sworn Book of Honorius*, a grimoire or ritual magic book that circulated in early modern England seeks to defend magic against such complaints by first invoking anti-magical sentiments:

> it is sayd: fo[r]sake the devill and all his pompes, but thes magyans and negromansers dothe nott follow only the pompes and workes of sathan but hathe also brought all people through there meruelus ellusyons In to err ors drawing the ignorant and suche lyke Into the damnasyon bothe of sowle and body.[31]

In this instance, the *Sworn Book* suggests that the problem that others bishops and popes have with magic is that it draws ignorant people into damnation and "errors" through "pompes" and "meruelus ellusyons." Like playwrights and actors, then, magicians use illusions to distract people from God. This issue of truth and falsehood in the interrelated fields of drama, magic, and religion is perhaps best exemplified in false miracles that were common at this time, as in mechanized roods that appear to move. Magic texts took up this problem, too: the title page of *The Art of Juggling or Legerdemain* is to help readers beware of cheating at cards and dice and to detect the

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[31] *Liber Juratus Honorii or The Sworne Booke of Honorius, Twilit Grotto: Archives of Western Esoterica*, Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (2009), accessed April 2011 http://www.esotericarchives.com/juratus/juratus.htm, lv.

"beggarly Art of Alchemistry, and the foppery of foolish cozening Charmes." Yet

Ryd defends legerdemain as "greatly commendable," as long as jugglers "abuse not

the name of God, nor make the people to attribute unto them his power, but always

acknowledge wherein the Art cometh.[32] This fear of cozening also appeared in stories

about Catholic clergy.

  With good reason, people who disliked or feared magic compared it with

theater. Indeed, grimoires, or books of ritual magic, offer spells that work like theater,

with the explicit purpose of creating illusions to deceive observers. The *Key of*

Knowledge, the most famous grimoire that circulated at the time, features such a

spell, which it calls, "[a]n experiment to fayne A thing to bee wch indeade is false

wherby many men be deceyued as in playinge, or in showinge any other thinge."[33]

Although the spell does not specify just what it can "fayne," it explicitly describes its

magic as "playinge." Creating false illusions is a characteristic of the necromantic

magic of this grimoire. The *Key of Knowledge* blurs the boundaries of the street

illusions of performance magicians with the ritual conjury of necromancers in another

spell: "*A suffumigation made as follows causes a house or such places where it is*

made to seem as it were full of water or blood." A suffumigation is a type of spell that

involves smoke or fumes of some kind, and this bloody spell, like the previous one,

makes something illusory seem real.

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[32] Samuel Ryd, *The Art of Juggling or Legerdemain* (Printed at London: [By Edward Allde] for T. B[ushell] and are to be solde by Samuel Rand, neere Holborne-bridge, 1612), Folger Shakespeare Library*,* B3r.

[33] Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (2009), accessed April 2011 <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ad36674.htm>.

We find another such seeming spell in the *Sworn Book*: "*A suffumigation made of, as after follows, causes visions in the air and the shaddows of sepulchers of the earth to appear.*" This spell makes ghosts and visions appear in the air, as its directions reveal: "*With this said confection make a fumigation in a convenient place, and you shall see visions in the air. Take of the said confection, and make a fumigation about the sepulchers, and visions of the dead shall and will appear.*" The "visions in the air" and ghostly shadows are reminiscent of Prospero's actors in *The Tempest*, who "were all spirits and /Are melted into air, into thin air" (4.1.149-50).[34] Both the spell and Prospero's description of theater bring together performance, magic, and illusion. As with the *Key of Knowledge*, the precise operation and mechanism of this spell are unclear: Do they describe actual ritual magic? Are they similar to stage tricks? Is there something in the "fumigation" that causes observers to hallucinate? The grimoire's writer(s) do not make distinctions between these different kinds of effects: magic, illusion, and performance flow freely together. Similarly, Agrippa describes some magical operations—mainly optical—as "sleight[s]" or "trick[s]."[35] The precedent for linking magic and theater appears within the magical

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[34] William Shakespeare, "The Tempest" in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

[35] "And it is well known, if in a dark place where there is no light but by the coming in of a beam of the sun somewhere through a litle hole, a white paper, or plain Looking-glass be set up against that light, that there may be seen upon them, whatsoever things are done without, being shined upon by the Sun. And there is another sleight, or trick yet more wonderfull. If any one shall take images artificially painted, or written letters, and in a clear night set them against the beams of the full Moon, whose resemblances being multiplyed in the Aire, and caught upward, and reflected back together with the beams of the Moon, any other man that is privy to the thing, at a long distance sees, reads, and knows them in the very compass, and Circle of the Moon, which Art of declaring secrets is indeed very profitable for Towns, and

texts themselves. Because the grimoires unabashedly use magic to counterfeit effects

such as earthquakes and blood-filled houses, which have obvious parallels with stage

magic, it is no wonder that those opposed to magic express their concerns in anti-

theatrical language.

The grimoires further blur the line between magic and theater in their very

form. Magic books closely resemble play texts in their attention to costumes (such as

robes), set pieces (such as altars), props (such as wands or daggers), stage directions

(such as movement around a charmed circle), and dialogue (such as spells cast at

certain stages of the rituals). In *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, for instance, there are

stage props and costumes, such as "a sceptre or sword; a miter or cap, a long white

Robe of Linnen, with shoes and other Clothes for ye purpose also a girdle of Lyons

skin 3 Inches broad." This passage pays special attention to setting the scene before

performing invocations. The proper costuming is necessary, and the set is the

charmed circle. There is dialogue from the Bible; as Joseph Peterson notes, "This text

from Psalm 50.9 is used in the Mass as well as virtually every grimoire." As with

many grimoires, the *Lesser Key of Solomon* overlays magical ritual with theatrical

and religious discourse.

The *Key of Knowledge* similarly reads like a script, as when the manual

directs: "let the M^r (betinge the ayer about hym on euery syde) hiss wth his voice, and

his companions prayinge, lett hym say wth A cleare voyce…" The practitioner is

advised to show an amulet or pentacle to the spirits, but if that does not subjugate

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Cities that are besieged, being a thing which *Pythagoras* long since did often do, and
which is not unknown to some in these dayes" (*Three Books of Occult Philosophy*
[London: Printed by R.W. for Gregory Moule, 1651], *Early English Books Online*).

them, he should beat the air, hiss, and use a clear voice to control them. The grimoire offers descriptions of stage directions and even pitch modulation followed by a monologue, or invocation. The *Key of Knowledge* also has a whole section on costuming: "The shoes and vestmentes must bee of lynnen yf you can gett sutch as the preyst weareth it is beste." And, like the *Lesser Key of Solomon*, this text brings together magical, theatrical, and religious language and ritual, even calling for a priest's vestments if the practitioner can somehow find some.[36]

Perhaps the most arresting example of a magical text drawing upon theatrical discourse occurs in Queen Elizabeth's court astrologer John Dee's *De Heptarchia Mystica*, a work with instructions for conjuring angels. Deborah Harkness gives an extended analysis of theatrical elements in Dee's text.[37] As each of the angels enter the scene, Dee offers an intensely theatrical description of their entrances, as in the following passage:

> Uriel cam-in agayne, and an other with him, and [j]ointly they two sayde togither, Glorify God for euer. And now Uriel stode behynde and the other sat down in the chayr, with a sword in his right hand. All his hed glistred like the sonne: the heare of his hed was long. he had wyngs: and all his lower partes seamed to be with feathers. He had a

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[36] Alchemical texts, as well, drew upon the metaphors of theater in their descriptions of the magnum opus. Margaret Healy notes, for instance, that alchemical emblem books depict the process of seeking the philosopher's stone as a stage complete with audiences (*Shakespeare, Alchemy, and the Creative Imagination: The Sonnets and the Lover's Complaint* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011], 41).

[37] See "Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527-1608/9)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 707-737.

robe over his body, and a great light in his left hand. he sayd We are

blessed from the begynning and blessed be the Name of God for

euer.[38]

Uriel enters in costume, speaks a line of choral dialogue with another angel, and

follows what seem to be prescribed stage movements. We see similar theatrical

moments as more angelic characters enter the space:

> There cam-in 40 white Creatures, all in white Silk long robes; And
>
> they like Children. And all they, falling on their knees, sayde:
>
> Thow onely, art Holy among the Highest: O God, thy Name be blessed
>
> for euer.
>
> D - Michael stode up out of his Chayre: and by & by, All his leggs to
>
> be like two great Pillers of Brasse: & he as high, as half way to heven.
>
> And by and by, his Sworde was all on fyre: And he stroke or drew his
>
> sword over all these 40 their heds. The Earth quaked. And the 40 fell
>
> downe. And Michael called Semiel with a Thundring voyce: and
>
> sayde, Declare the Mysteries of the liuing God: our God: of One that
>
> liueth for euer.[39]

This description of an angel conjuration reads like a theatrical performance,

specifically a masque; a reader can easily imagine how this procession of angels

might appear, with its spectacular movement and language. As Harkness notes, Dee,

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[38] Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (2009), accessed March 2012
<http://www.esotericarchives.com/dee/hm.htm>.

[39] Ibid.

known as well for creating seemingly magical theatrical effects, including a flying mechanical scarab, for a university production of Aristophanes' *Peace*, even includes a diagram of the blocking for the angels.

Just as Dee's grimoire reads like a play text, *Doctor Faustus* reads like a magic text. Indeed, after each of the demon's magical-theatrical performances, Faustus is presented with a grimoire that promises to teach him to conduct performances such as the Masque of the Seven Deadly Sins on his own. The first of these books includes spells to conjure spirits, and the second one promises to teach him how to "turn thyself into what shape thou wilt" (2.3.166-7).[40] These magical texts, or grimoires, double, then, as acting manuals, teaching Faustus how to stage his own magical spectacles: to create illusions and to shapeshift. He plans to use these manuals "to compass then some sport, / And by their folly make us merriment" (3.1.53-4). Faustus is both a thaumaturg and dramaturg whose end is not ethical transformation but rather delight in the folly of others. He plans to make "sport" with his magical-theatrical powers. Faustus's magical ability is limited to performance tricks. He is not a conjuror but a performance magician, a charlatan.

The slipperiness of the categories of magic, illusion, and performance was a source of concern for those opposed to what they saw as foolish belief in magic. Such skepticism appears, for instance, in Stephen Gosson's *Schoole of Abuse, containing a pleasant invective against Poets, Pipers, Plaiers, Jesters and such like Caterpillars of the Commonwealth* (1579), whose dedication to Sidney famously inspired his

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[40] Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: Norton., 2005). All lines from the play are cited from this edition.

Defence of Poesy.[41] Gosson attempts to display the deceitful workings of various

forms of poesy in order to demonstrate their foolishness and vice. Like the "Jugler"

who "casteth a myst to work the closer," the poets deceive in order to cozen people.[42]

Gosson's goal is to expose the vices associated with the counterfeit nature of poesy.

He explicitly links such vice-filled counterfeit with magic, saying, "These are the

Cuppes of Circes, that turne reasonable Creatures into brute Beastes."[43] Although

Gosson is attacking poetry, his comparison to magic demonstrates that one of the

reasons to fear it is that it has a transformative power that can "turne reasonable

creatures into brute Beastes."[44] Poetry endangers society through its mysteriously

transformative, yet paradoxically counterfeit, powers, which can inspire vice. Gosson

goes so far as to call poetry "legerdemain," explicitly aligning magic and theater:

"Some that haue neyther land to mainteine them, nor good occupation to get their

breade, desirous to strowte it with the best, yet disdayning to liue by the sweat of their

browes, haue found out this cast of Ledgerdemayne, to play fast & loose among their

neighbours."[45] The counterfeit dramatic arts compel even those who are destitute to

pay for the pleasures of performance and thereby to descend into vice.

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[41] Stephen Gosson, *The School of Abuse*, facsimile ed. (London: 1579; Amsterdam: Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm Ltd., 1972). Citations refer to the Theatrvm Orbis Terrarvm edition.

[42] Ibid., A2r.

[43] Ibid., A2v.

[44] Ibid., A2v.

[45] Ibid., C2v. Interestingly, Gosson offers a magical cure against this magical vice: "The Patient that will be cured, of his owne accorde, must seek the meane: if euery man desire to saue one, and drawe his owne feete from Theaters, it shall preuayle as

Both magic and drama fool their observers in their ability to transform appearances. For example, in *Doctor Faustus*, Valdes describes the spirits that Faustus will raise as shape-shifters: "Like lions shall they guard us when we please, / Like Almain rutters with their horsemen's staves, / Or Lapland giants, trotting by our sides; / Sometimes like women, or unwedded maids" (1.1.121-7). Like actors, the spirits have the ability to assume any form, as when Faustus comically commands Mephistopheles to transform himself into a friar: "I charge thee to return and change thy shape; / Thou art too ugly to attend on me. / Go, and return an old Franciscan friar; / That holy shape becomes a devil best" (1.3.23-6). Commanding spirits to change their shapes is also a common desire in the grimoires. *The Lesser Key of Solomon* cajoles spirits "to appear and shew yʳselves here unto me before this Circle, in a fair and humane shape, without any deformity or ugly shew and without delay"; and the widely available English grimoire the *Key of Knowledge* conjures spirits "by this booke…[to] come to vs, not deformed, but in A very faier shape." Part of Faustus's magical power, then, is like that of a playwright or stage manager to command others to change their appearances.[46]

With a similar concern for the counterfeit, yet vice-inducing powers of magic, several writers attempt to dispel the illusions of magicians, specifically jugglers and

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much against these abuses, as *Homers Moly* against Witchcraft, or *Plynies Peristerion* against the byting of Dogges." The natural herb magic of moly can defeat the black witchcraft of the theater.

[46] Of course, the devil is still a devil, so Faustus's power is limited to changing the outward show rather than the inner character. As a result, Marlowe draws attention to the limitations of drama in its ability to transform its devilish material into something virtuous.

necromancers, by laying bare their mechanics. Most well known among these

skeptics is Reginald Scot, whose *Discovery of Witchcraft* (1584) aims to curb the zeal

with which people accused and prosecuted witches. Scot carefully attested to the

existence of demons and demonic magic, but he argued that most acts of "magic" that

people claimed to witness were merely illusions. He blamed conjurors and jugglers

for contributing to the credulity of the common folk. Such charlatans elide the

boundary between illusion and reality.[47] Like theatrical practitioners, magicians are

"couseners" who abuse others through illusion. Scot explains that the abuse is the

direct result of magicians' conflation of magic and illusion: "For they are abused, as

are manie beholders of jugglers, which suppose they doo miraculouslie, that which is

doone by slight and subtiltie."[48] To warn further of the danger of confusing magic

with illusion, Scot's text includes a copy of a letter sent to him by a conjuror (and

physician) condemned to die for practicing magic. This conjuror reveals the truth

behind the lies of conjurors, saying, "among all those famous and noted practisers,

that I have beene conversant withal these xxvi. yeares, I could never see anie matter

of truth to be doone in those wicked sciences, but onelie meere cousenings and

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[47] "For if we seriouslie behold the matter of conjuration, and the drift of conjurors, we shall find them, in mine opinion, more faultie than such as take upon them to be witches, as manifest offenders against the majestie of God, and his holie lawe, and as apparent violators of the lawes and quietnesse of this realme: although indeed they bring no such thing to passe, as is surmised and urged by credulous persons, couseners…and witchmongers. For these are alwaies learned, and rather abusers of others, than they themselves by others abused" [Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (2009), accessed March 2012 <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/scot16.htm#chap2>].

[48] Ibid.

illusions." Again, anti-magical discourse draws upon the anti-theatrical language of "cousening and illusions" to set up a careful distinction between real and false magic.

Notably, Scot argues that magic that is clearly framed as entertainment is "greatly commendable," and he apologizes for the damage that exposing the magicians' secrets will do to their careers:

> I…regret any effect this may have on those who earn their living performing such tricks for purposes of entertainment only, whose work is not only tolerable but greatly commendable. They do not abuse the name of God in this occupation, nor claim their power comes through him, but always acknowledge what they are doing to be tricks, and in fact through them unlawful and unpious deceivers may be exposed.[49]

Scot's work attacks the deceitfulness of magic, but it may also be viewed as an apology for performance arts that acknowledge that they are merely fictional or representational entertainments. Indeed, performance magic may expose the fraudulent work of magicians.

Like Scot's *Discovery*, Johann Weyer's *On the Illusions of the Demons and on Spells and Poisons* (1563) uncovered the falsehoods of magic.[50] A major source for Scot's *Discoverie*, Weyer's text illustrates an example of a direct link between magic and theater in a story about a magician performing tricks onstage: "[A] magician of Madgeburg displayed in a crowded theater a little horse leaping through

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[49] Ibid., Chapter XXII.

[50] Johann Weyer, *Witches, Devils, and Doctors in the Renaissance*: Johann Weyer, *de prestigiis demonum,* trans. John Shea [Binghamton, N.Y. : Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies, 1991].

a hoop," which he then claimed he would mount to heaven: "[H]e threw a rope into the air, and the little horse followed it upward, and the illusionist (as though intending to hold him back by the tail) also ascended, and his wife followed, holding on to her husband, and likewise their maid."[51] Weyer concludes, "Now no one should deny that this whole relationship with demons, however effected, and the entire accounting of their illusions, is a deadly deceit introduced for the total ruin of mankind." In order to save mankind from damnation, Weyer exposes the counterfeit of stage magic, explaining that it is not performed by demons but by sleight of hand. Weyer similarly explains away the wonder-working of mages, claiming:

> The frenzy of this satanic profession has so pervaded the minds of these men that they believe that their every desire is accomplished by such demonic impostures, that new powers are conferred upon the natures of things, or former powers taken away, weakened, or enlivened, or that the course of nature is changed, lightning bolts stirred, thunderclaps, winds, and rains unexpectedly roused or quelled, serpents stripped of their savagery and violence, untamed beasts brought under control, iron broken, diseases inflicted and cured, shades and spirits of the dead called up, and (as Apuleius says) nimble souls returned, the sluggish sea stilled, and new bodies created.[52]

The vituperative energy of this passage demonstrates the power of magic to delude, to move the imagination to overcome reason. The language of the passage mimics spells

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[51] Ibid., 122.

[52] Ibid., 117.

found in grimoires, as well as the charm of Medea modified by Prospero, and "new bodies created" resembles Antonio's "new-created" or "new-form'd" "creatures" (1.2.81-83). Opponents of magic and of theater fear their potential to counterfeit reality, to lead people into vice, and to transform imaginations.

Both Weyer and Scot reserve some blame for the naïveté of the observers of magic, not just for the cozening of the conjurors and jugglers. Scot remarks, "HE that can be persuaded that these things are true, or wrought indeed according to the assertion of couseners, or according to the supposition of witchmongers & papists, may soone be brought to beleeve that the moone is made of greene cheese."[53] Weyer also suggests that some people are more likely moved than others by the arts and illusions of demons and conjurors; for example, as with the famous inquisitorial treatise on magic, *Malleus Maleficarum*, Weyer explains that women are more susceptible to cozening because of "the credulity and frailty of the female sex."[54] The problem with magical counterfeit lies in the imagination or the "credulity" of the observers. Weyer further recognizes the role of the imagination in foolish belief in magic; his chapter, "concerning the imagination and how it is impaired" (Chapter VIII), explains that the imagination can sense things that are not really there. In a chapter on dreams, Weyer contends "a human being sometimes thinks that he is an ass shut up in a bag, or very often a flying eagle."[55] Theseus warns of a similar power of the "tricks" of the "poet's pen": "Such tricks hath strong imagination, / That if it

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[53] Scot, Chapter V.

[54] Weyer, 180.

[55] Ibid., 189.

would but apprehend some joy, / It comprehends some bringer of that joy; / Or in the night, imagining some fear, / How easy is a bush supposed a bear!" (5.1.18-22)[56] Even the skeptical Theseus recognizes the permeability of the boundary between magic, poetry, and illusion in this passage, suggesting that audiences may be deceived as a result of "strong imagination."[57] Those warning of the dangers of magic and of theater, then, warn about the power of illusion to persuade unwary audiences through the influence of the imagination.

The Magically Wondrous Powers of the (Dramatic) Imagination

The imagination, however, offers the possibility for "real" magic, magic that is not entirely harmful or suspect. Agrippa argues, for example, "There are many such kind of wonderfull things, scarce credible, which notwithstanding are known by experience."[58] Agrippa's observation recalls Hamlet on the ghost: "There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy"

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[56] William Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

[57] Francis Bacon also derides the deceptive powers of the imagination in his *New Atlantis*: Bacon's "houses of deceits of the senses" resemble inverted theaters, in which illusions are performed in order that their mechanisms or "fallacies" may be exposed to the intellect. While Bacon contends that Bensalemites could perform wonders to deceive, they choose not to add to any natural wonder any "affectation of strangeness" because they "hate all impostures, and lies." For Bacon, wondrous illusion is a threat to reason, and more importantly, it is a threat to the wonder inspired by natural things <http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/bacon/atlantis.html>.

[58] Agrippa, Chapter X.

(1.5.166-7).[59] Agrippa recognizes that not all magic is cozening illusion,[60] explicitly linking transformative magic with both legerdemain and acting, when he claims,

> And it is well known, that some can weep at their pleasure, and pour forth abundance of tears: and that there are some that can bring up what they have swallowed, when they please, as out of a bag, by degrees. And we see that in these dayes there are many who can so imitate, and express the voices of Birds, Cattle, Dogs, and some men, that they can scarce at all be discerned. Also *Pliny* relates by divers examples, that women have been turned into men.[61]

Within a few sentences, Agrippa moves from imitation to shape-shifting, and even more strikingly from the magic of mimesis to that of ontological change. He concludes, "[imagination] is neerer to the substance of the soul then the sense is; wherefore it acts more upon the soul then the sense doth."[62] For Agrippa, imagination is one of the most powerful tools for transformation, and performance arts like magic

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[59] William Shakespeare, "The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark," in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

[60] Agrippa contends that there are "Divine Powers which are diffused in things, Gods." Through these "Divine Powers," man "extends his intellect unto intelligible things, and his imagination unto imaginable things; and this is that which they understood, when they said, *viz*. That the Soul of one thing went out, and went into another thing, altering it, and hindering the operations of it: As the Diamond hinders the operation of the Loadstone, that it cannot attract Iron" (Chapter XIV). The imagination is an occult virtue that extends, like the soul, into everything in the world. Language, art, and performance help the soul and imagination to extend to the fullest extent.

[61] Agrippa, Chapter LXIV.

[62] Ibid.

and theater are particularly affective and effective motivators of imaginative response.

The response generated by the imagination to the magic of theater is typically one of wonder. Theories of Renaissance wonder and imagination have gained much critical attention. T. G. Bishop recognizes, for instance, the importance of wonder in Shakespearean drama, linking this affective response with personal transformation: "Shakespeare does fulfill the expectation of Renaissance theory that wonder and the final purpose of drama in emotional transformation of the audience will be intimately linked."[63] Explaining that *admiratio* and *katharsis* are related at the time, Bishop uncovers a strong connection between theatrical wonder and personal "transformation."[64] The pleasure of such wonder, according to J. V. Cunningham's investigation of *causus* in Renaissance tragedy, not only derives from personal transformation, but it also has a social dimension.[65] Wonder arises in early modern plays as a form of "resignation" or "the subsumption, and almost the loss, of the individual under the general."[66] Cunningham and other scholars who explore wonder in early English poesy draw upon Plato and Aristotle. Cunningham cites Plato: "Thirdly, wonder is an end of poetry…This is the effect that Beauty must ever induce,

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[63] T. G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41.

[64] Ibid., 41.

[65] J. V. Cunningham. *Woe or Wonder: The Emotional Effect of Shakespearean Tragedy* (Denver: Swallow, 1951), 81.

[66] Ibid., 81.

wonderment and a pleasant astonishment, longing and love and a dread that is pleasurable."[67]

Of course, if wonder is the pleasurable end of poetry, then, Renaissance artists and apologists can draw upon Horace to contend that wonder can also delight and instruct. And what is more wonderful than magic, specifically magical deeds performed onstage? Bishop describes theatricality's force as a kind of wonderful magic, explaining, "The emotion known as wonder is a characteristic and heightened experience of this 'between' quality of theatricality. Wonder particularly raises the question of the theatre's interest in the emotions it generates through its characteristic creation of a dynamic space of flux and intermediacy—between stage and audience, between the real and the impossible, between belief and skepticism, between reason and feeling."[68] The liminal, fluid, and affective nature of theater generates wonder and transforms the emotions. Bishop, invoking Descartes, recognizes the potential of theatrical wonder: "Wonder is a rough magic, which the true philosopher can tame and convert to his own uses."[69] The plays analyzed in this dissertation vary in their presentations of what staged magic can perform, yet they all capitalize on the power of wonder to affect audiences.

Because of its powerful ability to work upon the imagination—and, in particular, because of its intensely social character—early English theater was both a site of immense promise and intense scrutiny. Stephen Greenblatt understands

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[67] Ibid., 66.

[68] Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder*, 3.

[69] Ibid., 8.

wonder generated by the marvelous to be an agent of conversion.[70] In his work on

early modern English colonial narratives, Greenblatt contends that wonder effects the

crucial break with an Other and is a prelude to appropriation or colonization.

Certainly wonder generated by staged magic can effect conversion. This dissertation

demonstrates that in many ways the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament,* which precedes

Greenblatt's texts by a century, inspires conversion through its staged wonders. At the

same time, however, rather than merely engendering emotions of "radical alterity,"

wonder generated by the staged magic in these plays ultimately connects its

characters and audiences to greater social and spiritual realities, an experience close

to Cunningham's resignation of the individual to the "greater logic."[71] The staged

magic in the plays seeks to join character to character, character to audience, and

observer to observer through a shared, communal response to a powerful medium and

through sympathetic identification with each other. Greenblatt's analysis of the

production of wonder in the service of power, however, offers insight into the ways in

which early English theater stages magic in order to appropriate the power of wonder.

Staged illusions showcase theater's inherent ability to manufacture wonder. Staged

magic draws attention to the danger of reflexive, uncontrollable, and irrational

transformations resulting from experiencing theater. Wondrous spectacles capture

theater's ability to move people to feel, to think, and to behave in new ways, and they

thus demonstrate the dangers and powers of their medium.

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[70] Stephen Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 75.

[71] Ibid., 135.

Todd Wayne Butler helpfully adumbrates both the appeal and danger that early English people associated with the imagination, saying, "The imagination was at once the medium of divine inspiration and calculated manipulation, a means to 'delight and teach' as well as confuse, suborn, and destroy."[72] Both lauded and condemned, the imagination was perceived as having the power to shape the political sphere, but the problem was how best to use it. Butler offers Francis Bacon's responses to magic as a case study for the dangers and powers of the imagination, demonstrating that imagination and magic were homologous. Bacon's rumination on the limitations of magic led him to "a recognition of the imagination's potential as a tool to control nature, individuals, and even entire societies. As such, the imagination and the spirit-filled world its powers relied upon would need to be restrained in order for their use to be acceptable and perfected."[73] For Bacon, the imagination can shape the individual and social worlds, a shaping so dangerous that it must be controlled, or as this dissertation describes it, tempered.

The notion of temperance is central to the chapters that follow. Tempering borrows from the alchemical lexicon. The importance of alchemy in cultural discourses in early modern England registers in the theater, and it thus appears in each chapter of this dissertation. The transforming potential of the imagination as an alchemical or magical agent clearly appealed to playwrights, who attempted to lodge defenses (and celebrations) of their art through the vehicle of staged magic. Margaret

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[72] Todd Wayne Butler, *Imagination and Politics in Seventeenth-Century England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008).

[73] Ibid., 31.

Healy describes this dangerous power of the imagination in alchemical terms, explaining that alchemy "was (and remains today) a perfect metaphor for talking about the operations of the transforming imagination"[74]; as a result, Healy "illuminates how thinking alchemically, and thus transformatively, played an important part in the English Renaissance's wider ferment of creativity."[75] She notes that it was the fantasy's "alchemical synthesizing powers" and "its transforming potential that disturbed people."[76] Citing Katherine Park's work on imagination's role in natural astral magic, Healy links alchemical poetics to self-making.[77] Alchemy captures both the threat and hope offered by theatrical magic, and this dissertation demonstrates that early English drama not only fears or limits, but also celebrates the imagination's liberating, emancipatory powers, particularly in *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle*. This revelry in the pleasure of wonder inspired by staged magic is at the same time a celebration of the pleasure and power of theater.

The Plays and Their Magic

Each of the four chapters focuses upon a magical-theatrical effect, discussing magical texts alongside a play that shares this effect as a central feature. To be sure, this approach cannot account for the great number or variety of magical moments in early English drama. This project attempts to provide a detailed assessment of the

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[74] Healy, *Shakespeare, Alchemy, and the Creative Imagination*, 3.

[75] Ibid., 5.

[76] Ibid., 183.

[77] Ibid., 185, 193.

way that magic works in a few case studies. Rather than selecting plays in an attempt to cover all types of magic or all sorts of approaches to magic, this project explores works that make an explicit connection between magic and theater in order to trace some ways in which theater viewed its own techniques as magical. Further, it includes a variety of dramatic genres, including sacred drama, comedy, romance, and finally, masque. Since a goal of this project is to demonstrate the prevalence of magic in drama of this time, this dissertation does not make an overarching argument about genre, suggesting for instance that one kind is more magical than another; yet each chapter deals with the contingencies of its form in relation to its staged magic.

The chapters are arranged chronologically in order to give a sense of the historical emergence of forms of magic in relation to drama. While sensitive to the importance of historical specificity, this dissertation, unlike other critical works about magic in early English literature,[78] does not posit a narrative that suggests that magic progressively declined in cultural or representational force. Rather, it contends that magical moments in drama represent a plurality of attitudes and ideas that emerged in a complicated, non-linear pattern. Although the chapters discuss the plays in chronological order, this dissertation does not imply assent with scholarly assessments that suggest that medieval magical thinking gave way to skeptical, scientific, or religious ideas by the middle of the seventeenth century. This project complicates such teleological narratives about the relationship between magic and

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[78] See, for example, Elissa Hare, *Enchanted Shows Vision and Structure in Elizabethan and Shakespearean Comedy about Magic* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1988); Robert Reed, *The Occult on the Tudor and Stuart Stage* (Boston: Christopher Publishing House, 1965); or Barbara Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers*.

religion or science, such as Keith Thomas's *Religion and the Decline of Magic*. Rather, it argues that the power of magic persisted alongside the presence of intense skepticism and pressure from religion and science well into the seventeenth century, and that such skepticism and pressure preexisted the scientific revolution or Protestant Reformation. As a result, although this project situates the plays within their specific historic moments, it works against claims of progression.

The first chapter, "Subtle Play: Magic and 'Miracles Pleying' in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," argues that the play presents Christ as an alchemist who purifies and heals the Jews through spectacular, alchemically-encoded transformations. With its insistent theatricality, the play brings together alchemy and legerdemain with the magic of drama. Further, the play suggests that theater is a form of beneficent magic, leading to self-transformation and restoration. Along this vein, perhaps the most stunning leap that the play asks audiences to make is that God's grace operates in a way similar to theater, and that both are magical. Indeed, contemporary debates about the Eucharist often centered upon the theatricality of the mass. This chapter proposes that the discourses of magic, drama, and religion were not discrete; rather, they often overlapped in purpose, effect, and language. Magic in the Croxton play is not just a metaphor. The play suggests that dramatic magic lies beyond the spectacle of stage tricks; juggling is only the beginning of the power of drama, and it is more than mere conjury or quackery. Instead, there is an unexplainable force in the way that drama moves audiences to identify with its characters. Ultimately, the play offers the magic of drama as a means of recuperation, social reintegration, and healing.

The second chapter, "'Magic's Mysteries Misled': Magic and Spectacle in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*," proceeds from this discussion of drama's ability to move people to experience sympathy and ethical transformation, also investigating the role of alchemy in the play. It focuses on the automaton in the play as a symbol of dramatic spectacle. Greene's staged living statue invokes the mysterious power associated with such religious and occult automata, relocating their force in dramatic representation. The comic failure of the automaton represents the limits of mechanical spectacle, whereas the alchemy and prophecy in the play advocate in favor of a kind of drama that moves people to experience temperance, love, and mercy. Greene uses the brazen head as part of an elaborate stage trick, a sleight of hand in which he makes audiences think that this trick will be the most magically and dramatically fulfilling aspect of the play while ultimately demonstrating that the play's true magical and dramatic power lies elsewhere: in the power of drama to temper and to transform its observers by inspiring sympathy, mercy, and reconciliation.

Like the first two chapters, the third chapter, "Boiled Brains, 'Inward Pinches,' and Alchemical Tempering in *The Tempest*," invokes alchemical ideas and locates part of the magic of drama in its ability to provoke sympathetic responses and to transform its observers. Prospero's magical acts blur the line between dramaturgy and thaumaturgy. Among other deeds, he produces an imaginary shipwreck, conjures an illusory banquet, and stages a masque with gods as actors—all in order to reform his "audiences" through the wonders of sympathy and of mercy. In essence, he uses his magic to effect ethical transformation. While Prospero is not an ideal magus—he is motivated in part by revenge, for example, and he is cruelly manipulative at

times—he demonstrates that magic and drama, as twinned forces, can be instrumental rather than merely representational. His observers appear to sympathize, learn, and repent through their experiences of staged magic. Even further, Prospero himself is transformed by his use of magic. The play similarly demands that the audience experience the power of prayer and mercy when Prospero begs in the epilogue, "Let your indulgence set me free." Such transformation, effected by the arts of a character who styles himself as a Neo-Platonic magus, evokes yet another form of the occult: alchemy. This chapter draws upon magic texts that bring together conjuration and alchemy, such as Agrippa's *Of Occult Philosophy,* in order to argue that Prospero is also an alchemist figure whose *prima materia* is not mineral but is the other characters; Prospero refines the dross substance of his base, flawed fellows through mystical transformation. The play itself works in a similar way. This chapter thus argues that *The Tempest* enacts an alchemical poetics in its portrayals of magic and self-transformation. Like alchemy, however, Prospero's deeds and motives are not entirely straightforward. Is he seeking revenge rather than repentance? Does he abuse his powers by torturing Ariel and Caliban, tormenting Ferdinand and Miranda, or teasing Alonso? The ambiguities of Prospero's magic—perhaps best signified by the mysterious nature of his book—suggest that while magic and drama can work together to effect ethical transformation, their sources of power are vexed and even dangerous. The play therefore posits that drama and magic have the power to enchant, charm, and move; yet they can draw on dubious forces to do so.

The final chapter, "Temperance, Magic, and the Masque in Milton's *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle,*" proceeds naturally from this discussion of alchemical

temperance and ethical transformation; it treats the central issue of chastity and temperance as magical forces in Milton's *A Mask at Ludlow Castle*. It considers the theatrical form most preoccupied with magic, the masque, arguing that the work that the masque does is performative. Like the magic of Sabrina, the masque effects transformation in those it touches. Among other contributions, it explores Milton's use of the masque form, and it investigates the role of gender and virginity. Further, it traces the political ramifications of provincial culture and government; and it considers the interstices between religion and magic. Most importantly, this chapter proposes to read the magic in the play as anything but allegorical; instead, it situates Milton's magic within its contemporary cultural approaches and takes it seriously as a force that his audiences would potentially register as powerful, mysterious, and transformative. The masque intertwines the instrumental forces of chastity and natural magic with the similarly performative powers of the masque form in order to align the mysterious powers of inspired dramatic art with those of virtue. This chapter returns to the opening chapter in its insistence on the interconnectedness of magic, theater, and religion, attributing to theater an almost-miraculous status.

Unlike many accounts of magic and theater, this project does not focus on demonic magic. There is no chapter on *Doctor Faustus*, for example. Further, it does not consider other malevolent forms of magic, such as witchcraft. *Macbeth* is notably absent. Instead, the selected plays offer an apology for the dramatic arts in the form of representations of magic that, while acknowledging their own problems and limitations, offer the possibility of positive ethical or even ontological transformations among readers and audiences. Omitting more skeptical attacks on

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magic and on theater's magical power limits the scope of the argument, yet this work

recuperates a sense of the wonder that many audiences and playwrights experienced

in their encounters with the experimental medium of early English drama.

Chapter 1: Subtle Play: Magic and "Miracles Pleying" in the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*, a late medieval play that exists in a sole manuscript from the sixteenth century, revels in theatricality as a tool to demonstrate the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist.[79] At the heart of the play is an epistemological question about how to access spiritual truth through the material world; the play thus draws dramatic force from the controversies of its time, such as doubts about transubstantiation and contemporary miracles. Rather than shying away from these issues, the play is overwhelmingly theatrical, with spectacular stage tricks that showcase its controversies. Its deployment of magic as a trope for both miracle and spectacle gives us a play that revels in ambivalence. Whereas the Jews in the play rehearse the miracles of Christ in order to discount them as magic tricks, the play itself aligns the magic of the stage with the miracles of Christ. Specifically, the spectacular transformations of the Host resemble the processes of alchemy, drawing dramatic force from alchemy's resemblances to transubstantiation. The play presents an image of Christ as an alchemist, whose miraculous abilities to convert the Jews

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[79] Tamara Atkin dates the extant manuscript from the 1530s or 1540s, though most critics agree that the play was likely written shortly after the date of the miracle described in the play: 1461 ("Playbooks and Printed Drama: A Reassessment of the Date and Layout of the Manuscript of the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Review of English Studies* 60, no. 244 [2009]: 194-205). Critics are hesitant to set the play in a single genre. Katie Normington includes the play in the conclusion because it is an example of "performance events that blur such distinctions" (*Medieval English Drama: Performance and Spectatorship* [Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009], 134).

and to shapeshift—from bread to flesh and back again—evoke alchemical transmutation.

As an alchemist, Christ purifies, heals, and converts the Jews in the play, just as in the *magnum opus,* the philosopher's stone purifies and transmutes base metals and heals disease. Christ's alchemical transformations take the form of spectacular stage tricks, which resemble legerdemain. The Croxton Christ, like other versions of this figure in biblical history and in late medieval drama, is a stage magician whose deeds toe the line between magic and miracle, both intensifying and dispelling anxieties about the efficacy of the Host and of miracles. By rendering miracle into magic, the play queries the reliability of visual confirmation of faith. At the same time, it offers an alternative path to grace: dramatic spectacle. Drawing upon alchemy allows the play to capture the correspondences among magic, miracle, and theater, celebrating their ability to heal, to purify, and to convert those they encounter. Yet the play's violent, comic critique of materialistic desires circumscribes theater's access to supernatural forces. This critique outlines the contours of dramatic spectacle as separate from both magic and miracle. Although theater cannot transmute magically, it can move the affections and quite possibly reform those experiencing it. Shuttling across the boundaries between magic, science, and miracle, alchemy is an especially suitable discourse for playing out the complexities of the material and spiritual conversions of bread into Christ and of unbelievers into Christians. The Croxton play dramatizes these tensions as a self-reflexive commentary on the nature of sacred theater. Through staged magic, the play highlights the promise of theater as a means of apprehending the divine, of healing, and of converting. Further, through magically

staged miracles, the play authorizes its own medium as both material and divine, like the Host and like the philosopher's stone. At the same time, however, the play draws upon magical and alchemical themes to warn against the dangers and limitations of its own medium. This contradiction, the constant metatheatrical and spiritual doubt, is a source of dramatic tension in the play. Ultimately, however, since audiences encounter the miraculous through the spectacularly material and metaphysical mode of theater, its representation authorizes its medium.

Miracle, Magic, and Metatheater

The play's language and action hinge upon the relationships among miracle, magic, and theatricality. The diction in the opening banns, for instance, testifies to the play's preoccupation with the role of performance in making sense of the divine. The word "maracle" appears twice in one stanza as a descriptor for the Host miracle performed by God in Heraclea: "Thus be maracle of the Kyng of Hevyn…In an howshold wer convertyd iwis elevyn. / At Rome this myracle ys knowen welle kowthe" (53-5).[80] In the following stanza, the same word more ambiguously describes some sort of presentation of the miracle in Rome: "Thys marycle at Rome was presented" (57). Foregrounding the importance of both divine and human show in converting nonbelievers, the linguistic slippage here between miracle as an act of God and as a human performance indicates the complex relationship between divine and earthly wonders.

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[80] *Croxton Play of the Sacrament,* ed. John T. Sebastian (Kalamazoo: Western Michigan University, 2012). All references to the play come from this edition.

This interest in proof of God's might through wondrous display drives the play's central conflict, when a Jew named Jonathas expresses the commonplace argument against the efficacy of the Sacrament: "Mervelously yt ys ment in mynde: / The beleve of thes Cristen men ys false, as I wene, / For they beleve on a cake" (198-200). His problem lies in the question: how can a "cake" be Christ? In order to dispute this marvel, he and his fellow Jews wish to prove that the Real Presence is merely a "conceyte"; he plans to "putt yt in a preve" (208). To this end, Jonathas pays a Christian merchant named Aristorius to steal a consecrated Host from the local church. When they acquire the Host, Jonathas spreads out a cloth on a table and mocks the miracles of Christ. Then, he and his fellows reenact the Five Wounds of Christ by stabbing the Host in five places. With the final wound, the Host begins to bleed, and the Jews attempt to toss it into a pot of boiling oil.

Instead, the Host miraculously affixes itself to Jonathas's hand, causing him to scream as he "*renneth wood, with the Ost in hys hond.*"[81] His fellows nail the Host to a post, evoking the crucifixion. When they pull his arm, attempting to separate his hand from the Host, the stage directions note that his hand "*shall hang styll with þe Sacrament.*"[82] The hijinks continue as a quack doctor and his servant enter, but the Jews decline their offer of help. Then, Jonathas plucks out the nails and throws the hand and Host into the boiling cauldron, at which point the oil becomes blood that overflows the pot. The Jews next toss it into an oven, which "*must ryve asunder and*

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[81] Ibid., 49.

[82] Ibid., 50.

blede owt at the cranys, and an image appere owt, with woundys bledyng."[83] The

response of one of the Jews, Masphat, to this miracle reveals its intended effect on the

audience as well as the characters, or as Seth Lerer styles it, the play models

spectatorial response: "Owt! owt! Here ys a grete wondere: / Thys ovyn bledyth owt

on every syde!" (713-4) The *imago Christi* restores Jonathas's hand to his body by

enjoining him to dip it into the boiling pot. Jonathas then repents of his sins and goes

to the church, where he shows the bishop the image, which transforms back into

bread. The bishop then leads a solemn procession to a church where Jonathas and the

Jews convert, and all of the characters—and likely the audience—sing a *te deum*, a

hymn of praise confirming faith in the liturgy.

The Croxton play taps into the rhetorical mapping of magic onto miracle,

staging fraught, yet potentially transformative, forms of magic in tandem with its

Host miracles. The magic in and of the play is not only a miraculous visual

confirmation of the sacrament but also the power of theater to offer an alternative way

to apprehend the divine. As a result, the play carves out a space for drama and for

magic to complement religious doctrine and liturgy. As Heather Hill-Vasquez argues,

the Croxton play is an example of medieval drama defending itself against anti-

theatrical claims, as in the Lollard *Treatise of Miracles Pleying*.[84] Hill-Vasquez

argues that the play "stages and illuminates a number of the chief points of the *Tretise*

writers. However, what the writers of the *Tretise* see as the dangerous precedent of

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[83] Ibid., 55.

[84] Heather Hill-Vasquez, "'The Precious Body of Crist that they Tretyn in their
Hondis': 'Miracles Pleying' and the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," *Early Theatre* 4
(2001): 53-72.

'miraclis pleyinge'—inappropriate human engagement of sacred objects and topics—the Croxton play embraces as potential site for indulging spiritual desires and exploring religious belief, while reassuringly asserting the fundamental stability and authority of Christianity."[85] The play's complex handling of its portrayal of the Host miracle, however, forecloses the possibility of control, instead foregrounding the irresolvability of its controversies. As Gail McMurray Gibson contends, "It is a play that assumes the presence of doubt and is just as forthright about assuming the power of drama to restore from doubt."[86] Victor I. Scherb notes that East Anglia, the region from which the play derives, was religiously diverse, leading to competing forms of religious expression, views, and therefore tensions.[87] David Coleman also suggests that late medieval drama acted as a means of dealing with religious tensions, arguing that the Croxton play's "closing rituals of recuperation are an attempt to control the forces of heterodoxy that have been released in the course of the play."[88]

The "heterodoxy" of the play would have held dramatic appeal for audiences in the late fifteenth century, and in a different way, would have engaged later readers

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[85] Ibid., 54.

[86] Gail McMurray Gibson, *The Theater of Devotion: East Anglian Drama and Society in the Late Middle Ages* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 38.

[87] Victor I. Scherb, *Staging Faith: East Anglian Drama in the Later Middle Ages* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2001).

[88] David Coleman, *Drama and the Sacraments in Sixteenth-Century England: Indelible Characters* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 24.

in its existing manuscript form.[89] The play's status as a Henrician document, though, hints at its enduring appeal through the early Reformation. Hailing from a mid-sixteenth-century manuscript, however, the play offers rich analytical possibilities for reading it as sympathetic to reform interests. Seth Lerer goes so far as to suggest that the "*Croxton Play* for all of its self-conscious grounding in a fifteenth-century event, is in many ways a Tudor text."[90] Lerer theorizes that the play "seemed an eerie presaging of the iconoclastic debates of the late 1520s and 1530s."[91] The Chester plays, which are Elizabethan documents, can be read both as expressions of medieval and early modern concerns: "From the Henrician age, certain religious texts could look backward to origins in a medieval devotional context while also gesturing meaningfully toward a reformed church and faith, often in ways that specifically court ambiguity of reception."[92] Indeed, the Croxton play's spectacular expressions of divinity may have drawn ire from some reformers who would have experienced the play's theatricality as idolatrous. Alternatively, its interrogation of contemporary miracles and transubstantiation may have resonated with reformers of Popish

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[89] Because of the difficulty dating this play, this chapter contextualizes the play in the time of the ostensible miracle it dramatizes, tracing the transmission of the play's concerns from earlier texts and traditions.

[90] Seth Lerer, "'Representyd now in yower syght': The Culture of Spectatorship in Late-Fifteenth-Century England," in *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England,* ed. Barbara A. Hanawalt and David Wallace (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 52.

[91] Ibid., 53.

[92] Theresa Coletti, "The Chester Cycle in Sixteenth- Century Religious Culture," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37, no. 3 (2007): 539.

superstitions and magic. At the same time, however, the play mocks and punishes materialist or literal attitudes toward faith, such as Aristorius's mercantile approach to the Host or the Jew's desire to "putt yt in a preve" (208), although Christ also accedes to the desire of the Jews to prove His presence through visible, spectacular evidence. Thus, the play both credits and rejects skepticism.

In a sense, the play offers an apology for drama's materiality, through which it awes, inspires, and even converts its observers. Sarah Beckwith observes such sacramental power in other late medieval drama, suggesting, "The Corpus Christi plays of the late Middle Ages understand the sacramental relation between form and grace as *best* realized in theater"; the theatricality of such plays is "the perfectly consonant form for the religion of incarnation."[93] According to Beckwith, the Corpus Christi plays represent "theater as sacrament."[94] In this case, as in the *Play of the Sacrament*, the source of theater's sacramental power is its spectacle, its materiality: "theater relies on that most basic form of signification—ostension; to define an object, one simply picks up the object itself to show precisely what it is."[95] To move Beckwith's assessment further, theater is a sign, but a material—and embodied—one. Theater's very corporeality parallels Christ's Incarnation and, as she contends, gives it its sacramental power: "In placing the body of Christ at once in the very body of an actor, and in the community of participation that was those who received, as well as

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[93] Sarah Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 59.

[94] Ibid., 62.

[95] Ibid., 63.

that which was received, Resurrection theater embodies sacramentality through the resources of acknowledgment rather than knowledge, trust and imagination rather than doctrine."[96] While Beckwith is theorizing Resurrection theater narrowly construed, the Croxton play similarly demonstrates the sacramental power of theater that works through "trust and imagination rather than doctrine."[97] Indeed, Darryll Grantley argues that plays that staged miracles marshaled their material and spectacular resources to convert observers through the power of theater, claiming, they were "a testament to the power of God which results directly in the conversion of sinners."[98]

The source of their power, according to Grantley, was not simply their materiality, but their stage tricks: "Since they themselves appeared to be miraculous, they contributed to the credibility of the wonders being presented on stage."[99] The technology of the spectacles inspired both wonder and "credibility" because they resembled miracles. Grantley cites several wonder-working dramatic technologies, such as windlasses used in miraculous ascents, real blood in hollow spears that achieved its special effect through sleight of hand, and, of course, pyrotechnics.[100] Ironically, then, the source of their miraculous powers was illusion or counterfeit technological marvels resembling street magic. Remarkably, in Grantley's view, the

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[96] Ibid., 89.

[97] Ibid., 89.

[98] Darryll Grantley, "Producing Miracles," in *Aspects of Early English Drama*, ed. Paula Neuss (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1983), 78.

[99] Ibid., 80.

[100] Ibid., 83, 84, 89.

illusory nature of the staged miracles does not detract from their divine message, but

rather enhances their power.[101] Although Grantley does not associate miraculous

dramatic spectacle with magical traditions, he articulates the power of plays to

generate wonder through stagecraft and illusion. Coupled with the frequent recourse

to magical language and topics, the plays' intensely spectacular illusions drawn from

magical traditions reinforce the sense of wonder and power that the plays attempt to

generate. To add to Grantley's assessment, and the theatrical staged magic required in

performing these tricks replicates, or even re-instantiates, the divine miracles. Both

Beckwith and Grantley posit a place for theater within worship, and both suggest that

late medieval drama aspired to move audiences in mysterious ways to experience

conversion or reaffirmation of their faith.

Focusing on the Croxton play, Seth Lerer also acknowledges late medieval

drama's capacity for performing wonders. For Lerer, Eamon Duffy's question about

the theatricality of the mass—"Spectators or Participants?"— reveals much about the

way that the plays "thematize the issue of theatricality itself, and in turn, the nature

and social function of representation."[102] Lerer reimagines the shocking torture of

Jonathas as more than *schadenfreude*, allowing instead that the play "stages the

possibilities of professional theater not just to entertain or shock an audience, but to

effect a kind of social reintegration."[103] Lerer's central issue is "how dramatic skill is

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[101] Grantley contends, "As with many stage miracles, the spectacle is used here to reinforce the theme of divine power in the play and it does so in the most dramatic way possible" (Ibid., 91).

[102] Lerer, "Representyd now in yower syght," 37.

[103] Ibid., 44.

thematized within the play and how the scenes of mutilation and dismemberment

constitute a self-conscious reflection on the power of theatrical artifice to move an

audience."[104] Or, we might extend his argument to suggest that spectacular

demonstrations of pain can move audiences mysteriously to experience communal

reintegration.

The theatricality of Jonathas's torture is a kind of "trial," which Lerer links to

legal trials.[105] The notion of trial might just as easily belong to the discourse of

alchemy that the play explores. Though not casting the play as magical or alchemical,

Lerer argues that it heals.[106] Like the alchemical cures of the physician-alchemist, the

healing within the play mirrors the healing of the play. Because the *Play of the*

Sacrament heals the battered body politic through spectacle, it is a "metadrama, a

play about the possibilities of theater and its symbols."[107] Lerer even contends that the

play's real wonder is the "miracle of the theater itself…how it uses the technologies

of stagecraft or the skill of a performer to evoke the fear, the horror, or the pleasure of

the spectacle of torture."[108] Lerer suggests that the play's miracle lies both in healing

the body politic and inspiring emotion through theatrical technologies.

Both of these effects can be present, of course. If the play truly can inspire

wonder or reaffirm faith or heal communal fractures—in short, if it can perform

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[104] Ibid., 44.

[105] Ibid., 45.

[106] Ibid., 46.

[107] Ibid., 47.

[108] Ibid., 47.

something miraculous—then is does so through its insistent theatricality, through the

technologies and illusions of spectacle that move observers to experience

mysteriously transformative emotions. The Croxton play thus demonstrates that

dramatic spectacle can be an especially effective form of devotion because it relies

not upon didactic rationality, but upon affective response. The play's triumph is not in

proving the miracles of God, but in *moving* people to the mystery of faith. The

spectacular tricks purge Jonathas of his misdirected wit, leaving him open to faith. He

cries, "I am nere masyd—my wytte ys gon" (655). His reason shaken, Jonathas turns

to faith: "Therfor of helpe I pray yow all" (656). His epistemological center shifts

from wit to wonder, from skeptical probing to faith, as when he says to the image,

"For dred of Thee I trymble and quake" (743). As with the play's spectacle, the

Eucharist itself requires a similar kind of suspension of disbelief, an accession to

wonder in the face of skepticism. Paul Strohm elaborates this idea as applied to the

sacraments by contending, "At the heart of sacramentality lay a concept of

transformation; the sacrament is ministered in a ritual or ceremony which possesses

the power to alter status or identity, even in the absence of apparent or outward

change."[109] This transformation relies on faith, not reason: "The point about

sacramental actions is that they do not—cannot—make sense. Their mystery of utter

transformation in the semblance of apparent continuity is unsusceptible to rational or

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[109] Paul Strohm, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament:* Commemoration and
Repetition in Late Medieval Culture," in *Performances of the Sacred in Late
Medieval and Early Modern England*, ed. Susanne Rupp and Tobias Däring
(Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2005), 33.

causal analysis."[110] Like the Host's spectacular transformations in the play and like magic, the sacrament requires and inspires faith, wonder, and amazement.

The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* links wonder and faith, suggesting that spectacle is perfectly suited to inspiring both. Theatricality, according to the Croxton play, is the source of drama's devotional power. Just as Jonathas's wit is transformed through his bodily experience with the Host's transformations, audiences are moved through their sensory encounter with the play's spectacle. Sarah Beckwith notes that even in liturgy, sacramentalism is likened to drama, impersonation, and theatricality. Accordingly, she argues that the ending of the play might be interpreted as "the absorption of procession into theatre."[111] Croxton's insistent theatricality draws attention to drama's resemblances to sacramental acts. The play demonstrates that staged magic is not just a metaphor, suggesting instead that there is real magic to be found in drama. This magic lies beyond the spectacle of stage tricks; juggling is only the beginning of the power of this kind of drama, which is more than mere conjury or quackery. Instead, there is an unexplainable force in the way that drama moves audiences to experience conversion and social reintegration. The play reclaims the power of grace, sacrament, and spectacle *through* spectacle. Thus, while drama draws upon spectacle and illusion, it deploys these tricks to tap into a deeper devotional truth.

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[110] Ibid., 33.

[111] Sarah Beckwith, "Ritual, Church and Theatre: Medieval Dramas of the Sacramental Body," in *Culture and History: Essays on English Communities, Identities and Writing 1350-1600*, ed. David Aers (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1992), 78.

Staged Magic and Alchemy in the Croxton Play

In addition to legerdemain, the play also stages the fraught tradition of alchemy. Alchemy's promise of transformation and potential for counterfeit prove fruitful in exploring the anxieties about the transformative powers of the Eucharist. In the play, the transformation of oil into blood in a boiling cauldron heightens the tension between magic and miracle. Such a cauldron was a centerpiece of early English alchemical laboratories, as it was used for the important stage of distillation. The Croxton play features other alchemical undertones, as when one of Jonathas's confederates, Jason, casts the Host into the oven using pincers, or forceps, similar to the ones alchemists used, as in visual depictions of early alchemical labs, including Peter Brueghel the Elder's *The Alchemist*. Indeed, the play's props and set pieces would be at home in such a lab: the Jews have a huge pot, a furnace, an oven, metalworking tools, and plenty of kindling, all components of alchemist's labs. Poking and prodding the Host with their many tools, including an auger and pincers, the Jews mimic the work of alchemists, who similarly subject their materials to drilling, boiling, burning, and baking. For instance, Jasdon throws Jonathas's hand and the nails into the pot and stirs them: "And I shall, with thys dagger so stowte, / Putt yt down, that yt myght plawe, / And steare the clothe rounde abowte, / That nothyng therof shalbe rawe" (665-8). Masphat continues this heating and boiling process by burning a fire to distill the Host and hand, attempting to separate the two in a comic *separatio*: "And I shall manly, with all my myght, / Make the fyre to blase and brynne / And sett therunder suche a light, / That yt shall make yt ryght thynne" (669-72). Masphat builds a hot fire to make their brew "thynne" in order to distill and

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purify the hand and Host. As a result of such firing and stirring, the cauldron boils and changes color—"Here shall the cawdron byle, apperyng to be as blood" (54)— much like the *rubedo* stage of alchemy, in which the *prima materia* changes to a red color, as in Roger Bacon's *Tract on the Tincture and Oil of Antimony: On the true and right Preparation of Stibium / to heal human weaknesses and illnesses therewith, and to improve the imperfect metals*, where he describes this final product of the opus as "a very bright red and transparent stone, ruby colored."[112]

Bacon's stone has the property of alchemical healing, like the cauldron in the Croxton play. By tossing Jonathas's hand into the oil, the Jews hope to "stanch hys bledyng chere" (687). The healing properties of this solution evoke one of the goals, indeed perhaps the most important, of alchemical distillation: to make the Elixir of Life, a liquid that Roger Bacon and others characterized as *aurum potable* or drinkable gold, the mythic Elixir with the ability to heal all wounds and to prolong life. Jonathan Hughes observes, "One of the keys to the physician's political influence in the fifteenth century …lay in his involvement in alchemy."[113] Over two hundred Middle English texts refer to distillation and that gold was widely used in medicine, and physicians and herbals described illnesses in alchemical terms.[114] Roger Bacon's work on alchemical healing was popular in the university instruction of physicians in

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[112] Friedrich Roth-Scholtz, *Deutsches theatrum chemicum*, Nürnberg: Adam Jonathan Felsecker, 1731, Trans. by Kjell Hellesoe (1985) <http://www.alchemywebsite.com/rbacon2.html>.

[113] Jonathan Hughes, *Arthurian Myths and Alchemy: The Kingship of Edward IV* (Stroud, Gloucestershire: Sutton, 2002), 15.

[114] Ibid., 16-17.

the fifteenth century.[115] John Lydgate, a Benedictine monk of Bury St. Edmunds (a

possible site suggested for the play's performance) showed an interest in alchemy and

"was given the authority to copy a series of elaborate authoritative medical

manuscripts," which included recipes for cures.[116] Medical alchemy was popular in

the fifteenth-century, from the ubiquitous household distilleries used for creating

healing waters to the cures of the court physicians. The courts of Henry VI and

Edward IV invoked alchemical symbols associated with healing, redemption, and

renewal, drawing upon alchemy as a spiritual and political discourse of significant

force. Further, court physicians applied alchemical medicines to attempt to restore the

physical and mental health of King Henry VI.[117] In his *Opus Major*, Roger Bacon

catalogues examples of the Elixir of Life, which would heal and purify the human

body and prolong life, as in the ploughman who "found a golden vessel in the fields

hidden in the earth, which contained an excellent liquor. Thinking the liquor was dew

from the sky he drank it and washed his face, and was renewed in mind and body

beyond measure."[118] Bacon codes these instances of seemingly miraculous healing as

natural forces, carefully distinguishing from necromancy or black magic the

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[115] Ibid., 40.

[116] Ibid., 50-54.

[117] Ibid., 78. Hughes notes that Edward's armor was coated in alchemical imagery, and he portrayed his return from the Burgundian court exile as returning to the grace of God after experiencing suffering that led to alchemical purification. The Croxton play is likewise interested in the alchemical torture, purification, and renewal of outcasts, who experience the grace of God after experiencing vexations and distillation.

[118] Roger Bacon, *The Opus Majus*, ed. Robert B. Burke (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1928), 622.

alchemical processes of making and perfecting such unguents. As a healing and purifying oil, the boiling liquid that restores Jonathas's hand evokes this famed Elixir of Life.

Christ as Alchemist and Healer

The play draws upon the redemptive aspects of alchemy found in scientific, religious, and political discourse, concatenating these various strands into the figure of Christ the Redeemer as an alchemist who transforms His substance in order to convert and purify His flock. If the cauldron of boiling oil in the play evokes the alchemical Elixir of Life that cures Jonathas's hand, then the play also portrays Christ as an alchemist. Whereas the Jews represent the charlatan or ineffective alchemists who fail to transform lead to gold, Christ represents that illusory figure: a successful alchemist. The alchemical efforts of the Jews fail to heal Jonathas and instead produce comic results. Rather than restoring his hand to its natural condition, the alchemy of the Jews causes their oven to break, a common problem of practicing alchemists who forever broke their furnaces, pots, and glasses and never produced the philosopher's stone. Instead, Christ must cure Jonathas, both in body and in spirit. Christ's cure is notably material and theatrical, rather than simply spiritual or verbal, and it reverberates with alchemical undertones. He directs Jonathas to dip his hand in the healing waters of the cauldron in order to restore it to wholeness: "Thow woldyst preve thy powre Me to oppresse. / But now I consydre thy necesse: / Thow wasshest thyn hart with grete contrycion. / Go to the cawdron—thi care shal be the lesse—/ And towche thyn hand to thy salvacion" (773-8). Echoing the rites of baptism,

Christ's enjoinder for Jonathas to wash his heart in contrition by placing his hand in the cauldron also plays upon alchemical imagery, language, and action. Christ is a sort of alchemist whose Elixir of Life not only heals the body but also purifies the spirit. Through Christ's alchemy, Jonathas becomes whole in body and soul: "Here shall Ser Jonathas put hys hand into the cawdron, and yt shalbe hole agayn" (57). The play thus affiliates baptism with distillation and alchemical healing.[119] The conversion of the Jews resembles the transmutation of the *prima materia* into the Elixir of Life. Further, Jonathas refers to Christ as a "gracyows oyle streme" (782); Christ is not only an alchemist, then, but also the Elixir itself.

Though a surprising figure for contemporary readers of the play, Christ as alchemist (or as philosopher's stone) traces its literary transmission through many textual and cultural incarnations in late medieval England. Magical and alchemical works, for instance, often conflate transmutation and alchemical healing with the miracles and transubstantiation of Christ. A fifteenth-century alchemical poem, for instance, describes Christ as both an alchemist and the philosopher's stone and the gifts of the magi as the base materials of the alchemical process: "I figure now owr blesset Stone, / Fro heven wase sende downe to Salomon" (4-5).[120] The "Stone" is not

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[119] The flowing tears and liquids further connect alchemy and baptism. Jason prays for his tears to purify his soul, linking baptism and tears when he prays, "Lord, with sorow and care and grete wepyng / All we felawys lett vs saye thus, / With condolent harte and grete sorowyng: / Lacrimis nostris consciendam nostram baptizemus!" (746-9) The tears here perform a sort of spiritual distillation of the soul, just as Christ's alchemical baptism purifies and heals both the body and soul of Jonathas. Similarly, Malchas calls upon Christ to wash him in "the water of contrycion" (760).

[120] "Philosophers Stone," in *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose,* ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). All line numbers are cited from this edition.

only the philosopher's stone itself, but also the Son of God. Both the philosopher's stone and Christ compose of a holy trinity and both are heavenly. The gifts of the magi, as components of the stone are "on in mode, / Lyke as the Trenité ys but on" (18-19), and like the Son, "owre Ston" was sent "out of heven, / By an angel" (23-4). Underscoring the homology between Son and "Ston," "thys figure…ys lyke to personis thre" (25-6). The poem thus figures alchemy as a form of devotion by which philosophers can understand the Trinity; and indeed, the poem reads like a prayer that concludes, "Into hys blyse now come wee, / Amen, goud Lord, for cheryté" (29-30). Just as the stone has the ability to effect material transformation, so Christ can effect spiritual purification and conversion.

A fifteenth-century treatise on the making of the philosopher's stone similarly compares it to the Trinity, even identifying the offspring of the chemical wedding as a son that will be worshipped by all mankind: "And then sche schall conseyve and ber a sone that schall worshype all kyne" (142).[121] Identified as a "medisyn," this "ston that is no ston" becomes a healing elixir. Its process of conversion resembles the one in the play in which the Jews place the hand and Host in a closed vessel, fire it, and attempt to restore it to its proper life. As Jasdon explains, "I stoppe thys ovyn, wythowtyn dowte, / With clay I clome yt vppe ryght fast, / That non heat shall cum owtte" (709-11). The treatise on the making of the philosopher's stone similarly enjoins practitioners to seal up the prima materia in a vessel in order to separate and purify its elements, spirit and body, before restoring its wholeness: "Take this ston

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[121] "The Making of the Stone," *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose,* in ed. Douglas Gray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985). All line numbers are cited from this edition.

and put him in a well closede vessel and clere…For then is the spirite departed fro the body and levethe the body dede and blake, but yyt yyf the sepulcour be well closed above he wull come doune ayeyn unto the bodye and the soule wull nevere be departed; for hyr resurrexioun thei schall evere be togeder" (142). In a closed vessel, the stone becomes dead and black and the spirit leaves the body, but eventually the spirit returns and the soul is resurrected. Figured in biblical terms, the process of creating the Elixir of Life mirrors Christ's death, descent into hell, and resurrection.

Christ-as-alchemist in the Croxton play draws from these and many other depictions of the transformative, healing power of the philosopher's stone and of the Elixir of Life. Related to Christ as an alchemist is the popular image of Christ as a healer. *Christus medicus*, an image which Katharine Park describes as "almost ubiquitous" in medieval and Renaissance Europe, illustrates the intimate relationship between physical and spiritual healing in medical practice and theory.[122] Christ's alchemical correspondences fold into this tradition, since alchemical processes such as distillation were responsible for many herbal cures. Such cures were not merely the purview of a select few wealthy or educated practitioners; the relationship between alchemy and healing was widely acknowledged.[123] Alchemists imagined their work as healing diseased metals via the elixir or philosopher's stone. Practitioners also saw

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[122] Katherine Park, *Medicine and Society in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 166.

[123] Susanne B. Butters notes that by the late fifteenth-century, "the once esoteric alchemical art and apparatus of distillation circulated in increasingly available published works, so that anyone who could afford the time and equipment might prepare herbal concoctions" (*The Triumph of Vulcan: Sculptors' Tools, Porphyry, and the Prince in Ducal Florence* [Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 1996], 217).

alchemy as cleansing both physical and spiritual corruption, understanding their work

as mirroring Christ's. Fifteenth-century charms also depict Christ as a healer, as in "A

Charm to Stop Bleeding." Just as a grimoire conjures a demon, this charmer attempts

to invoke Christ to heal bloody wounds: "I hot and halson that this blod mot stop and

stanch by the vertu of the Fader, son, and Holi Gost, 3 persons and o God in Trinité"

[I command and charge that this blood must stop and staunch by the virtue of the

Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, 3 persons and one God in Trinity].[124] Blurring

the boundaries between magic and miracle, this poetic charm compares the miracle of

Christ stopping the waters of Jordan to his staunching of bleeding wound: "He het it

stond, and it stod—and so mot this sam blod of this man, woman, or child…" (7-8).

Like the Jews throwing Jonathas's hand into the cauldron to attempt to "stanch hys

bledyng chere" (687), this charm invokes Christ as a healer to stay the flow of blood.

Similarly, an alchemical work that describes Mary as Mercury, the fifteenth-century

Visio Johannis Dastyne portrays Christ's healing powers as alchemical, explaining

that Christ's "newe warme blod" will act like an Elixir to heal lepers.[125]

  Because of its Christ-like powers to transform and renew, Roger Bacon argues

that alchemy is not only a holy endeavor, but the one most suited to understanding the

divine as it appears in the material world.[126] For Bacon, alchemy is the pinnacle of

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[124] "A Charm to Stop Bleeding," *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse and Prose,* ed. Douglas Gray, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), 137.

[125] Ibid., 143. The text is a "fragment of a fifteenth-century translation of the early fourteenth-century alchemist John Dastin" (*The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse,* 449).

[126] Bacon, *The Opus Majus*, 626.

Christian science because it offers a material path to salvation. Of all of the experimental sciences, alchemy is the greatest art: "the dignity of this science can be exemplified in alchemy." Jonathas's comical desire to prove Christ's presence in the material world, to put the Host "in a preve," finds an equivalent, earnest attempt in Bacon, who calls upon alchemy and other "experimental sciences" to prove God's presence in the world. Experimental science, Bacon claims, "is useful not only to philosophy, but to the knowledge of God, and for the direction of the whole world."[127] Furthermore, the experimental sciences are, after moral philosophy, the most effective means of spiritual devotion: "this science next to moral philosophy will present the literal truth of Scripture most effectively."[128] Analogously, understanding the mysteries of the material world through alchemy helps worshippers apprehend the divine.

Because alchemy and its sister sciences offer the most convincing "proof"—a word Bacon, like the Croxton Jews, uses again and again—they are especially useful for converting people to Christianity.[129] Experimental science further distinguishes between natural miracles and demonic magic: it "knows how to separate the illusions of magic and to detect all their errors in incantations, invocations, conjurations, sacrifices, and cults."[130] Working against the idea that God's miracles are merely

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[127] Ibid., 587.

[128] Ibid., 632.

[129] Ibid., 632.

[130] Ibid., 633. According to Bacon, "This science alone, therefore, knows how to test perfectly what can be done by nature, what by the effects of art, what by trickery, what the incantations, conjurations, invocations, deprecations, sacrifices that belong

forms of magic, Bacon explains that alchemy and other experimental sciences prove

their miraculous nature and thus convert unbelievers; they offer proof of God's

miraculous presence in the material world. Through alchemy and other experimental

philosophies, Bacon not only proves God's miracles but also His very existence: "I

state, therefore, that God must exist just as this fact must be proved in

metaphysics."[131] Although proof and faith seem to be contradictory means of

accessing God, Bacon reconciles wit and wonder, saying, "as a solace for human

frailty, to the end that it may avoid the attacks of error, it is useful for the Christian to

have effective reasons for those things which he believes, and he should have a

reason for his faith for every case requiring it."[132] Along with divine revelation,

alchemy and other experimental sciences confirm the miraculous power and presence

of God in order to convert unbelievers and assure the faithful.

Jonathas's attempt to prove the Real Presence of Christ in the Host borrows

from this tradition of probing the natural and material worlds in order to make sense

of God's Word. Whereas Bacon celebrates natural miracles as proof of God's

powerful presence in the world, Jonathas's alchemical experiment proves foolish.

Thus, the Croxton play critiques and ridicules the attempts of experimentalists,

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to magic, mean and dream of, and what is in them, so that all falsity may be removed
and the truth alone of art and nature may be retained. This science alone teaches us
how to view the mad acts of magicians, that they may be not ratified but shunned, just
as logic considers sophistical reasoning" (Ibid., 587).

[131] Ibid., 638.

[132] Ibid., 793. Bacon repeatedly discusses experimental science's approach to religion
in terms of proof, as when he argues, citing Avicenna, that metaphysics is a branch of
experimental science that "seeks to prove the existence of God" (Ibid., 795) or "Then
the advocate of the religion of the faithful has on the part of Metaphysics and this
Moral Science another method of procedure in giving his proofs" (Ibid., 797).

natural philosophers, and skeptics who try to prove God through probing the material world. It seems, then, that the Croxton play satirizes doubters' need for proof of Christ's transubstantiation and of God's miracles, suggesting that faith in God's grace is superior to foolish skepticism. Yet the play offers a more complex portrait of alchemy and therefore of material confirmation of the divine. Jonathas and the Jews may fail as alchemists because they are unable to restore Jonathas's hand, but Christ's miracles in the play perform actual wonders. With its Host miracle, in which the Eucharist undergoes multiple transformations, the Croxton play characterizes as alchemical the sacrament's ability to be both flesh and bread. Like the philosopher's stone, the Host experiences transmutations into various colors, shapes, and materials. If we consider the Host's transformations as Christ's miracles and His restoration of Jonathas's hand in the oil as a form of successful alchemy, then Christ is both an alchemist and shape shifter whose wondrous transformations prove the miraculous presence of God in the material world and thus convert the Jews. Miracles as proof of God's power in the Croxton play may find its precedent in Bacon's understanding that alchemy is a noble, holy endeavor that restores faith and converts unbelievers.

The attempt of the Jews in the Croxton play to prove Christ's presence in the Host through its material incarnation and transformation similarly corresponds with Bacon's proofs. Bacon "proves," for example, that Christianity is the one true religion by arguing for the power of God's miracles and of His presence in the Sacrament, denouncing other religions, such as that of the "Tartars," who do not have any priest but instead rely upon magic arts and demons instead of miracles.[133] He then argues

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[133] Ibid., 807.

that the main condition by which one can prove the truth of Christian doctrine is "the

indescribable power of miracles"; the Sacrament of the Altar offers the most

convincing proof.[134] Bacon registers the problem of doubt prompted by the wonderful

nature of the Eucharist: "Since, however, a certain article seems burdensome to

human frailty, for this reason some deny it, others are doubtful in regard to it, still

others accept it with difficulty, some look upon it as hard, others imperfectly

understand it, a few grasp it easily with full peace and sweetness of mind. I refer to

the Sacrament of the Altar."[135] Like the play, in order to prove the Sacrament as body

and blood of Christ, Bacon cites various Host miracles: "there are an innumerable

number of miracles which are found in the Sacred Writers and in the histories."[136]

These miracles convert heretics who have invoked false magic to achieve their

desires. For example, when a heretical bishop calls upon a necromancer to help a

woman conceive a baby. The demon is rendered impotent, however, because a priest

administers a Host to a sick man in the room next door. The woman and priest are

converted, and the bishop, like Aristorius in the play, "immediately began to preach

the faith of Christ, and to confound heretical evil." Bacon explains that this Host

miracle proves the efficacy of the Sacrament: "Oh, how true a proof and how noble a

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[134] Ibid., 812.

[135] Ibid., 814-15.

[136] Ibid., 816.

one this is."[137] In both Bacon's work and the Croxton play, spectacular Host miracles confirm Christ's miraculous power and convert unbelievers.

By figuring Christ as an alchemist, the play aligns the conversion of unbelievers with alchemical transmutation, but the physical change is also spiritual. Like the transmutation of minerals, the conversion of unbelievers transforms them from base sinners to purified worshippers. Late medieval alchemical treatises also register the correspondences among alchemy, conversion, and Christ's various transformations, including his resurrection and transubstantiation. For instance, the canon George Ripley, a well-known alchemist as early as the 1450s, composed an alchemical poem, "The Compound of Alchemy," which was one of the most significant alchemical works of the fifteenth century. Printed in London in 1476, just a few years after the supposed Host miracle in the play (1471), the poem circulated widely in manuscript prior to that date. The poem sets up the alchemical process as a series of twelve "gates" through which the practitioner must progress in order to attain the philosopher's stone. The poem is highly allegorical, and it represents the tradition of philosophical alchemy, in which the purpose of the magnum opus is not simply to achieve metallic *chrysopoesis*, turning lead into gold, but also to attain to the highest spiritual wisdom, to purify the soul, and to achieve oneness with God.

"The Compound of Alchemy," like other alchemical tracts of its time, recasts the idiom of philosophical alchemy in biblical language. The tenth "gate," a unit of poetic division as well as a step in the alchemical process, is "exaltation." This section of the opus begins by comparing this stage of the alchemical process to

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[137] Ibid., 817.

Christ's exaltation: "Hereto accords the holy scripture, / Christ saying thus – 'if I

exalted be, / Then shall I draw all things to me'" (5-7).[138] In this stage of the process,

according to Lyndy Abraham, "the substance of the Stone is raised to a higher degree

of purity and potency through a reiterated cycle of dissolution and coagulation of the

Stone in its own mercurial blood."[139] Ripley compares Christ's biblical exaltation in

Philippians to the alchemical process. In alchemy, the adept repeatedly subjects the

prima materia to various vexations or tortures in order purify, refine, and eventually

transmute it into the Stone. Christ's biblical exaltation similarly began with trials and

vexations; he was first humbled or humiliated before he was resurrected and exalted

as the Redeemer. The Stone, like Christ, is bathed in its own blood, and through this

process of trial and purification, the Stone gains the ability to "draw all things" to it,

just as Christ is able to transmute and purify all mankind. Similarly, in Ripley's

poem, the Stone "must be crucified and examined." After, the adept must "bury

together both man and wife, / To be after revived by the spirit of life" (12-14). In this

passage, the body and spirit ("man and wife") undergo crucifixion, death, and

resurrection before "up to heaven they must be exalted, / There to be in body and soul

glorified" (15-16). Ripley also characterizes the exaltation "gate" as achieving

"conversion." For instance, Ripley explains that the stone, "When heat of cold has got

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[138] George Ripley, "The Compound of Alchemy," (London: Imprinted by Thomas Orwin, 1591) *Early English Books Online,* 13 March 2013. In Phillippians 3:21, the closest echo of this line is after Christ's exaltation: "Who will reform the body of our lowness, made like to the body of his glory, according to the operation whereby also he is able to subdue all things unto himself" (from the Duoay-Rheims Bible, <http://biblehub.com/drb/philippians/3.htm>). All lines are cited from this edition.

[139] Lyndy Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 71.

domination, / Shall be converted by craft of our circulation" (34-5). This resolving of

contraries continues with fire turning into water, "And this conversion accords to our

intent" (49). Then, "into earth the air converted be" (51); followed by water into fire:

"convertion true is this" (56). The Croxton play similarly engages with the

correspondences between alchemical and biblical forms of transformation. The

conversion of the Jews in the play—by which they are purified and bathed in Christ's

blood, the holy water, and their own tears of contrition—mirrors both the Son's and

the Stone's exaltation. Further, the Jews' vexations, trial, and even torture make sense

according to this framework. Like the Son and the Stone, the Jews must first

experience humiliation in order to be purified, converted, and exalted.

Materialists, Quacks, and Chaucer

Alchemy, of course, was not ubiquitously characterized as godly in late

medieval England, and the play equally portrays it as counterfeit, ineffective, or

demonic. The alchemical transformation performed by the Croxton Christ resembles

the transmutations of philosophical alchemy. Christ also resembles the alchemist who

seeks the Elixir to save and prolong lives. But other alchemist figures populated the

popular imagination in the fifteenth century. The greedy, materialist alchemist whose

sole goal was to gain wealth by turning lead into gold was a much more prevalent

figure than the philosophical alchemist, as was the charlatan alchemist whose riddling

language obscured his lack of knowledge as he attempted to fool people out of their

property. The Croxton play reminds audiences of these alchemist figures through the

greedy materialism of Aristorius and Jonathas and the scene with the quack doctor.

By juxtaposing these dubious figures with Christ-as-alchemist, the play dramatizes

the difficulty of distinguishing true miracles from false magic, intensifying the play's

engagement with the problem of accessing divine truth through material means.

The vaunting of the merchant and the Jew at the beginning of the play

epitomizes the desires of the materialist alchemists to transform lead into gold.

Aristorius, for instance, demonstrates his pride in his wealth in his opening lines: "For

off all Aragon I am most myghty of sylverys and of gold" (87). He goes on to list all

the places that he has bought and sold, thanking God for blessing him with material

riches. The play dramaturgically aligns the materialism of Aristorius and Jonathas, for

the Jew comes onstage thanking his God for worldly goods: "For I thanke thee

hayly,that hast me sent / Gold, sylver, and presyous stonys" (157-8). Jonathas's boast

is even more stuffed with material, specifically mineral, wealth. He has "dyamantys,"

"emerawdys," "Onys," "achatys," "Topazyouns, smaragdys," "Perlys," "rubés,"

"Crepawdys and calcedonyes," "curyous carbunclys" (165-72). Overflowing with

mineral riches, Jonathas has no need of more gold, as he himself observes, "For gold

and sylver I am nothyng agast" (227). His worship of his surfeit wealth, however,

seems to prompt his materialist desire to possess and to prove the Host, since

immediately after listing his inventory and announcing its sufficiency, he continues,

"But that we shall get that cake to ower paye" (228). The clause "I am nothing agast"

linguistically links the overflowing presence of his "gold and sylver" with the absence

of the "cake" in his inventory; he lacks nothing among his possessions except the

Host. Jonathas's goal is to purchase the Host, thereby introducing it into a mercantile,

material economy. His merchant trade mirrors the alchemical process, turning merchandise into money, material into gold.

His goal in purchasing the Host, however, inverts the alchemical model of increasing the value of material objects; instead, Jonathas desires to reduce to nothing the true value of the Host by demonstrating that its substance is earthly dross rather than spiritual gold. As a result, the play juxtaposes Jonathas's material wealth with his spiritual poverty. Indeed, in this same passage, overstuffed with mineral and material goods, Jonathas critiques the Christian belief in the Real Presence: "For they beleve on a cake" (200). This worshipper of the material world cannot believe in divine materiality, in the presence of Christ infusing earthly substance. A radical materialist, Jonathas requires empirical experiment to prove the substance of the Host, and his vaunting inspires Jason to demand that they "putt yt in a preve" (208). Their comical testing of the Host with the tools of a scientific experimenter and their violent punishments for subjecting it to such torture suggest that material alchemy as a version of extreme empiricism is a limited, foolish, and even dangerous epistemological inquiry into heavenly truths.

The play's critique of empiricism and experimental science vis-à-vis alchemy clarifies the role of the scene with the quack doctor. Described by his assistant as "a man off all syence," Master Brundyche of Braban is also a charlatan alchemist, whose distillations fail to cure and even sicken his patients (529). The physician's corruption and incompetence critique skeptical, materialist, and experimental approaches to the divine, comically suggesting that they are foolish; spiritual truths require spiritual, not empiric trials. Similarly, Jonathas's ailment, though it has physical consequences,

must be healed spiritually through repentance and faith, not through the limited means of a drunken doctor whose servant claims he will want Jonathas to "pysse" in a "pott" to determine the nature of his malady, even though he can see Jonathas is missing his hand (648). Through this charlatan, the play suggests that materialist probing of spiritual matters inspires materialist, flawed responses.

Perhaps the most immediate and readily accessible literary precursor for Jonathas as a materialist alchemist and the doctor as a charlatan alchemist is Chaucer's *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, which similarly underscores alchemy's associations with charlatanism, greed, and ineffectiveness. In the prologue to the tale, the Host describes the alchemist as "a man of science," which Colle echoes in describing his master, the quack, as "a man off all syence" (529).[140] The Canon Yeoman, like Colle, recognizes alchemy as a "slippery science" (179). Further, both the Jews in the play and the alchemist in the poem, for instance, cover their pots to stop the heat and air from escaping. Jasdon exclaims, "I stoppe thys ovyn, wythowtyn dowte, / With clay I clome yt uppe ryght fast, / That non heat shall cum owtte. / I trow there shall He hete and drye in hast!" (709-12) And the Canon Yeoman explains that the alchemist "covered all these [powders] with a plate of glass, / And of the various other gear there was? / And of the sealing of the pot and glass, / So that the air might no way from it pass?" (211-4) Both pots have what Chaucer calls, "reddening waters" (234), and both tales have liquids associated with healing, such as the healing elixirs that motivate characters to spend all their money in Chaucer's tale: "The thing has

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[140] Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale," in *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry Benson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

caused us to spend all we had, / For grief of which almost we should go mad, / Save that good hope comes creeping in the heart, / Supposing ever, though we sorely smart, / The elixir will relieve us afterward" (315-9). The Canon's healing waters are illusory, however, whereas Croxton's are efficacious.

The play and the poem both also spoof the perpetual failures of alchemical vessels and furnaces, like the overflowing pot and the shattering oven in the play and the broken pots in the tale. In the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, we have: "Full oft it happens so, / The pot broke, and farewell! All vanished, O! / These metals have such violence and force / That crucibles cannot resist their course" (353-6), and "And some are scattered all the floor about, / Some leap up to the roof" (361-2). In Croxton: "the ovyn on peacys gynnyth to ryve asunder" (715). Further, as in the play, the Canon Yeoman's tale links the alchemist figure with a merchant ["A merchant's luck, gad! will not aye endure" (394)]. Further, Chaucer's priest pays forty pounds for a (counterfeit) recipe for making the philosopher's stone (828), just as Jonathas pays Aristorius forty pounds for the Host (309). Both the Host and the recipe teach their owners about the limited authority of material evidence. Similarly, both the play and the poem associate alchemy with legerdemain. Chaucer's charlatan alchemist, for example, slips silver into the crucible while the priest wipes his brow, one of several juggling tricks that falsely prove his ability to transmute metals. Chaucer's alchemist, who, "by experiment" (572), teaches the priest about the truth of material alchemy, warns of the limitations of empiricism and experiment, just as the Croxton play draws upon alchemy to critique the Jews' desire to put the Host "in a preve."

In contrast to this representation of the flawed, materialist alchemist,

Chaucer's Fragment VIII offers a model of alchemical transformation as a form of

Christian piety. Scholars have observed that alchemy, specifically multiplication and

transformation, join together the two tales on the fragment: the *Canon's Yeoman's*

Tale and the *Second Nun's Tale*. Lee Patterson suggests that Chaucer drew from late

medieval alchemical texts that depict Christian piety, explaining, "beginning around

1300, alchemical texts come more and more to appropriate the mode and manner of

religious discourse."[141] Such texts "typically present God or Christ as the keeper of

the alchemical secret that can be revealed only to the worthy. In other words, many

alchemical treatises present alchemy less as a secular pursuit opposed to the

otherworldliness of Christian doctrine than as another form of piety."[142] This type of

alchemy provides a complement to religion, allowing practitioners to access the

occulted divine presence in the world. Ann W. Astell similarly links the *Canon*

Yeoman's Tale and the *Second Nun's Tale* through their alchemical references to the

conversion of heathens.[143] She notes that both invoke alchemy to deal with the

"contrast between spiritual wealth and worldly lucre."[144] Similarly, both tales use

alchemy to connect spiritual and material processes: "In linking the tales of the

Second Nun and the Canon's Yeoman, Chaucer places emphasis on spiritual change

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[141] Lee Patterson, "Perpetual Motion: Alchemy and the Technology of the Self," *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 15 (1993): 49.

[142] Ibid., 49.

[143] Ann W. Astell, *Chaucer and the Universe of Learning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 120.

[144] Ibid., 122.

and metallic metamorphosis as analogous processes."[145] For Astell, the *Canon Yeoman's Tale* explores materialist alchemy, whereas the *Second Nun's Tale* foregrounds the spiritual kind.[146] Carolyn P. Collette also discusses Chaucer's juxtaposition of spiritual and material alchemy in the two tales.[147] The duality of alchemy as spiritual change and material conversion appears in the Croxton play, though in it, both forms of alchemy exist in the same discursive space. Christ's healing oil transforms the physical body of Jonathas, just as it converts his soul.

In both Chaucer's poems and the Croxton play, alchemy acts as a proving ground for exploring the problems associated with accessing divine truth through the spiritual world. Alchemy is at the heart of the spiritual transformations in both works, as it mediates between worldly and spiritual desires. With its emphases on transformation and counterfeit, alchemy aptly dramatizes doubts about transubstantiation and miracles. The depiction of Christ as an alchemist in the Croxton play draws energy from the tensions among alchemy's various incarnations. In particular, alchemy captures the play's interest in the contested boundaries between the material and the divine, between magic and miracle, and between doubt and faith.

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[145] Ibid., 124.

[146] Astell argues, "Through their juxtaposition, Chaucer "separates the two processes as widely as possible" (Ibid., 133).

[147] "Nature Obeying the Thoughts and Desires of the Soul: Alchemy and Vision in 'The Second Nun's Tale' and the 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale'" (Carolyn P. Collette, *Species, Phantasms, and Images: Vision and Medieval Psychology in* The Canterbury Tales [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004], 128-60.

Christ as Juggler or Sorcerer

Many contemporary spectacular tales of the divine substance of the Host situate the play's miracle within the context of a vibrant narrative tradition in which Christ and the Host shapeshift in order to confirm the faith of doubters. In their staging, the miraculous transformations of the Host require acts of jugglery, and the miracles themselves resemble the tricks of street magicians; yet unlike these forms of magic, the Host transformations in the play inspire wonder and devotion. Representations of Christ in which His (or the Host's) miracles act like shape shifting or jugglery in order to convert unbelievers have a long history. According to Eamon Duffy, many stories circulated in which doubt inspired bleeding or gruesomely transforming Hosts.[148] Duffy cites several of these tales, including one about a man who had stolen a Host at the behest of a Lollard who "boasted at a supper that he had eaten 'ix goddys at my sopyr that were in the boxys." But his accomplices were not heretics, and 'it was done of very nede that they robbyd.'" When the accomplice went to Mass to pray for mercy, he was struck blind when the priest elevated the Host, and he had to be shriven to see it. This penitent thief and boasting Lollard are potential sources for the thieving merchant and doubting Jews in the Croxton play. In another similar miracle, an early sixteenth-century Lollard priest attempted to say mass and Christ's blood boiled in the chalice and broke it.[149]

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[148] Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England, C.1400-C.1580* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992), 101.

[149] Ibid., 104.

In addition to medieval accounts of miraculous Jewish conversion, there is a Biblical precedent for God's spectacular miracles converting Jews, in a tale of exorcism found in *Acts of the Apostles:*

> And God wrought by the hand of Paul miracles not common: so that there were also brought from his body napkins or handkerchiefs upon the sick, and the diseases departed from them, and the wicked spirits went out...And many of [the Jews] that had practiced curious things, brought together their books, and burnt them before all: and counting the prices of them, they found the money to be fifty thousand pence (5:11-19)[150]

In this account, God's miracles trump magical beliefs, inciting the Jews to burn their grimoires and to convert, yet God's wonders strikingly resemble legerdemain. The *Acts of the Apostles* is a book dedicated to proving God's power through the miracles of Peter and Paul in order to convert non-believers. The play may inherit the idea of miraculous proof that Jonathas requires for conversion from the *Acts*. Again and again in the *Acts*, God demonstrates his power through visual, spectacular proof. In this book, Saul is struck blind by a sudden light, spurring his conversion and transformation into Paul. The apostolic proofs in the form of miraculous cures, resurrections, conversions, and other "signs" cross the line, or indeed, they establish the line, between divine miracle and demonic magic.

This biblical book naturally, then, works to distinguish the miraculous from the magical, as in the account of Paul's wonders that cause "those who practiced

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[150] *The Vulgate New Testament with the Douay Version of 1582 in Parallel Columns* (London: Samuel Bagster and Sons, 1872), accessed on Google Books, 2013.

magic arts" to burn their books. This same book records the defeat of two false

magicians by the apostles, providing a precedent for the numerous medieval and early

modern literary battles between good and evil magicians, found in various literary

forms including romance and drama. For instance, the magician "Elymas" attempts to

defy St. Paul, who strikes him blind and thus converts him: "And now behold, the

hand of the Lord upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun until a time.

And forthwith there fell dimness and darkness upon him, and going about, he sought

somebody that would give him his hand" (13:11-12). In this case, the wonders of God

defeat the false magic of Elymas. Another false magician—"a magician, a false

prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-Jesu" (13:6)—meets a similar fate in Paphos.

The most famously defeated magician in the *Acts*, however, is Simon Magus, and his

tale provides the Ur-text for all examples in which holy miracle defeats demonic

magic. Simon misleads the people of Samaria by claiming to be a great magician, but

he is converted by witnessing the wonders of the apostles. Peter later chides Simon

when he attempts to buy the apostolic power of conferring the Holy Ghost through

the laying of hands in baptism, thus bequeathing his name to the sin of simony, or

attempting to buy power in the church (8:9-24). This Simon and the other magicians

in the book of *Acts* represent the threat of earthly magic and lucre deftly brushed

aside by the miracles of God.

The Croxton play's miracles resemble these wonders in *Acts*, as Jonathas, the

Jew who attempts to disprove God's powers through buying a Host, is instead

punished, chastened, and converted through the miraculous wonders of God. Like the

false, heretical, and Jewish magicians in the biblical accounts, the Jews in the play

require miraculous spectacles, "signs," and "wonders," to prove the authority of the Christian God. Associated with the base, materialist practice of alchemy, the Jews in the play resemble these false magicians whose attempts to acquire the power of God with money are frustrated by God's miracles. The Jews are guilty not only of lack of faith, but also of simony in their attempt to buy the Host, which draws from the most popular representation of Simon Magus in the Middle Ages as having what Alberto Ferreiro calls a great "appetite for money and for riches."[151] Similarly, the representation of the Jews as false magicians draws from the prevalent medieval depictions of Simon as magician, which, according to Ferreiro "became more specifically a medium through which the Church censured heresy, insubordination to church authority, and magic and witchcraft."[152] The Croxton play participates in the late medieval conversation about the authenticity of contemporary miracles, playing upon the fraught boundaries between magic and miracle that the *Acts* work so hard to patrol. Like *Acts*, the Croxton play presents Christ as a wonder-worker whose ability to shapeshift and heal represent divine power rather than fallen magic.

This tradition of invoking Christ's miracles to decry false magic finds another source in Origen's *Contra Celsum*. Writing in a time in which the early church faced an onslaught of challenges, such as the Decian Controversy in which Christians were expected to perform a sacrifice to the gods to prove their allegiance to Roman beliefs, Origen refutes Celsus's claims that Christ's powers are demonic, arguing, "And

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[151] Alberto Ferreiro, *Simon Magus in Patristic, Medieval, and Early Modern Traditions* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 23.

[152] Ibid., 24.

[Celsus] next proceeds to bring a charge against the Saviour Himself, alleging that it was by means of sorcery that He was able to accomplish the wonders which He performed…But even if it be impossible to show by what power Jesus wrought these miracles, it is clear that Christians employ no spells or incantations, but the simple name of Jesus."[153] Origen's rhetorical gymnastics demonstrate the delicate work of distinguishing the miracles of Christ from the magic of demons and the forthrightness with which early opponents to Christianity aligned his miracles with magic. Origen attempts to distinguish between the miracles of Christ and magic. Origen claims, "Jesus attempted and successfully accomplished works beyond the reach of human power,"[154] yet he is not guilty of "sorcery." Origen later draws upon the tale of Moses and the pharaoh's sorcerers in order to demonstrate to the Jews that, as one of their own prophets, Moses's miracles prove the efficacy of God's work and set it apart from demonic magic. Although accused of sorcery or "jugglery" by unbelievers, both Moses and Christ are "truly prophets of God." Because the Jews in Origen's tale suspect that Christ's miracles are merely "jugglery," Origen wishes to convert them by distinguishing false magic from holy miracle, yet this exemplum offers yet another instance in which the miracles of God resemble the dark magic of sorcery or "jugglery."

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[153] Origen, "Contra Celsum" in Ante-Nicene Fathers, trans. Frederick Crombie, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 4 (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Publishing Co., 1885), revised and edited for New Advent by Kevin Knight, accessed May 31, 2013 <http://www.newadvent.org/fathers/04161.htm>, Book 1, Chapter 6.

[154] Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 27.

Fixated on differentiating between magic and miracle, Origen's work overflows with evidence attempting to establish Christian wonders as non-demonic. As in *Acts of the Apostles*, for instance, Origen juxtaposes Christ's miracles with the magic of Simon Magus. Origen comments on the decline of Simon's influence, proving that, unlike Christ, he is not "divine."[155] Not simply satisfied with proving that Christ's miracles are not demonic, Origen contends that his miraculous presence brings an end to the power of magic on earth. Origen suggests that the source of the Magi's power is the invocation of "evil spirits," but that Christ, as a "greater manifestation of divinity" overthrows their powers. Origen tackles Celsus's claims that Jesus's miracles are no more than

> the tricks of jugglers, who profess to do more wonderful things, and to
> the feats performed by those who have been taught by Egyptians, who
> in the middle of the market-place, in return for a few obols, will impart
> the knowledge of their most venerated arts, and will expel demons
> from men, and dispel diseases, and invoke the souls of heroes, and
> exhibit expensive banquets, and tables, and dishes, and dainties having
> no real existence, and who will put in motion, as if alive, what are not
> really living animals, but which have only the appearance of life.[156]

Christ is no street magician because he does not traffic in "tricks." Yet this quote demonstrates the narrow line between miracle and street magic; healing and resurrecting, for instance, are common to both. Origen even accounts for some

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[155] Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 57.

[156] Ibid., Book 1, Chapter 68.

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resemblance between Christ's miracles and magic, by suggesting, "There would indeed be a resemblance between them, if Jesus, like the dealers in magical arts, had performed His works only for show; but now there is not a single juggler who…invites his spectators to reform their manners, or trains those to the fear of God who are amazed at what they see."[157] The difference between Christ's miracles and jugglery lies not in kind but in purpose. His miracles are not "only for show" but to teach the "fear of God" through amazement and to inspire people to "reform their manners." Origen blurs the already fuzzy line between magic and miracle by suggesting the only difference between the two is the goal and the character of its practitioner. Origen provides a precursor for Bacon by attempting to distinguish true, Christian miracle from false, demonic magic.

The Croxton play's engagement with magic—in particular with the transformative, yet vexed, endeavor of alchemy—draws upon this long-standing blurring of the lines between magic and miracle, just as it taps into late medieval doubts about transubstantiation and miracles. Each time the Jews encounter one of Christ's Host miracles, they claim it must be demonic: when the Host bleeds, Jonathas exclaims, "Ah! Owt, Owt, harrow! What devyll ys thys? / Of thys wyrk I am in were" (481-2). Their inability to recognize Christ's miracles arises in part in response to the thin line between the miraculous and magical. Because of this hazy distinction, the characters' initial and subsequent encounters with miracle have the opposite effect of their intent. Rather than proving the authority and divinity of Christ and the Sacrament of the Altar, the Host miracles cast the Jews in "were," in doubt or

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[157] Ibid.

error. While of course the comic Jews are not reliable interpreters of the miraculous, their difficulty in distinguishing the miracles of Christ from the demonic magic of necromancers highlights the play's central preoccupation with the ability to read the divine in the material world. If what appears to be miraculous might equally be demonic magic, how can anyone be sure that their encounters with God's wonders are legitimate? At the same time, the play ridicules those who require and attempt such proof. Jonathas attempts to prove the inaccuracies of Eucharistic liturgy through the conventions of empirical trial, registering his skepticism by conducting a materialist proof. Jonathas's probing of the Host and his testing of Christian miracle have led critics to argue that the play is anti-Lollard because it mocks the doubting of the Jews.[158] Reading the figure of Christ as an alchemist or magician complicates this notion of the play. Because Christ converts the Jews through wondrous transformations that resemble legerdemain and through alchemical healing, Christ gives the Jews what they seek: visible, earthly confirmation of his divine presence.

The Croxton Christ proves his miraculous presence not only through material transformations of a Host that invoke both legerdemain and alchemy, but also through the particularly embodied vehicle of spectacle. Christ's dramatic representations of His power offer a materialist response to a materialist question. Further, Christ's spectacular miracle goes beyond the proposition of the Jews. Through the violent and hyperbolic comic tortures of Jonathas, Christ's miracle is particularly attentive to physical sensation as well as visible confirmation. Spectacular and material, the play

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[158] See, for example, Cecilia Cutts, "The Croxton Play: An Anti-Lollard Piece," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944): 45-60.

purports to inspire devotion, enjoining audiences to become participants in a procession and a hymn confirming and reasserting their communal faith. Christ is like a stage magician, but instead of performing tricks, he performs miracles; or, rather, by performing tricks, Christ performs miracles.

Whereas the *Acts of the Apostles*, *Contra Celsum*, and Bacon's *Opus* attempt to distinguish carefully between magic and miracle, the Croxton play delights in playing with the tensions between magic and miracle, between earthly and divine, and between trickery and truth. Staging a Christ who acts both as magician and dramatist, the play capitalizes on the productive anxieties that both of these suspect endeavors generate. The play, for instance, juxtaposes the miracles of Christ with the ineffective alchemical trials of the Jews, but instead of delineating the difference between the two, the play relies on affect—on anticipated audience response—to prove its mysteries. Christ's materialist proof differs from that of the Jews not in its kind, but in its effect. Christ's transformations in the play ultimately effect conversion, and His onstage appearance inspires wonder and devotion rather than laughter and derision. Christ's miracles differ from magic in this play because of their dramatic effect. Because affect generated by spectacle reveals the truth of Christ's miracles, the play suggests that theatre is a valid, perhaps even preferred, mode of representing and apprehending the divine. With its metatheatrical Christ whose spectacular powers dance along the boundary between magic and miracle, the Croxton play reflects as well on the nature of sacred drama.

Magic in "Miracles Pleying"

Several medieval plays feature Christ and Moses as wonder-workers whose miracles resemble magic and require stage illusions or legerdemain in their performance. Rather than attempting to tease out the differences between magic and miracle, however, the plays relish the productive dramatic tensions generated from this contested boundary, dramatically and linguistically likening the work of miracle to magic. In the Wakefield *Pharaoh*, for instance, Moses enters with a rod in hand, visibly linking him with magical traditions through this stage prop.[159] The play stages the burning bush, demonstrating God's powers through spectacle, in particular a staged illusion. *Pharaoh* further draws attention to the material transformations that God performs as a "tokyn" of his power: "If that he will not understand / This tokyn trew that I shall sent, / Afore the king cast downe thy wand, / And it shall turne to a serpent. / Then take the taill agane in hand-- / Boldly up look thou it hent-- / And in the state that thou it fand / Then shal it turne, by mine intent" (158-165). God advises Moses to use his "wand," not a staff or rod, and He emphasizes the specific mechanics of performing the wonder. With explicit attention to the theatricality of the miracle, God's lines read both like stage directions and a jugglery manual: throw down the wand; it will be turned into a serpent; grab its tail; take it up again "Boldly"; and it will turn back. The Wakefield God then explains how Moses ought to perform his next trick, drawing attention to the sleight of hand required by the actor in the performance of the miracle:"Sithen hald thy hand soyn in thy barme, / And as a leper it shal be like, / And [w]hole agane withouten harme. / Lo, my tokyns shal be slike"

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[159] The citation of plays in this section derive from David Bevington, *Medieval Drama* (Houghton Mifflin, 1975).

(166-9). The Croxton play could even use this same staging when Jonathas places his

arm in the cauldron of oil and removes it with his hand intact. Both plays also use

stage directions to note their miraculous transformations: "The wand turns into a

serpent" and "The wand resumes its former shape" (331). In both plays, stage tricks

draw upon the jugglery tradition in order to perform their miracles.

This intermingling of traditions causes confusion among the characters. Just

as the Croxton Jews assume that the Host miracles are demonic wonders, Pharaoh

believes Moses to be a juggler, calling him "a sotell swain" (259) who performs

legerdemain: "All thy gawdys shall thaym not gain" (261). Bevington glosses

"gawyds" as "tricks." Pharaoh thus conflates Moses's God with subtle tricks. Moses's

miracles occur contemporaneously with the seven plagues, which audiences do not

see, though they hear one of them described: the waters turning red with blood: "the

waters that were ordand / For men and bestys foyde, / Thrughoutt all Egypt land, / Ar

turnyd into reede bloyde" (274-7). This description resembles the oil turning into

blood in the Croxton play. Similarly, just as the Croxton Jews calls the Host miracles

wonders, Pharaoh calls the plagues "wonderfull" work (280). Although both the Jews

and Pharaoh at least initially mistake the source and quality of the miracles,

associating them with demonic magic, they respond to them as wondrous and awe-

inspiring.

In both plays, too, the miracles inspire wonder through their spectacular

performance. The *Pharaoh* play even stages the parting of the Red Sea when Moses

lifts his "wand" (388). Like Croxton, the *Pharaoh* play features doubters of God's

power who undergo torment and pain as they encounter miracles of his divinity. Also

as in Croxton, the miracles in *Pharaoh* convert non-believers and serve as an exemplum for spreading the word about God's power. For example, 1. Puer advises people to tell the marvel to convert doubters: "Lofe we may that Lord on hight, / And ever tell on this mervell" (420-1). Although linguistically, thematically, and dramatically aligned with magic, the miracles in both plays eventually prove themselves to be godly deeds with the power of conversion. Similarly, the Christ in Chester's *Christ Appears to the Disciples* revels in spectacular and visible confirmation of faith through miracles that strongly resemble magic tricks. He vanishes and reappears several times to prove to His disciples that He has risen and to demonstrate that He is who he claims. The first disappearance occurs during a scene in which He breaks bread for His disciples and then confirms His presence through a stage trick, mysteriously materializing out of thin air. At first, the disciples think he is a "ghost" (176), until He lets them touch His body to prove He is real, alive, and corporeal. This Christ also endorses the material proof of faith through miracles, which require stage tricks hailing from the juggling tradition. Like Croxton, *Pharaoh*'s Moses and Chester's Christ dispel doubt through miracle and through stage tricks that operate like legerdemain.

The N Town *Passion Play II* also overlays the miracles of Christ with magic, associating both with spectacle. The Messenger to Herod describes Christ's miracle, explaining that Christ's words knock the men onto their backs; they are quite literally astounded. As in the *Pharaoh* play, the doubter and challenger to Christ's power, Annas, calls Christ's miracles "nigramancye": "From this cetye into the lond of Galilé / He hath browth oure lawys neyr into confusion, / With hese craftys wrowth

by nigramancye / Shewith to the pepyl by fals simulacion" (249-52). The threat of

Christ's "craftys," according to Annas, is that they disrupt the social order and laws

with "fals simulacion." As dissembling craft, Christ's miracles not only resemble

magic, but also, as "simulacion," they resemble dramatic spectacle. According to

Christ's naysayer in the play, such spectacular magic throws the world into

"confusion." The Jews and Caiphas similarly align Christ's miracles with conjury and

jugglery, as when 2 Judeus cries, "Ya, by fals crafte of soserye, / Wrowth opynly to

the pepyll alle, / And by sotyl pointys of nigramncye, / Many thowsands fro oure

lawe be falle" (381-4). Like Pharaoh, 2 Judeus calls the miracles of God "sotyl"

"crafte," wrongly believing them to be black magic or trickery. Caiphas argues that

such "fals simulacion" leads the malleable people into false belief: "By his meraclys

and fals preching, / He bringith the pepyl in gret fonning" (388-9). Lumping together

miracle and magic, the villains in the play misread both the power of God and the

power of spectacle. The play suggests that miracles have an effect on the masses and

can sway belief, and the non-believers in the play see that as a problem. For Christ,

however, miracles lead to conversion and the saving of souls. By aligning miracles

with spectacle, the play makes a "sotyl" apology for "miracles pleying." Instead of

misleading the masses through its affiliations with conjury, the play aligns itself with

godliness, conversion, and even miracle.

Like the intertwining of the magical with the miraculous, the *Passion Play*'s

apology for drama is complex. Christ's refusal to perform a miracle before Caiphas's

eyes to demonstrate the power of God seems to militate against the power of

spectacle. Herod charges Christ to prove God's authority by working miracles: "It is

told me thou dost many a wondyr thing: / Crokyd to gon and blind men to sen, /And they that ben dede gevist hem leving, / And makist lepers faire and hool to ben. / These arn wondyr werkys wrought of the[e]. / By what wey? I wold knowe the trew sentens" (401-6). Herod wants to know how the miracles work, like Simon Magus. Unlike in the Croxton play, however, Christ refuses to put the miraculous "in a preve" when prodded, and Caiphas calls Christ's denial a "false sotilté" (421). As a result, the N-Town play calls into question the necessity for miraculous confirmation of the divine, while at the same time interrogating the value of spectacle in conveying God's miracles. Instead, the play ends by associating spectacle with diabolism, when the devil enters and "pleyth" (535). Whereas Christ refuses spectacle, the devil indulges. So, on the one hand, *Passion Play II,* brings together magic, miracle, and spectacle as appropriate proofs of God's power in the world; on the other hand, the play aligns drama with the devil's play. It thus suggests that interpreting magic and miracle depends upon the audience. Townley's *Pharaoh* and Chester's *Christ Among the Disciples* celebrate the miracles of Christ as both magical and spectacular. Like the Croxton play, however, the N-Town *Passion Play II* blurs distinctions amongst magic, miracle, and theatricality, capitalizing on the dramatic tensions resulting from this juxtaposition.

The contrast between earthly magic and divine miracle appears as well in the Wakefield *Second Shepherds' Play*. In the first comic part of the play, Mak uses a silly sleeping spell to charm shepherds while he steals their sheep. The men find him out and punish him by tossing him on top of a sheet. Suddenly, an angel appears and the scene shifts into the story of Christ's nativity. Thus, the first half of the play

involves earthly, comic magic and rough retribution, whereas the second part stages

the mysteries of Christ's mercy and wondrous birth; secular magic transforms into

sacred, comedy into reverence, just as in the Croxton play. Critics have taken several,

often competing approaches to this duality. Rick Bowers offers a convincing

explanation for *The Second Shepherds' Play* in which "[t]heatrical parody lifts off

into the epiphanic realm as the angel sings, '*Gloria, in excelsis.*'"[160] Bowers asks

readers to "see the *Second Shepherd's Play* as a continuous, epiphanic action," that is,

"to see it in terms at once theatrical and divine." The *Second Shepherd's Play* depicts

the sacred and divine realms as interpenetrated. According to Bowers, the real magic

of God in this play is to transmute earthly comedy into sacred mystery. The effect of

this transformation for Mak is that "[i]n his desperate ludicrousness, in his comic

energy, and ultimately in his place in the divine calculus of the Nativity, Mak

discovers that he *belongs.*"[161] The Croxton play works in a similar way, in which

God's miraculous grace transforms the ridiculous stuff of the earthly realm into a

sacred wonder, just as the false alchemy of the Jews gives way to the successful

alchemy of Christ. For the Croxton play, this movement into the epiphanic realm

begins with the image of Christ asking for pity. The difference, of course, is that

Mak's sorcery is exposed as fraudulent and foolish. In the Croxton play, however, the

Host miracles appear like magic tricks and successfully convert Jonathas.

The Digby plays further intensify the problematic role of theater in

representing God's miracles. In Digby's *The Conversion of St. Paul,* God

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[160] Rick Bowers, *Radical Comedy in Early Modern England: Contexts, Cultures, Performances* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), 20.

[161] Ibid., 22.

spectacularly performs miracles in order to prove His power to the characters within the play and to the audiences who experience the play. *The Conversion of St. Paul* conflates magic and miracle, mapping this set of correspondences onto the relationship between theatrical performance and religious ritual. The play depicts God's miracle in converting Saul, with explicit stage directions that call for vivid spectacle and elaborate stage tricks that draw attention to their theatricality: "*Here commit a fervent [light] with gret tempest, and Saule faulith down of[f] his horse. That done, Godhead spekith in hevyn*" (671). God's miracle amazes Saul's senses, and, like other nonbelievers confronted with miracles in the other cycle plays, Saul calls this spectacular presentation a "wonder" or a "mirable" (254). As in the Croxton play, the miraculous stage trick generates a dramatic, affective response, and in this metatheatrical moment, Saul models appropriate audience response. Though audiences are not expected to be literally astounded, like Saul, or comically to fall off any horses, they may experience awe and conversion. Notably, Saul responds to the miracle of God, but the play attempts to transform audiences through the wonders of theatricality. The play aligns the power of God with that of theater: both move observers to experience awe, contrition, and conversion in response to visual and spectacular effects. Both miracle and theater, in this play, offer valid proof of God's authority. The play further suggests that like miracle, drama can purge sin and heal. As in the Croxton play, the Digby *Conversion* features a healing, baptismal scene in which Ananias christens Saul. Ananias explains that the baptism "shall make [Saul] [w]hole of [his] dedly wound / That was infecte with venom nocent. / It purgith sinne, and fendes powers so fraudulent / It putith aside" (320-3). Both the Digby and the

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Croxton play invoke the spectacle of staged miracles, which operate like legerdemain, in order to convert observers, and both plays invite audiences to participate in religiously inflected dramatic ritual as part of a communal reassertion of faith.

Despite this seeming apology for drama vis-à-vis the wonderful spectacles of God, *The Conversion of Paul*—like the *Passion Play II*—complicates this image of both miracle and spectacle by comparing them with jugglery. Again, the nonbelievers in the play deem miracles suspect, as when Caiphas calls the miracles, "subtill meanys" (404), or when he calls Christ's miracle a "conjuracion": "That Saule is thus marvelously changyd! / I trow he is bewitchyd by sum conjuracion, / Or els the devil on him is avengyd" (602-5). For Caiphas, as for the nonbelievers and villains in the cycle plays, miracles are "subtill" tricks that threaten social order and law. And just as the devil "pleyth" in the N-Town play, associating drama and diabolism, the devils in the Digby play perform the same kind of marvel as God: "*Hereto enter a divel with thunder and fire*" (678), and the devils vanish "*with a firye flame and a tempest*" (681). When the devils attempt to fight miracle with demonic magic, they conjure the same spectacle as God when he converts Saul, but with opposing intent. Through this dramaturgical doubling, the play provides a compelling reason to doubt the truth of God's miracles by aligning them with necromancy. Further, if the demons and saints can perform the same stage tricks, the play warns observers that spectacle may likewise be suspect. The play may therefore inspire diametrically opposed aesthetic responses. As in Christ's denial to perform spectacular wonders in the N-Town *Passion Play II*, the play's ending seems to warn against spectacle by refusing to

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stage Saul's theatrical escape from Damascus in a basket, relying instead on the angel's words.

Although spectacle in *The Conversion of St. Paul* appears to render miracle and magic analogous, the play hardly places audiences in danger mistaking holy for demonic marvels.. Only the villains in the play have difficulty distinguishing miracles from "conjuracion," whereas the protagonist experiences religious conversion. The technology of the marvels may be identical—"subtill meanys"—yet the purpose and the character of the practitioner distinguish the miraculous from the magical. Drama, in this formulation, is a kind of wondrous technology, the means through which people may express both the miraculous and the demonic. At the outset of the play, for instance, Saul is a boasting, Herod-like opponent of Christ, like Jonathas in the Croxton play; yet, through encountering the spectacular marvel of God, Saul, also like Jonathas, undergoes spiritual transformation. Dramatic spectacle in the play is a vehicle for reformation of character because it accommodates and appeals to both sinner and saved.

The Digby *Mary Magdalene* is perhaps the play that most resembles Croxton in its delight in playing with the correspondences among magic, miracle, and metatheatricality. As in other late medieval plays, *Mary Magdalene* engages spectacle to perform the wonders of Christ and Mary. Again, these miracles appear magical in their staging or description. Among other deeds, for instance, Christ makes Mary whole in body and spirit and exorcises her devils; revives Lazarus from the dead; frequently disappears and reappears; and, of course, returns from the dead. As in the other plays, doubters associate Christ's miracles with "sotilté" (1262) and

"crafty…conning" (1327). But as in other plays, spectacular miracles in *Mary Magdalene* also convert observers, as in one of the most theatrical moments of the play when Mary causes the idols to tremble and the temple to catch fire: "*Here shall comme a clowd from heven and sett the tempyl on a fier, and the prist and the cler[k] shall sinke*" (736). The theatricality of the miracles aligns their wondrous power with that of drama. In *Mary Magdalene* and in the *Play of the Sacrament*, these magical associations with Christ's miracles are even more overt than in other extant contemporary plays.

Further, both plays invoke the lexicon of alchemy to describe spiritual processes involving Christ's transformations. After his resurrection in the *Mary Magdalene*, for instance Christ describes his gestation in Mary, for instance, casting his experiences in strange, occult terms, redolent with alchemical allusions. Notably, after spectacularly and miraculously reappearing from the heavens after death [*Her[e] shall hevyn opyn and Jhesus shall shew [himself]*" (730)], Christ tells of the womb, not the tomb, emphasizing the metaphorically rich parallels between birth and resurrection. Death-as-rebirth is a foundational principle of alchemy. As in Ripley's poem conflating Son and Stone, alchemists also referred to producing the philosopher's stone as generation, likening it to birth and gestation, and the womb was a very common term for the alchemical vessel or alembic.[162] Christ also calls Mary the "onclipsyd sonne" (1349), one of the most important symbols in alchemy, referring to "philosophical gold," which, like the sun, was believed to have "magically transformative rays" that "provided the generative warmth to ripen such

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[162] See, for example, Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 219.

imperfect metals as iron, copper and lead into the perfect metal, gold."[163] As a "vessel

of puere clennesse, / Wher my Godhed gaff my manhod myth" (1354-5), Mary (and

her womb) similarly assist in the transformation of Christ's "Godhed" into

"manhood." The word "onclipsyd" in the first line of Christ's speech refers to Mary's

virginity and her superiority over women, but it also immediately positions the

passage in the occult register. An astrological term, the eclipse also represents the

nigredo or putrefaction stage of alchemy in which the prima materia must first die,

like Christ, before experiencing regeneration. Similarly, Mary is alchemically

encoded as the "tempyll of Salamon" (1349), the ancient biblical site of the holy of

holies. Alchemists described Solomon as the first alchemist, who "built his temple

with the aid of the philosopher's stone."[164] Christ's lines invoke imagery shared with

alchemy. As in the charm that describes Mary as alchemical mercury, Mary in the

Digby play is also the "mone" and, in an echo of Ovid, the palace of Phoebus. The

chemical wedding is the marriage of the sun and the moon, and as a palace or vessel

of the sun, Mary is a Diana figure whose womb is the site of the creation of the

philosopher's stone or the Son of God. In perhaps the most obvious alchemical

reference, Mary is the cinnabar ["sinamver" (1361)], "the only important ore of

mercury" in alchemy and the "rich blood red color" of the stone in the final stages of

the opus (41). Bevington glosses the rest of the line ("the body thorow to seche") by

suggesting that Mary is the cinnabar "to seek through and cleanse the body" (731).

Mary, then, is an alchemically purifying agent through which Christ's Godhead can

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[163] Ibid., 194.

[164] Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 186.

add "myth" (*might*) to his manhood. Not only is her body a purifying agent, but also it alchemically heals. She is the "muske agens the hertes of violens, / The jentill jelopher agens the cardiakille wrech" (1362-3)—the musk or gillyflower used as natural cures for bodily suffering. Christ aligns Mary with the generative, transformative, purifying, and healing materials of alchemy not through simile, but through metaphor, suggesting an analogous identity between Mary's miraculous powers and alchemical ones.

Like the Croxton play, the Digby play expresses the miracles of God in a language shared with alchemical healing and purification. Both plays, too, include the more materialistic form of alchemy, associating this inferior art with the vice characters. In the Digby play, this discourse appropriately belongs to the allegorical character, World, who explains, "In me restit[h] the ordor of the metelles sevyn, / The which to the seven planyttes ar knett ful sure" (312-2). World goes on to list them all—including gold, silver, iron, lead—calling the minerals of the earth "rich tresor" (323). World's vaunts about possessing the minerals of the earth resemble the lists of Aristorius and Jonathas, as in Jonathas's "Gold, syluer, and presyous stonys." Further, in addition to materialist alchemy, both plays have a mountebank figure that offers quack remedies. In the Digby play, it is Flesch who lists his herbal cures, like the charlatan in the Croxton play.

Alchemical discourse encapsulates the interest of late medieval drama in apprehending spiritual meaning through material means. Alchemy is a field that embodies both hope for transformation and wariness of trickery, like drama. Further, conversion is at the heart of both the plays and alchemy. Alchemical dualism links the

Croxton play's seemingly disjointed plots: the merchant with the quack and the converted Jew with the wonder-working, shape-shifting, and hand-healing Christ. Preoccupied with effecting change in its material and spiritual world, the play's central miracle of conversion resembles transmutation. Like the alchemical trial of the philosopher's stone, Jonathas's torture is a trial of his material body that leads to conversion—both material and spiritual. In the play, material alchemy yields to spiritual alchemy, as the litany of stones and minerals that Jonathas possesses gives way to a healing elixir and spiritual transmutation at the end. The language of buying and selling at the beginning of the play similarly shifts to the language of spiritual redemption at the end; instead of buying a physical Host with material wealth, Jonathas receives the spiritual gold of Christ's mercy.

Alchemy yokes together materiality and spirituality, offering an earthly path to the divine. As Peggy A. Knapp explains, "The stone was seen as a scientific/technological artifact and a pious penetration of God's secrets, and these two faces of alchemical work coexisted through its long history with varying emphases on one or the other. An unlimited supply of gold would release the social world from poverty, and the elixir would eradicate illness."[165]Alchemy's goal was to effect change in both the material and spiritual worlds. In her Marxist reading of alchemy, Knapp suggests, "What might happen in the best case scenario for the alchemical studio is that more (in terms of exchange value) would be produced than

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[165] Peggy A. Knapp, "The Work of Alchemy," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 30, no. 3 (2000): 575**.**

came in."[166] Similarly undergirding the miracle of the play is the illogic of mercy and redemption and of the conversion of matter into spirit, of Jew into Christian, and of sinner into saved. In other words, as in the ideal alchemical lab, what goes in is greater than what goes out: bread in, Christ out; heresy in, mercy out. Theresa Coletti argues that *Mary Magdalene* and the *Play of the Sacrament* contrast secular and sacred economies.[167] Similarly, in her recent monograph on *Mary Magdalene*, Coletti convincingly argues that the Digby play warns about the ability of material evidence, including drama, to make sense of the divine: "It is against such brazenly corporeal testimonials that Jesus cautions, suggesting that neither direct experience nor the performative resources of theater can be counted on to provide reliable access to sacred knowledge."[168] *Mary Magdalene* faults spectacle because it "is both a medium of conversion and the dramatic signature of demons and lecherous pagan priests."[169] For Coletti, the Croxton play similarly "offers a critique of the material excesses of the Sacramental culture promoted for and by late medieval lay society, but it does so in the very dramatic medium that epitomized that culture's emphasis on the spiritual efficacy of mingling the mundane and the sacred."[170] In a paradoxical critique and celebration, the play blends material and spiritual experiences through theatricality.

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[166] Ibid., 583.

[167] Theresa Coletti, "Paupertas est donum Dei: Hagiography, Lay Religion, and the Economics of Salvation in the Digby *Mary Magdalene*," *Speculum* 76, no. 2(Apr., 2001): 337-78.

[168] Ibid., 193.

[169] Ibid., 193.

[170] Ibid., 202.

In such theater, materialism leads to spirituality, and in the play, they are joined like Jonathas's hand to the Host. First nailed together then separated, then ultimately imbued with Christ's presence through baptism, the hand and the Host represent the union of the earthly and the divine, of body and spirit. Similarly, Jonathas's conversion is both physical and spiritual; his body is transformed as his soul is purified. This process operates like the alchemical *magnum opus*: from putrefaction and separation to distillation and transmutation, the hand enters the cauldron and emerges restored, undergoing a chemical wedding with Christ's body in the form of the Host. Like a miracle, it is a materialist and magical proof of Christ's power in the materialist and magical medium of drama. Through blending magic and miracle, the play crafts a powerful response against antitheatrical claims that drama is counterfeit or heretical, presenting the materialist form of drama as proof and calling upon the theatricality of the Sacrament of the Altar to promote the magic of drama. Jonathas's hand, restored in the cauldron of oil-turned-blood, is emblematic of the regenerative power of theater. Drawing from the paradoxical symbolics of alchemy, however, the play's apology for drama is complex. As Elisabeth Dutton attests, "[M]edieval audiences were entrusted with a subtle task, one which required a sophisticated understanding of their own experiences of seeing and believing: not a willing suspension of disbelief, but more a faithful suspension of belief in the evidence of the eyes."[171] With its "subtle" appropriations from alchemy, jugglery, and magic, the play invites audiences to "put to a preve" competing epistemologies using affect generated

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[171] Elisabeth Dutton, "The Croxton *Play of the Sacrament*," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Drama,* eds. Thomas Betteridge and Greg Walker (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 63.

by the techniques and technologies of theater to distinguish between magic and miracle. As the source of both confusion and confirmation, the magically inflected staging of the Host miracles outlines the problems and the wonders of "miracles pleying."

Chapter 2: "Magic's Mysteries Misled": Magic and Metatheater in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*

Many discussions of Robert Greene's most successful play, *The Honourable Historie of Frier Bacon, and Frier Bongay*, take as a starting point William Empson's suggestion that "the power of beauty is like the power of magic."[172] Empson's seminal claim was part of an attempt to unify the disparate elements of the play. This chapter substitutes "theatre" for "beauty" in Empson's equation, investigating the ways in which Greene asks audiences to understand theatre as an analogue for magic. Through multiple, seemingly competing modes of and attitudes toward magic, the play outlines the limitations and dangers of theatre, while demonstrating and celebrating its power. This chapter argues that the magical technologies in the play—specifically, the "glass prospective," the necromantic contests, and the brazen head—represent what Greene sees as mechanical, spectacular elements of drama. These spectacular forms of magic and of theatre accord with the second clause of Empson's famous formulation in that "both are individualist, dangerous, and outside the social order."[173] Importantly, though these magical tools are renounced or destroyed, the play takes them seriously as truly magical in their own right. Thus, although Greene satirizes magical and theatrical technologies as limited and even dangerous, his play

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[172] William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral*, rev. ed. (1935, repr. New York: New Directions Publishing Corporation, 1960), 31.

[173] Ibid., 33.

also suggests that such stage mechanics have an inherent force. Toward theater, Green was as cautionary as he was enthusiastic.

Two forms of magic underscore the play's suggestion that theatre has truly performative powers. The first is one that Bacon does not perform onstage but that the historical Friar Bacon practiced: alchemy. The second is one in which Bacon engages after his renunciation of magic: political prophecy. These forms of natural, philosophical magic complement the tools of mechanical and artificial magic associated with dramatic spectacle. Thus, Greene imagines a theater that can move and reform its characters and audiences through mysterious natural forces.[174]*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* presents an uneasy truce between technics and mechanics on one side, and, on the other, the mysteriously affective aspects of theatre. In a time when Greene and others debated the merits and flaws of the newly burgeoning professional theatre, Greene suggests still that it can inspire personal and social reform.

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[174] Henry S. Turner argues that early modern theatres were "understood to be a kind of machine: theaters had mechanical parts that assisted in the projection of the 'scene'" ("Life Science: Rude Mechanicals, Human Mortals, Posthuman Shakespeare," *South Central Review*, 26, No. 1 & 2 [Winter & Spring 2009], 204). Greene's use of spectacular magical technologies supports Turner's discussion of the "'technicity' of theatrical *mimesis* in Shakespeare, the mystery of what happens when an actor enters the stage and begins acting, supported and facilitated by an artificial environment that allows him to project life without a soul" (208).

The Brass Head, the "Glass Prospective," and Necromantic Contests as Spectacle

The spectacular centerpiece of Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* is the animation and destruction of a brazen head automaton, a curious blend of living creature and machine that is at once marvelous and mechanical, extraordinary and ordinary. The automaton in the play is a "head of brass" that Bacon "contriv'd and fram'd" with the help of a conjured demon, Belcephon, whose job was to "hammer out the stuff." Bacon boasts that his head "by art shall read philosophy" (ii.55-7).[175] He will put this knowledge to use by girding England with a protective wall of brass. Early in the play, Bacon brags about his marvelous head, saying,

> And I will strengthen England by my skill,
>
> That if ten Caesars liv'd and reign'd in Rome,
>
> With all the legions Europe doth contain,
>
> They should not touch a grass of English ground.
>
> The work that Ninus rear'd at Babylon,
>
> The brazen walls fram'd by Semiramis,
>
> Carv'd out like to the portal of the sun,
>
> Shall not be such as rings the English strand
>
> From Dover to the market-place of Rye. (ii.58-66)

With his magical automaton, Bacon plans to provide military defense for England, as well as to garner national pride, causing England to rival even the legendary biblical

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[175] Robert Greene, "Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay," in *Drama of the English Renaissance I: The Tudor Period*, ed. Russell A. Fraser and Norman Rabkin (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1976). All lines are cited from this edition.

city of Babylon. The brazen head's big moment happens late in the play. After a hard day of vanquishing local and international rivals, making and marring love matches, and feasting with royalty at his home, Bacon finally has time to work on his pet project, which after seven years of hard labor has finally come to fruition. As he awaits the prophecy of his automaton, however, he falls asleep, asking his bungling apprentice, Miles, to watch over the brass head.[176] Alas, Miles fails to awaken his master, so Bacon entirely misses his opportunity to witness his automaton at work— and what splendid, mysterious work it is. The brass head moves, accompanied by a rumble of thunder; it cryptically states, "Time is…Time was…Time is past" (xi.55, 67, 77); then it is shattered by the ultimate *deus ex machina*: a hammer emerging wondrously from the heavens.

Greene's automaton is one of many such mechanical marvels found in medieval and early modern English literature, and the brass head itself even has a precedent in (and is probably a borrowed prop from) Greene's own play, *Alphonsus, King of Arragon*.[177] In many of its precursors, the automaton acts a symbol of art. Wendy Beth Hyman observes that underwriting the automaton figure in early English

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[176] The historical Friar Bacon's teacher, Grosseteste also was rumored to have a prophetic head of brass. Like Greene's Friar Bacon, Grosseteste also slept through the animation and prophecy of his automaton.

[177] See Todd Andrew Borlik, "'More than Art': Clockwork Automata, the Extemporizing Actor, and the Brazen Head in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*," in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011): 129-44. While there is some debate about the authorship of this play, many critics suggest that it is Greene's. See, for example, the Kirk Melnikoff's and Edward Gieskes's introduction to *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer,* ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 1-24.

literature is Ovid's Pygmalion story, which represents both the possibilities of art and its hubris and danger. Hyman argues, "Literary fantasies of animation, poetic representations of inanimate objects coming to 'life,' are inevitably marked by this kind of duality: exhilaration and terror, love and betrayal, ambition and frustration, magic and matter, lust and loss."[178] The readers or audiences of the literary automaton thus had diverse, confusing traditions to draw upon, and so the brass head in the play represents "a deep epistemological fracture" because it "seems to different characters to represent a force of wonderment and sorcery, an elaborate clockwork, and an empty parlor trick."[179] Indeed, because it draws upon these vastly different attitudes toward automata, the brazen head in the play remains a source of critical "wonderment," particularly in what it suggests about the nature of art or of drama. As Barbara Traister and others have argued, the brazen head is specifically a symbol of theatrical spectacle.[180] The automaton represents the seemingly contradictory impulses that drama provokes: a curiosity about the mechanical and a craving for the marvelous. It symbolizes the audience's interest in the mechanics of drama, while at the same time it is a figure of the willingness to suspend one's self fully within theatrical worlds.

Greene offers cues to the audience that the brazen head is a symbol of dramatic spectacle, linking magic and metatheater. The scene begins with a stage

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[178] Wendy Beth Hyman, "Introduction" in *The Automaton in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Wendy Beth Hyman (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2011), 3.

[179] Ibid., 12.

[180] Barbara Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 67.

direction in which Friar Bacon "*draw[s] the curtains with a white stick.*"[181] This

opening of the curtains onstage signals both the audience's entry into the realm of

metatheater and the common stage device of the play within the play. The "white

stick" is likely a magic wand, as Fraser and Rabkin gloss it.[182] By using a magical

stage prop to orchestrate a metatheatrical action, the drawing of the curtains, Greene

thus brings together magic and theater in an overstated spectacular moment. Further,

the stage direction calls for a comical abundance of props: the wand, a book, a lamp,

the head itself, and an unspecified number of weapons that Miles carries with him.

Miles draws attention to the exaggerated use of what he calls "furniture" (xi.5),

saying, "I have / so armed myself that if all your devils come I will / not fear them an

inch" (xi.5-7). By comically calling attention to the overuse of stage props, Greene

leads audiences to understand that this scene is overloaded with metatheatrical

implications; such a set-up suggests that the scene is going to be spectacularly stagey,

and the many earlier references to the brazen head have prepared audiences to expect

this sort of display.

Friar Bacon next delivers a bombastic monologue about the marvelous

construction of the head, a speech that would rival the boasts of Tamburlaine and

Faustus in their spectacular quality. Bacon tells how he traveled to the depths of hell

and conjured the greatest demons and even the devil, making Luna herself tremble

and shaking the "rafters of the earth" from its "poles" (xi.8-18). Greene packs the

scene with mythological allusions and bold diction emphasizing the greatness of the

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[181] Ibid., 375.

[182] Ibid., 375.

task: "darkest" (9), "[p]oring" (17), "monstrous" (17), "strange and uncouth" (20) and "glorious glister"(32). Bacon's monologue is excessively histrionic, and his command for Miles to "[d]raw close the curtains" (xi.38) once more highlights the theatrical nature of the scene. When Bacon falls asleep mid-sentence ["Be watchful, and—" (xi.39)], Greene reminds audiences that they are watching not just a play-within-a-play but an over-the-top comic scene. The brazen head's awakening is itself particularly spectacular in that it is accompanied by multiple special effects, including loud noises, lightning, and—especially stagey—the hand that "*appears that breaketh down the* head *with a hammer.*"[183] As a recognizable, borrowed prop from one of Greene's own earlier plays, the head points audiences directly towards the existing dramatic tradition. The brass head, then, is a symbol of spectacle.

As such, the brazen head scene offers a cautionary tale about the dangers and limitations of dramatic spectacle, in particular regarding its inability to control its effect on audiences. For instance, Miles, the poor bungling scholar, is the worst candidate for witnessing the brazen head's animation. He forgets to awaken his master, falls asleep midway through the prophecies (nearly stabbing himself with his own sword in the process), and offers silly interpretations for the aphorisms. The audience is central to this scene: Bacon claims that if he had been the one to watch the magical spectacle of the head's prophecies, the brazen head would have produced better oracles and the promised wall of brass. He slanders Miles for letting him sleep: "If though hadst watched, and waked the sleepy friar, / The brazen head had uttered aphorisms, / And England had been circled round with brass" (xi.107-9). Bacon's

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[183] Ibid., 376.

claim here is relevant for considering the brazen head as a symbol of dramatic

spectacle in that the wrong audience can lead to comical or even destructive

consequences. His seven years of work are wasted on a dunce, and his brazen head is

destroyed, according to Bacon, because the audience does not know how to respond

properly to the spectacle. The brazen head scene is the most theatrical moment of the

play, and no one is there to witness it other than a fool. Significantly, Bacon claims

that the magic itself would have been more effective if another observer had

witnessed it. Bacon seems to wish that all audiences might be as capable of

interpreting spectacle as those who create it.

Greene is playing upon the problems of response and interpretation,

suggesting (like Sidney before him) that the dangers and limitations of drama's ability

to move audiences arise not entirely from dramatic spectacle itself but in a large part

as a result of inept perceptions. The problem is not only theatrical spectacle, after all,

but also bad audiences. In this sense, Bacon's magical technologies warn of ignorance

rather than deception. Minsoo Kang argues that Greene's automaton represents the

problem of interpretation rather than of creation, saying, "far from a tale of a man's

intellectual hubris going awry to pose a threat to the world, it is ignorance that is

shown to be the danger, one that can undo decades of wondrous work by a learned

man."[184] For Kang, it is ignorance, not knowledge, which causes problems in the

world of the play. Indeed, the failure of the brass head mocks audiences and

playwrights who rely too heavily on the spectacular technologies of theater for its

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[184] Minsoo Kang, *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination* (Harvard University Press, 2010), 78.

dramatic effect. Such over-the-top spectacular moments can generate audience

responses as superficial as Miles's silly and ineffectual commentaries on the

automaton's movement and prophecies.

The parallels between the automaton and drama work also at the level of the

dramatic character or actor. In addition to symbolizing inept audience response, the

automaton also symbolizes actors transforming themselves into puppet-like figures.

As Todd Andrew Borlik reports, "In *The Groats-Worth of Wit*, Greene 'insinuates

that the player is a kind of automaton, artificially animated by the playwright's

text.'"[185] For Borlik, and, arguably, for many early modern observers, the brazen head

thus becomes a symbol of drama's problematic nature: "Through the destruction of

the automaton, the play delivers a stern judgment not only on contemporary fantasies

of technological dominion, but also on drama itself as an aesthetically and morally

dubious form of animation."[186] He reads the brass head as a symbol of the limitations

of the mechanical arts.[187] The "thaumaturgical failure" of the brazen head symbolizes

for Borlik the limits of human achievements and "gives voice to Greene's frustrations

with the theater."[188] As Borlik aptly recognizes, the brass head is a satire on the

limitations of spectacle. The automaton's hybridity allows it to stand-in for various

elements of theater. Requiring and responding to outside influence, the automaton can

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[185] "More Than Art," 143. Borlik also cites Roger Bacon's *Nullity of Magic*, which includes a section on jugglers—a term regularly used to describe not only performance magicians but also actors—as deceiving like automata (Ibid., 132).

[186] Ibid., 129-30.

[187] Ibid., 131.

[188] Ibid., 139, 144.

represent the audience. Appearing like both a human and a puppet, the automaton can represent the fictional character animated by an actor's body and voice, or the actor himself. Fashioned by mechanical parts and resembling a stage prop or set piece, the automaton can represent the technologies of theater; yet as this chapter will demonstrate, Greene's play recuperates drama's potential through other forms of magic, specifically through alchemy and prophecy.

Greene's representation of an automaton as diabolical, mechanical, and explicitly theatrical stages the debate about the role of mechanics and dramatic spectacle, well before Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones began to quibble. By drawing attention to its own constructedness, hybridity, and limitations, Greene's automaton draws dramatic and comic force from this debate. The early modern commercial theater was situated at the art/craft divide. With its deep associations with artisanal crafts such as costuming and carpentry, the theater might equally be characterized as a technology that combines poetry and spectacle in a hybrid medium. Greene's brazen head fits in with Henry Turner's assessment of Shakespearean drama as a machine that generates artificial forms of life and therefore realigns our understanding of the relationship between literary and scientific epistemologies. The head represents art, in particular dramatic art, as analogous to the new science or to a technology that is monstrous yet capable of moving and of inspiring wonder.

The weirdness of a technological creation imbued with lifelike movement makes the automaton figure "monstrous." Zakiya Hanafi theorizes that "what makes an automaton monstrous is not the arrangement of its parts…it is the fact that matter formed by artificial means and moving of its own volition would seem to be endowed

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with spirit."[189] It is the liminal position of the automaton that generates concern: "The threat that automatons pose could hardly be clearer: if matter moves of its own accord, it presents a threat of breakdown, of collapsed boundaries, not only in the realm of natural forces—hence the association with demons and necromancy—but especially as a figure for the stability of the social order."[190] Greene capitalizes on this threat of social breakdown associated with mechanically moving marvels by staging an automaton that is at once linked with national defense and with demonic influence. The automaton in the play represents a threat to existing paradigms of security or, as Hanafi claims, "a deformation of formative power that could result in violent discord."[191] Greene's brazen head stages this potential breakdown of social paradigms, just as the play registers unease with other types of social breakdown: as in Margaret the milkmaid who becomes a noblewoman, thus transgressing class lines—or as in Friar Bacon himself, the magician who invokes demons while at the same time serving the king. Thus, the automaton symbolizes the disruption of existing orders. As a token of dramatic spectacle, it also reflects concerns about drama's ability to transgress and overturn social and political hierarchies, as Empson claims in his understanding of beauty threatening the "social order."

While the play registers this potential "breach of hierarchy," it offers, at the same time, the possibility that the automaton can work on the side of the "natural and

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[189] Zakiya Hanafi, *The Monster in the Machine: Magic, Medicine, and the Marvelous in the Time of the Scientific Revolution* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 54.

[190] Ibid., 93.

[191] Ibid., 97.

social orders," in its promise to circle England with a wall of brass and therefore to

protect England and to increase national prestige. One possible interpretation of the

brazen head as a symbol of what drama can do is that both have the ability to display

or to garner political, personal, or academic clout. As Scott Lightsey has argued,

medieval and early modern automata often were designed explicitly for the purpose

of showing off such technological advancement. Referring to contemporary examples

of automata, such as Albertus's moving, talking woman that was destroyed by

Aquinas and, most relevantly, Roger Bacon's reputed brazen head, Lightsey describes

such "manmade marvels" as "clever devices whose rarefied emotional effects were

deliberately engaged in the pursuit of social and political capital."[192] Because of their

intermediary position between object and actor, automata have the ability to reshape

social landscapes. Anthony Grafton also discusses the use of automata and

mechanical marvels as political tools. Explicitly connecting such technologies to both

magic and dramatic spectacle, he explains that political leaders deployed automata

and other moving objects as dramatic spectacles in order to demonstrate their power

and knowledge.[193] Like Lightsey, Grafton includes Bacon's and Magnus's automata

as part of this tradition.

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[192] See Scott Lightsey, *Manmade Marvels in Medieval Culture and Literature* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 4.

[193] See Anthony Grafton, *Magic and Technology in Early Modern Europe*: *Dibner Library Lecture, 15 October 2002* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Libraries, 2005). Grafton argues, "To prove that the despots of little Renaissance cities had power over nature, as well as man, engineers built spectacular pageant wagons for them—wagons that moved without animals to pull them, as hidden teams of soldiers energetically cranked their wheels…Engineers, like magicians, loved to amaze and frighten their audiences" (24). Even Queen Elizabeth took part in this practice, as Silvio A. Bendini notes in his description of an "organ clock" which

The most exhaustive study of such mechanical wonders appears as part of

Lorraine J. Daston's and Katharine Park's *Wonders and the Order of Nature*.[194]

Daston and Park also discuss the wide-ranging use of automata in political,

spectacular displays, demonstrating the ways in which man-made wonders—

including automata—were central to political functions. Daston and Park further

contend that "[t]he wonders of art, then, like the wonders of nature, embodied a form

of symbolic power—over nature, over others, and over oneself."[195] To extend their

argument to the metatheatrical level, then, in addition to symbolizing political, social,

and individual power, automata and other mechanical wonders also serve as an apt

symbol of spectacle. Because they move, cross the line between object and actor, and

appear in spectacular displays, automata work particularly well as symbols of ability

of the dramatic arts to perform cultural and political work.

Friar Bacon regularly employs his magic in spectacular displays, of which the

brazen head is to be his *tour de force*, in order to defeat personal academic and

international political rivals. His first conjuration of the bar hostess has the explicit

intent of putting Burden, who has scoffed at Bacon's plan to use the brazen head to

ring England with a wall of brass, in his place. Further, the "dispute" (iv.38) that the

emperor of Germany wishes to hear at Oxford is actually a spectacular magical

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replicated the sounds of many instruments ("The Role of Automata in the History of
Technology," *Technology and Culture* 5, no. 1 [Winter 1964]: 35).

[194] Lorraine J. Daston and Katharine Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature* (New
York: Zone Books, 1998). Daston and Park demonstrate the ways in which
wonders—including automata—were central to political functions.

[195] Ibid., 91.

contest between the German scholar-magus Vandermast and Bacon, rather than an academic disputation. The purpose of this contest is to display knowledge and power; this battle ties humanist scholarship together to magic and theatrical spectacle as a source of national pride. Indeed, King Henry explains that he will "bind" Vandermast's "brows…with a coronet of choicest gold" (iv.64, 6) if he beats his rival in magic spells and "mathematic rules" (iv.63). King Henry's promised reward equates magical supremacy with both national pride and artistic achievement; the ring of gold is like the poet's laurel wreath. Thus, magical technologies and their dramatic deployment serve as a symbol of art that wins national prestige.

The pinnacle of Bacon's magical power as a display of English technological, intellectual, and occult power—and the crux upon which his future reputation will rest—is the brass head itself, with its predictive aphorisms and its creation of a wall of brass. The promised ring of gold that will rest upon Vandermast's head is like the brass wall with which the brazen head will encircle England, and both are like Oceanus's walls that King Henry claims ring England like "the battlements / That compassed high-built Babel in with towers" (iv.2-4). The brazen head is like the natural forces of the ocean that protect England from invaders; thus, the automaton is an important source of national defense and pride. The Oxford doctor, Clement, explains that Bacon's academic clout depends upon Bacon's claim to have performed such a brazen accomplishment: "For if thy cunning work these miracles, / England and Europe shall admire thy fame, / And Oxford shall in characters of brass / And statues such as were built up in Rome / Eternize Friar Bacon for his art" (ii.39-43). The spectacular "miracle" of the brazen head will accrue academic, national, and

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international acclaim for Bacon, for Oxford, and for England; here, brass represents academic fame.

Even better, Bacon's "art" will make immortalize him. Bacon himself confirms that his entire reputation relies upon the brazen head, when he tells Miles, "The honor and renown of all his [Bacon's] life / Hangs in the watching of this brazen head" (xi.27-8). Bacon warns Miles, just before he dozes off, not to fall asleep because "If that a wink but shut thy watchful eye, / Then farewell Bacon's glory and his fame" (xi.36-7). When Bacon famously sleeps through the animation of the brazen head, he laments his loss of pride: "But now the braves of Bacon hath an end; / Europe's conceit of Bacon hath an end" (xi.119-20). The brazen head's cryptic aphorisms, its failure to "girt fair England with a wall of brass" (xi.21), and its physical destruction represents the loss of Bacon's personal power and England's national prestige. Marlowe's Doctor Faustus similarly claims that he will direct his spirits to build a wall of brass around Germany. Both Faustus and Bacon promise to use their magic to build brazen, protective walls around their respective countries in order to gain personal and national respect; therefore, in both plays, brass technologies represent the possibilities of magic and art in achieving such prestige. Neither promise, however, comes to fruition, thus suggesting that both Bacon's project and Faustus's represent the failure of magic and of drama to achieve such lofty goals. So while real-life early modern automata reinforced political and personal pride, both plays offer an alternative in which relying upon spectacular technological wonders for power is a brazen, prideful, and even comic pursuit.

Further, in both *Doctor Faustus* and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, magical technologies are associated with the dangers of diabolism. Bacon's brazen head is diabolically created and animated. Greene therefore also toys with the possibility that drama can be tinged with the demonic. Both drama and early automata suffered the reputation of diabolism. Thomas Aquinas, for instance, was rumored to have discovered and destroyed his teacher Albertus Magnus's maiden automaton, which talked and swept the floor, because he thought it was a demon.[196] A potential source for Greene's brass head that also highlights its connections with brazen pride and diabolism can be found in stories of the biblical King Solomon, as in the grimoire, *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, which circulated widely at the time. In such accounts, Solomon is a necromancer who binds demons in a "vesall of Brasse" and then uses "devine power" to "cast Them all into a deep lake or hole in Babilon."[197] Unfortunately, the Babylonians could not contain their curiosity when they discovered this brass jar, and "woundering to see such a thing there, they went wholy into ye lake to brake [break] ye vesel open, suspecting to find a great Treasure." As with Pandora, their brazen wonderment causes trouble: "when they hadd broken it open out flew all y^e cheefe spirits Immediately, and their Legions followed them, and they were restored againe to their former places."[198] The Babylonians' curiosity about

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[196] Kevin LaGrandeur, "The Talking Brass Head as a Symbol of Dangerous Knowledge in *Friar Bacon* and in *Alphonsus, King of Aragon,*" in *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer*, ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008), 39-51., 409.

[197] *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, Joseph H. Peterson, ed. (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2001), 39.

[198] Ibid., 40.

the brass vessel leads to demonic power. As with *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, literal and figurative brazenness is linked with wonder and demonic influence. Further, this story offers an early example of a demonically motivated, prophetic automaton. One of the demons, Belial, "entered Into a certaine Image, and there gave answares to those whome [who] did offer sacrifice unto him as yᵉ Babilonians did."[199] As in the play, this Solomonic tale describes an automaton made of brass that is moved magically by a demon; in both cases, the automaton represents the dangers of pride, curiosity, and brazen ambition. Further, in both cases, the automaton serves as an exemplum about the dangers of pursuing knowledge.

The brass head in this historical context relates to the ancient practice of calling demons into brazen vessels for prophetic purposes. In medieval and early modern traditions, this practice, despite its appeal, served as a symbol of dangerous pride in humankind's achievements, particularly technological ones. For instance, St. Augustine characterized the related practice of calling demons into statues in most unsavory terms, describing it "as if there were any unhappier situation than that of a man under the domination of his own inventions."[200] Minsoo Kang notes that reactions to historical brazen heads reflect this tension between technology as delightfully representing progressive knowledge and as fearfully warning of man's pride and fall; Kang notes that the brazen heads of Gerbert, Albertus, Grosseteste, and Bacon suggested to their contemporaries that they "dabbled in…forms of learning

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[199] Ibid., 40.

[200] Augustine of Hippo, *City of God*, trans. Henry Scowcroft Bettenson (New York: Penguin Books, 2003), viii.23.60-5.

associated with the preternatural realm, located between the stable order of traditional

scholarship and the chaos of uncontrolled but infinitely powerful knowledge beyond.

The magical automaton of the oracular head served to express both popular anxiety

and fascination with magic and with those who practice it."[201] With its associations

with diabolism, then, the brazen head represents the prideful pursuit of knowledge.

Greene's brass head in both *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and in *Alphonsus,*

King of Aragon, according to Kevin LaGrandeur, is a "specific lampoon of the

scientists and science of his day" in their attempt to overreach natural knowledge.[202]

For LaGrandeur, the "brass head is…a metaphor for Bacon-the-scientist's desire to

make a prosthesis of sorts out of a combination of nature and his knowledge" and an

"embodiment of the scientist's intellect, together with a harnessed, natural force."[203]

LaGrandeur even uses the same diction as *The Lesser Key of Solomon* to describe the

head, calling it a "vessel": in Greene's head, as in Solomon's jar, "the transcendental

and the mundane meet and are bound in an uneasy stasis" (418). Like this

overreaching scientist, the automaton unleashes destructive social forces and signifies

the brazenness of intellectual endeavor. When his spectacular project fails, Bacon

complains, "Bacon might boast more than a man might boast, / But now the braves of

Bacon hath an end" (xi.115-6). Bacon recognizes that his automaton and its

accompanying goal to ring England with brass are prideful, futile attempts to elevate

himself and England beyond natural bonds. Since the brass head represents dramatic

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[201] Kang, *Sublime Dreams*, 78.

[202] LaGrandeur, 408.

[203] Ibid., 418.

spectacle, Bacon's lament implicates spectacle, too, as one of the "braves" of Bacon.[204] Greene's brazen head thus signifies the brazenness of artistic endeavor. In this scene, Bacon becomes the victim of his own brazenness, and he is inadvertently changed as a result of the failure of his magical spectacle. He is chastened, humbled, and tempered as a result of his overreliance on a limited form of magical, mechanical art. He recognizes the limitations of his craft, realizing that using magical spectacle as a toy to gain personal and national clout has limitations. In this way, magic is a prideful, vain pursuit that leads to problems.

The automaton's ultimate failure further complicates its effect in the play; it is at the same time a source of anxiety, of promise, and of loss. Like Hanafi, Minsoo Kang recognizes the automaton's representational force as deriving from its liminal status, yet offers an alternative view to the automaton as a threat, suggesting, "what makes the automaton so enthralling and conceptually dangerous at the same time is the very fact that even as it supports the status quo it also disrupts it."[205] Greene's automaton is both a threat and a source of power, just as for Kang "the automaton is the ultimate categorical anomaly. Its very nature is a series of contradictions, and its purpose is to flaunt its own insoluble paradox."[206] Greene's approach to the

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[204] The brazenness of Bacon's (and, by extension, Greene's) artistic project is emphasized throughout the play with mostly comic references to brass, especially to "Brazennose" college, or Oxford, where Greene and Bacon both received degrees. As LaGrandeur points out, "Unflattering visual puns suggest themselves: 'brazen' or 'brazen-faced' was common Elizabethan slang for shamelessness; thus the effigy is a metaphor for the impudence of its creator and his kind, for scientists who dare to reach beyond their station" (Ibid., 422).

[205] Kang, *Sublime Dreams*, 66.

[206] Ibid., 36.

automaton aligns closely with this model: the automaton as an imaginative device delights in its aporetic appeal, in its inability to be resolved. Kang draws his argument from medieval literary sources, mainly romances like the source of the play, in which "the automaton appears in literature alternatively as the wondrous creation of ancient knowledge and as the diabolical work of heretical magic, the former meant to arouse sublime awe and the latter horror."[207] Although Kang does not come to this conclusion, Greene's play, however, offers a third possible affective response in place of sublime awe or horror, one that encapsulates both but does not rest upon either: the comic. The play draws its appeal from the potential for awe or horror, but it also imitates the automaton's irresolvable status by refusing to settle for either; instead, it plays with the possibilities of awe and horror, and it offers delight, pleasure, and laughter.

Because the brass head as a signifier shuttles along so many opposing vectors, it also hints at spectacle's deceptive, mysterious nature. The automaton in the play is powerful. Its power lies in its ability to awe spectators with its possibilities of movement, of prophecy, and of defense. Indeed, Bacon's reputation rests in a large part upon the prestige generated by the automaton's potential powers. In other words, the brazen head's power in both the world of the play and among audiences is spectacular—it creates an aura of mystery through its pretensions at grandeur. The automaton's dramatic force is effected through a disparity between its actual capabilities and the perception of them. As such, the source of its power is illusion.

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[207] Ibid., 65.

As a token of dramatic spectacle, then, Greene's brass head underscores the way in which drama deceives its observers through their wonder and ignorance, by wowing them with the possibility of miraculous movement and transformation and by stopping rational thought in favor of faith in spectacle.

Another of Bacon's mechanical tools, the "glass prospective" (vi.105) acts as a symbol of dramatic spectacle, suggesting that such spectacle is limited and dangerous while at the same time potentially instrumental. Like the brass head, the glass draws attention to itself as a theatrical device. The first time the glass appears onstage, Greene foregrounds spectatorship by depicting Edward and Bacon using it to watch Margaret and Bungay, who then watch Lacy. Throughout the scene, Bacon instructs Edward on how to be a spectator: "Stand there and look directly in the glass" (vi.10); "Sit still, and keep the crystal in your eye" (vi.15); "Now look, my lord" (vi.45); and in an overtly metatheatrical line, "Sit still, my lord, and mark the comedy" (vi.48). Here Greene inverts his critique of audiences in the brazen head scene; instead of mocking audiences who mistake spectacle for reality, Greene creates characters who treat their real lives like a play: "Sit still, and mark the sequel of their loves" (vi.109). As with the brass head, this magical technology suggests that the problem with spectacle lies in the interpretation of its audiences.

Greene also uses the glass to warn that despite (or perhaps because of) its limitations, dramatic spectacle can cause rivalries, anger, and even death. It is Bacon's prospective glass, for example, that offers the occasion for the rivalries between Prince Edward and his friend Lacy and between Serlsby and Lambert and their fathers. When Prince Edward sees Lacy and Margaret kissing in the glass, he

tries to stab it, but he must be reminded of the distance between himself and the lovers. As a symbol of dramatic spectacle, the glass is effective in revealing hidden inner truths that inspire anger. Even as it reminds characters and audiences of the distance created by spectacle, the glass is so powerful that it can move characters to feel strong emotion and to act impulsively. After Bacon reminds Edward that his sword is not long enough to reach Lacy (in a comical, and obviously sexual, reference), Edward proclaims, "Choler to see the traitors 'gree so well / Made me think the shadows substances" (130). Edward recognizes that the spectacle has moved him to such great anger that it disrupts his ability to comprehend reality. Though Bacon attempts to prevent the emotional response that his spectacle inspires ["Oh, hold your hands, my lord, it is the glass!" (vi.128)], he is unable to stop the rivalry between the friends. The glass suggests, paradoxically, that spectacle can move its observers, yet it is limited because of the distance it creates. The staging of the scene enhances this irony. It is quite likely that the actor playing Edward would be able to reach the actor playing Lacy with his sword; thus, the staging manipulates the audience's sense of perspective. Greene asks audiences to experience a disjunction between physical experience and fictional representation, just as Edward's sense of space is disrupted by the glass's magical powers.

After his brazen head is destroyed, Bacon fears that his magical spectacles will lead to trouble. He tells Bungay, "I smell there will be a tragedy" (xiii.36). Soon after, he watches helplessly in his glass as Serlsby and Lambert kill each other, followed by their sons' repetition of this gruesome scene. Bacon recognizes that it is his magical spectacle that has caused this "tragedy" when he laments, "Bacon, thy

magic doth effect this massacre" (xiii.75). His subsequent destruction of his glass and renunciation of magic emphasize the foolishness and futility of dramatic spectacle. Alan C. Dessen suggests that the glass symbolizes a problem in perspective: "That the users of the glass…are provoked to deadly violence or near-violence indicates the presence of seeing or knowledge without true understanding or control."[208] The historical Roger Bacon's interest in optics as a tool of deception informed Greene's use of the prospective glass to comment upon the dangers of dramatic illusion. The optic glass points once again to the problem of audience interpretation and response to spectacle, rather than to the problem of stage mechanics in and of themselves. Greene stages the anti-theatrical fear of spectacle as leading to vice. His magical technologies suggest that unmediated spectacle can generate intense emotional responses and lead to unpredictable results.

Like the brass head, however, the optic glass does not have a single representational possibility. Instead, it, too, symbolizes contradictory aspects of dramatic spectacle. While the glass points to the limitations and dangers of spectacle, it also outlines one of its potential powers; as in Hamlet's use of a play to "catch the conscience of the king," Greene's version of dramatic spectacle can reveal the inner truths of characters. In other words, the glass prospective gives characters perspective, and Greene's optical glass is a play on the ways in which the principles of optics resemble those of spectacle. For instance, Bacon's glass reveals to him the

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[208] Alan C. Dessen, "Robert Greene and the Theatrical Vocabulary of the Early 1590s," *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer,* Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes, eds. (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 34.

true identity of Prince Edward, despite his disguise, just as it reveals to him Lacy's betrayal of Edward when he woos Margaret. One of the nobles, Ermsby, compares Bacon to "Apollo" (90) for having such knowledge. This allusion to the god of light, truth, prophecy, and poetry highlights the connections among optics, self-revelation, magic, and metatheater in the play. Naming Bacon's tool a "glass prospective" (v.105) further emphasizes these correspondences. The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines "prospective glass" as "A device which allows one to see objects or events not immediately present," and audiences also would have associated it with a "prospective stone": "a stone or crystal in which it was believed that distant or future events could be seen."[209] It is also useful to consider the sixteenth century meaning of "prospective" as "[c]haracterized by looking into the future; forward-looking, anticipatory; having foresight or regard for the future; provident" or "[u]sed or suitable for looking forward or viewing at a distance." Greene plays with all of these associations. For example, the glass helps Bacon see things not immediately present, such as Edward's true identity, just as it helps him predict things yet to come, as when he looks in the glass and "smell[s] there will be a tragedy"(xiii.36) before the landowners and their sons kill each other vying for Margaret's love. Further, the glass gives both him and Edward perspective into their own and others' characters. Upon watching the multiple slayings through the glass, Bacon realizes that his magic and meddling have caused misrule and tragedy, just as witnessing the true love of

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[209] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "prospective glass."

Margaret and Lacy helps Edward to recognize as troublesome his own lust, anger, and selfishness.

It takes Bacon awhile to apply this new realization, however. Despite worrying about the dangers of sharing his glass prospective with the children of new rivals for Margaret's love, Lambert and Serlsby, Bacon allows them to look. When they see their fathers fighting and killing one another in rivalry, and then they kill each other, Bacon finally recognizes just how dangerous his magically spectacular technologies can be, and he decides to renounce magic and his "art" (79), breaking the glass and destroying the remaining form of magical technology that led to so many problems. He eschews the diabolical power that undergirds his art, but unlike Faustus, he learns not to "drown" in "despair" but to repent and see mercy (xiii.98-100). He decides instead to devote the rest of his life to God to make up for his vanity and demonic pursuits. Thus, the failure of his magical technologies leads Bacon to transformation in the form of repentance and devotion to God.

Since it is unlikely that Greene would completely discount the value of the medium that he deploys, it is important to consider, then, where the analogy between the magical technologies and dramatic spectacle breaks down in the play. The play itself makes a distinction between Bacon's and Bungay's explicitly magical spectacles and their dramatic ones. As the Oxford dons prepare for the kings' visit, Burden suggest that they stage plays to show off the power, pride, and supremacy of England: "We must lay plots of stately tragedies, / Strange comic shows, such as proud Roscius / Vaunted before the Roman emperors, / To welcome all the western potentates" (vii.9-12). Yet he is overruled in favor of the magical competitions among

Bungay, Bacon, and Vandermast. Their choice suggests that drama is inferior to magical arts, yet related in purpose. While they are correct that English superiority in the magical arts impresses the foreign leaders, it is not dramatic spectacles but magical technologies that create deadly rivalries and diminish England's vaunts of prospective military defenses. The necromantic magic of this scene suggests that magic is a divisive form of spectacle. The magical contest between Vandermast and Bungay highlights the silliness of the competition between England and its neighbors. Though a funny and pleasurably dramatic entertainment, the conjurations of the magicians are unproductive. Bungay conjures a tree with a dragon shooting fire; and, in response, Vandermast conjures Hercules, who begins to tear down the tree. With its fire-breathing dragon, this scene represents a kind of theatrical spectacle that conjures something from nothing with its mechanical wonders. While impressive in execution and exciting to view, such spectacles are merely show. They effect little more than a sense of wonder in their audiences, or, at best, highlight the technological skill of their respective nations. Further, the dragon and the warrior both impress through their destructive potential: the dragon's ability to breathe fire and Hercules's ability to pull down its tree. They are thus figures of threat and disorder rather than constructiveness and unification. As symbols of dramatic spectacle, then, the magical contests suggest that this kind of showy spectacle is at best limited and at worst divisive.

Bacon freezes Hercules with his gaze, however, earning England the win in the rivalry. His trick ends the contest, mainly because he also spirits Vandermast back to his home in Hapsburg. It quells the rivalry, but it does so by eliminating the rival

rather than joining opposing parties together. Bacon's intervention hints at the

possibility for spectacle to break down divisions rather than build them up, though his

magical act does little to effect positive change in the world or to join together the

rival magicians. As a result, his magic in this scene circumscribes the limited powers

of dramatic spectacle to make something new. Magical spectacle is a "toy" to be used

for the purposes of "comedy," entertainment, and prestige; it encourages rivalries and

divisions through its mechanical marvels and illusions, rather than transforming

people through sympathy or wonder or effecting positive change in the world. As a

token for dramatic spectacle, magic up to this point of the play is limited, illusory,

dangerous, divisive, and comic.

The Natural Magic of Drama: Prophecy and Alchemy

Although the magical spectacles in the first half of the play prove to be

diabolical, dangerous, and comically ineffective, the magic in the second half

intimates that drama has the potential to perform beneficial wonders. The play

suggests that while drama is not magical in the ways that the brazen head promises—

it cannot build a brass wall around England, for example—it can offer a different kind

of instrumentality than Bacon's magical technologies. So just what can Greene's ideal

form of drama do? What makes it more powerful than the diabolical, mechanical,

deceptive, and divisive drama represented by the brazen head, the optic glass, and the

necromantic contests? The answer to this question lies in what happens after the

brazen head is destroyed and in how its destruction affects Friar Bacon. The real

power of dramatic spectacle involves its ability to provoke repentance, to diminish

excess pride, to demonstrate man's limitations. In other words, the dramatic spectacle in the play has the ability to move one to temperance. In the beginning of the play, Bacon uses the word "temper" to demonstrate his magical prowess, when he says, "Now, frolic Edward, welcome to my cell; / Here tempers Friar Bacon many toys" (vi.1-2). His use of the word in the early part of the play highlights his ability to manipulate nature, to create and manipulate mechanical marvels such as his prospective glass and his brazen head. The word is alchemical in nature, and, along with the word "cell," it conjures the historical Friar Bacon's involvement with alchemy, as do the many references to brass and other metals throughout the play.

With reformation and transformation as central issues, the play derives force by calling up alchemical processes such as tempering and transmutation. Alchemy appears frequently in the subplots and subtext, and the principles of philosophical alchemy undergird the play as a whole. The brass head, of course, and the many references to the word brass or brazen conjure metallurgical, and thus, alchemical images. The first description of Margaret also invokes alchemical language: "Her bashful white mixed with the morning's red / Luna doth boast upon her love cheeks" (i.16-7). Luna, the moon goddess, is a central figure in alchemical texts and preparations, as is the mixture of red and white. Greene also offers a comical depiction of Burden's alchemy, which involves playing cards with the hostess of Henley, making money from a frivolous pursuit. Further, Miles comically negates the famous dictum of alchemy, "As above so below," saying "that which is above us pertains nothing to us" (ii.21). And Edward entertains the notion of being himself transformed into gold in order to find his way into Margaret's skirts.

Even the necromantic contest is rife with alchemical imagery. The golden-leaved tree with a dragon shooting fire that Hercules begins to tear down can be read as an over-determined alchemical symbol. The philosophical tree, for instance is an "ancient symbol used to represent the course of the opus alchymicum, the growth of gold and maturation of the philosopher's stone, the alchemical process itself, and the unfolding of the psyche during the…opus."[210] Similarly, the dragon represents the first stage in which the *prima materia* is dissolved into two "seeds,"[211] represented as two dragons who battle each other to the death in order to "engender their offspring."[212] These dragons then become the caduceus of Mercury, and they also appear in alchemical lore specifically as "the dragons keeping watch over the golden apples in the garden of the Hesperides, the two serpents which Hercules strangled in his cradle."[213] Hercules in the play, then, is a symbol of a stage in the alchemical *magnum opus*.

Hercules and the dragon as alchemical tropes are especially appropriate in a play about character and social reform and tempering, since, as Abraham explains, "Metaphysically, the dragon is the lower, earthly self which the soul must learn to subdue and train, so that the higher self (the golden apples) may at last reign."[214]

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[210] Lyndy Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 150.

[211] Ibid., 59.

[212] Ibid., 60.

[213] Ibid., 60.

[214] Ibid., 60.

Greene's collaborator Thomas Lodge also drew upon this imagery, in a satire on the quixotic language of alchemy, complaining "of the vain enigmas employed by the alchemist, including the uroboric dragon: 'First aske they where the flying eagle dwels…Then of the Lyon greene, and flying hart. / Next of the Dragon, swallowing his tayle.'"[215] Like Lodge's complaint, Greene's play spoofs cryptic alchemical discourse, just as it demonstrates the foolishness and destructiveness of other technologies. Thus, in part at least, the play critiques alchemy as a silly and dangerous endeavor like the other necromantic spectacles. The brass head's cryptic aphorisms and comic demolition may lampoon alchemy's attempt to create material wealth out of nothing. Brass and bronze are both terms for the "natural alloy of gold and silver" or "philosophical gold, which is the unclean body or raw stuff of the philosopher's stone which must be cleansed of its impurities."[216] Through the destruction of the brass head, Greene's play suggests that false or materialist alchemy must be purged in order to make way for the more philosophical alchemy of tempering and reform. Just as the dragon must be eliminated in the *magnum opus*, in the play, the lower, earthly self must be tempered and purified.

Alchemical allusions in the play highlight the limitations of materialist or hubristic endeavors, such as Bacon's wall of brass or the frivolous necromantic dispute to garner national pride. At the same time, however, alchemy underscores the play's interest in the possibility of reforming and tempering character and society. Coupled with his use of "toys," Bacon's use of "tempers" illustrates not his restraint

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[215] Ibid., 60.

[216] Ibid., 114.

or temperance, but his excess pride. At the end of the play, however, his use of the word reflects his renunciation of such magical arts. The very first lines of his Merlinian prophecy imply that his application of such arts is past: "I find by deep prescience of mine art, / Which *once* I tempered in my secret cell…" (xvi.41-2, italics mine). While the source of Bacon's "art" at the end is mysterious, it is clearly not of the same nature as that which inspired the automaton or the prospective glass. Similarly, at the end of the play, Bacon's pride and ambition have been tempered as a result of his failed spectacle. His dramatic failure was, after all, performative, in that it inspired him to become a humble and repentant person.

Bacon is not the only one who has been tempered as a result of magical spectacle. Prince Edward, for example, also learns to curb his lustful desires and his anger at his friend and rival, Lacy. He learns, in effect, to become a gentleman, a prince who can marry a respectable princess and who can put aside personal desires and emotions in order to lead a nation. The mechanical and magical spectacles in the play serve a fruitful end: tempering their audiences. Though this link between wonders and temperance may seem surprising, Daston and Park argue that early modern mechanical marvels often were used for just such a purpose. Of the mechanical wonders at the wedding banquet of King Philip described earlier in this chapter, Daston and Park suggest that the aim of the spectacle was to soften and make "tender" hard hearts.[217] Thus, in addition to serving a political end, according to Daston and Park, such mechanical wonders civilized and tempered those who created, possessed, and observed them. Indeed, the central argument of their book is that

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[217] Daston and Park, *Wonders and the Order of Nature*, 107.

artificial wonders, such as automata, generally had a "civilizing intent."[218] The real

magic effected by the magical spectacles within the world of *Friar Bacon and Friar*

Bungay is perhaps this civilizing function.

Bacon's tempering of his toys depicts him as a tinker, an engineer, an

automaton maker, and a craft alchemist in addition to a necromantic conjurer—the

mechanical and magical are conjoined in this depiction. His cavalier attitude toward

his craft is the characteristic that requires tempering. He tinkers with lives as he does

with his toys; he misses the mark on how to deal effectively with interpersonal

relationships, encouraging rivalry and interfering with love. He treats magic (and thus

its analogue, dramatic spectacle) as a toy, a game, or a "sport" (ix.77). It is a

technology for gaining power, prestige, and stuff—in other words, for satisfying his

ego. Friar Bacon proudly displays his magical prowess to Prince Edward and others

but fails to consider the consequences and the real potential for his magical spectacles

to inspire anger or jealousy through misinterpretation and misapplication. Indeed, he

calls the first scene in the prospective glass a "comedy" (vi.48), treating the

relationship between a prince and his noble friend as a joke, not realizing the

obviously destructive consequences. The metatheatrical connotations implicate

audiences, too, who Greene makes keenly aware that they are watching people

watching a scene unfold; Greene's audiences are meta-viewers. Their curiosity and

scopophilia are pleasures just as problematical as Bacon's. Bacon's magic is divisive

in that he uses his necromancy to strike Friar Bungay dumb as he attempts to marry

Lacy and Margaret. Rather than encouraging a union between lovers, he encourages a

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[218] Ibid., 91.

rift and inspires a rivalry between friends. Lacy calls Edward's attempt to woo Margaret a "jest" like Bacon's "comedy" in the prospective glass; both Edward and Bacon treat the hearts and lives of others as toys, and both must be tempered or humbled to realize the cruelty, the negative consequences, and the divisiveness of their light treatment of magical and princely power.

The tempering of Edward and Bacon notably depends not on the magical technologies themselves but on how the tools cause them to witness the effects of love and anger on others. Prince Edward is moved to mercy, for instance, when he witnesses Lacy's transformation as a result of falling in love with Margaret. Love and beauty transform Lacy from a rakish supporter of the Prince's sexual conquest into a sympathetic lover. Margaret likens the process of Lacy's and Margaret's conversion to love to magic, calling herself "bewitched" (viii.42). She also describes the love as operating through glances, saying she "loved Lacy with my looks" (viii.42). The play thus suggests that perceiving beauty has the potential to transform people and to inspire love with an almost-magical force. Seeing is not only deceptive and divisive but also, as in this case, transformative and unifying.

Such mysteriously transformative forces accord with William Empson's famous proclamation that in the play "the power of beauty is like the power of magic." In the play, such magic is of a contagious, sympathetic kind; for instance Margaret and Lacy's love in turn tempers Edward's jealousy, lust, and rage, thus inspiring him to sympathy and mercy and inspiring him to be the heroic prince whose fame and visage Princess Eleanor has fallen for. He soliloquizes, "Edward, art thou that famous Prince of Wales / Who at Damasco beat the Saracens…Is it princely to

dissever lover's leagues, / To part such friends as glory in their loves?" (viii.57-8, 61-2). Rather than sunder love and kill his friend and friendship, Edward decides to use his power to join them all together, to "make a virtue of this fault, / And further Peg and Lacy in their loves" (viii.118-9). Seeing their love transforms his "fault" into "virtue" and leads to "subduing fancy's passion, / Conquering [himself]" (viii.120-1). He tempers his "passion" and "fancy" into mercy, transforming himself therefore from lustful rake into a noble prince worthy of Eleanor's love. While the glass incites rivalry and anger, the beauty of Margaret and of Lacy and Margaret's love yield sympathy and unity. Magical spectacle alone is framed as a dangerously divisive sport, leading to competition and violence, whereas perceiving love and beauty can be transformative and unifying. Thus, the play endorses a kind of drama that encourages sympathy through depicting such love and beauty. As Charles W. Crupi argues, "Greene thus sets two images of Bacon's magic against each other, and neither quite cancels out the other; instead, the terms for evaluating magic shift. The potential for good is genuine, but Bacon must renounce the destructive power of forces that he cannot fully control."[219] It is not merely the "terms for evaluating magic" that "shift," but rather the very kinds of magic deployed.

Although Bacon renounces the diabolical, mechanical magic that inspired and symbolized divisiveness, he still uses magic in the play. The destruction of the brazen head and prospective glass and the renunciation of magic do not end the magic in the play. Rather, the last words in the play are explicitly mystical: Bacon's prophecy for England. Instead of tempering demonic toys in his "secret cell" (xvi.43), Bacon uses

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[219] Charles W. Crupi, *Robert Greene* (Boston: Twayne, 1986), 119.

the "deep prescience of mine art" (xvi.42) to predict the coming of Elizabeth and the golden age of England. Bacon becomes a sort of living oracular head, whose prophetic magic replaces the failed technological aphorisms of the brazen head. With Bacon's prophecies, the play ends with the promise of "peace" (xvi.55) and "plenty" (xvi.53) and a feast celebrating the union of Spain and England and England's glory "over all the west" (xvi.71). A Merlinian prediction of the coming of Elizabeth, Bacon's prophecy forecasts that her arrival will signal an end to war: "But then the stormy threats of wars shall cease" (xvi.49-50). In addition to peace, Elizabeth's arrival will bring feasting, celebration, and plenty: "Drums shall be turned to timbrels of delight; / With wealthy favors plenty shall enrich the strand that gladded wandr'ing Brute to see, / And peace from heaven shall harbor in these leaves / That gorgeous beautifies this matchless flower" (xvi.51-6). In place of rivalry, revelry will bolster national pride; in place of discord, peace; and in place of suffering, delight. Through the union of people and of countries, England will experience peace, joy, and celebration. The end of the play is prophetic and moving; it incorporates the contemporary audience; and it celebrates peace and unity. Competition, isolation, defensive enclosure, and rivalry yield to cooperation, marriage, openness, and sympathetic identification. The play cedes dramatic force from ridiculously spectacular magical technologies to simpler, natural mysteries such as love, sympathy, and reconciliation. Bacon's tempering thus leads to his capacity for prophecy, just as Edward's enlarges his capacity for mercy.

While the brazen head may stand as a token of the problematic aspects of dramatic spectacle, Bacon's moving prophecy animates the play with a kind of magic

that extends beyond the limited world of the play and into the living present of the contemporary world, what Kent Cartwright calls the "commonwealth of the present moment."[220] Bacon's prophetic magic, then, is the ultimate symbol of the kind of drama that Greene strives for in the play. Such a performative drama reaches forward and outward, transforming audiences through its predictive, revelatory powers. It offers hope not only for national supremacy, but also for personal transformation and reconciliation. Though it takes pleasure in the energies and mechanics of dramatic spectacle, it endeavors to move audiences even more compellingly through affect, through sympathy, and through possibility. Instead of the brazen world promised by Bacon's automaton, the magic of drama at the end of the play is like the golden world delivered by poets in Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*. Indeed, after the prophecy and the play's last line celebrating English glory ["Thus glories England over all the west" (xvi.71)], the play ends with an Horatian postscript celebrating art as both useful and beautiful: "*Omne tulit punctum qui miscuit utile dulci*" ["*He wins every hand who mingles profit with pleasure, by delighting and instructing the reader at the same time*" (382)]. The last lines of the play then link drama's delightfully instructive powers with national glory, particularly the English addition to the Latin phrase.

Thus, although Bacon renounces magic when he laments that "magic's mysteries misled," alchemy and prophecy remain as efficacious forces even at the end of the play. Unlike necromancy, both alchemy and prophecy were at times endorsed and even pursued by royalty. Elizabeth herself consulted John Dee for political

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[220] Kent Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*: *English Drama in the Sixteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 246.

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prophecy, for example, and his aphoristic book on astrology reignited interest in prophecy in Elizabethan England.[221] Further, Elizabeth I's grandfather, Henry VII incorporated Merlinian prophecies into his political pageants and emblems, and that political astrology was especially in vogue in the court around the time of the marriage negotiations of Prince Arthur to Katharine of Aragon.[222] As in the play, the marriage of an English prince to a Spanish royal involves political prophecy. Alchemy and prophecy were related fields. Bruce Janacek notes, for example, that Puritan clergyman Thomas Tymme understood both alchemy and prophecy as tools of spiritual devotion, linking them both to hope for redemption through transmutation of the natural world and the spirit and through apocalyptic leanings.[223] Indeed, as forms of natural magic, rather than demonic or mechanical, alchemy and prophecy both underscore the play's insistence on the possibility of reformation and redemption. As alchemy aims to perfect nature, so prophecy aims to predict it.

Reformation and redemption both require time, another important consideration associated both with alchemy and with prophecy.[224] For instance,

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[221] For more on Dee and political prophecy, see Benjamin Wooley, *The Queen's Conjuror: The Science and Magic of Dr. John Dee, Adviser to Queen Elizabeth I* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 2001).

[222] Hilary M. Carey, "Henry VII's Book of Astrology and the Tudor Renaissance," *Renaissance Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (Fall 2012): 661-710.

[223] Bruce Janacek, "Thomas Tymme and Natural Philosophy: Prophecy, Alchemical Theology, and the Book of Nature," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1999): 988.

[224] For a discussion of prophecy, time, and performance, see Brian Walsh's "'Deep Prescience': Succession and the Politics of Prophecy in *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*," *Medieval and Renaissance Drama in England* 23 (2010): 63-85.

Bacon concludes his *Mirror of Alchemy* with an important notice of time "and this is a worke of one day, or one houre, or a moment, for which our wonderfull God is eternally to be praised."[225] The transmutation of matter and the creation of the philosopher's stone require an understanding of the mysterious nature of time. One of the goals of alchemy is to manipulate time, to collapse it, to speed up natural processes. Greene draws attention to the comic futility of this attempt in the brass head's lines, "Time is…Time was…Time is past." Yet Bacon's prophecy at the end of the play attempts the same thing, albeit in a different way; by predicting the future, Bacon attempts to be, like Lady Macbeth, "transported…beyond the ignorant present" in order to "feel now / The future in the instant" (I.V.56-8).[226] Unlike the prophecy in the later *Macbeth*, Bacon's mystical attempt to understand and to collapse time does not serve a darker purpose, but rather promises peace, reconciliation, and celebration. Theater similarly manipulates time, collapsing the past (the life of Edward, for instance) and the future (Bacon's prophecy) with the present (Elizabethan England).

Like his portrayal of drama, Greene's portrayal of alchemy and prophecy is complicated. For instance, King Henry says, "This prophecy is mystical" (xvi.63). Like the cryptic aphorisms of the brass head, Bacon's prophecy is enigmatic. Henry may dismiss the worth of Bacon's prophecy due to their impenetrability; indeed, Henry's next word is "But" (64), and he turns the conversation back to his present moment of feasting and celebration. The word "mystical," however, also invokes the

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[225] Roger Bacon. *The Mirror of Alchemy*, ed. Stanton Linden (New York: Garland, 1992), 15.

[226] William Shakespeare, "Macbeth" in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

divine. As such, King Henry's words code Bacon's prophecy as a spiritual mystery, outside of human understanding, yet conveying truth nonetheless. The play does not discount prophecy, and indeed gives it place of prominence just before the last lines, yet even this form of magic is of uncertain value.

Alchemy, too, is complicated in the play. Alchemy represents the limitations of materialist endeavors (such as dramatic spectacle), while at the same time celebrating the possibility of drama to temper and to reform. Further, alchemy's vexed status underscores the play's interrogation of transformation. The play queries: if one can fall in and out of love, betray friends, and break vows even to God, then how can anyone be trusted? Can someone really be transformed, reformed, or made wise hereafter? The spectacular, magical moments lead to change in the characters, but the play challenges the stability and longevity of such change. For instance, Lacy send gold to Margaret to test her love, but then challenges her decision to become a nun, saying, "whence this metamorphosis?" (xiv.68) She just as quickly changes again when choosing Lacy over her vow to God. Undergoing equally dizzying metamorphoses, Edward lusts after Margaret, wants to kill his best friend for loving her, quickly shows him mercy, and then decides to love Eleanor instead. Rafe, the fool, even warns Eleanor that she should not trust Edward's so rapid transformations engendered by love (xxii.80). Alchemy draws attention to these mysterious, suspicious transmutations. Despite their complicated representation, however, the play does not renounce the linked forms of magic—alchemy and prophecy—because of their affiliation with reformation, possibility, and transcendence.

Rather than solitary skill or isolation in a cell, the play celebrates humility and conviviality through tempering. The play ends with two marriages, joining countries (Spain and England) and classes (a nobleman and a farmer's daughter). Further, the action of the play moves from inciting division and rivalry to promoting unity and reconciliation. Necromancy and academic magic, though capable of working wonders, are exposed as comic and fruitless, aligned with misrule rather than love or community. Indeed, Bacon refuses to dispute with Vandermast, sending him away and inviting the nobles to dinner instead. Rather than spectacular magical contests, Bacon calls for communal feasting. And Bacon's foolish and brazen desire for isolating England with a wall of brass yields to the more impressive—and more promising—magic of love and cooperation. Deanne Williams argues that the play advocates against English insularity: "Fusing the legend of Bacon constructing the brass head, treated in detail in the *Famous Historie*, with the idea of constructing a brass ring around England…Greene brings down the ideal of national integrity along with magic: both of which, he implies, are medieval creations."[227] For Williams, Miles most clearly works against such isolation: "A figure of human resistance to the automaton, of internationalism and particularly of Latin learning, Miles, like Skelton, rails against English insularity, and the status quo."[228] The play thus decries isolation and insularity, favoring international and interpersonal outreach. Similarly, the play suggests that the best kinds of drama and magic move audiences outside of

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[227] Deanne Williams, "*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* and the Rhetoric of Temporality," in *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, ed. Gordon McMullan and David Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 42.

[228] Ibid., 46.

themselves to experience the world sympathetically through contact and collaboration with others.

Alchemy and *The Nullity of Magic*

Greene's play features both a skeptical attack on mechanical and diabolical forms of magic and a celebration of the potentially positive effects of magic, including alchemy and political prophecy. While this conflicting representation lends dramatic interest to the play, it also vexes readers attempting to make sense of its structure. One possible way to resolve this issue is to consider a related text with a similarly divided, even cryptic, approach to magic, "Concerning the Marvelous Power of Art and Nature and the Nullity of Magic," a letter attributed to Roger Bacon.[229] This letter, and another nearly-identical text based on the letter, *An excellent discourse of the admirable force and efficacie of Art and Nature,* were not published in English until appended to *The Mirror of Alchimy* in 1597. This text was printed in the sixteenth century to dispel Bacon's reputation as a magician, but they circulated widely in manuscript and in Latin and other print versions much earlier.[230] Stanton Linden sees the treatise as divided against itself: the first half resembles Scot's attack on magic—lambasting necromancy and other forms of magic as false, illusory, or diabolical—and the second half is a serious alchemical treatise, a recipe

[229] Stanton Linden, *The Mirror of Alchimy: Composed by the Thrice-Famous and Learned Fryer, Roger Bachon* (Garland Publishing, 1992). While this chapter considers both the letter and the discourse, it will cite the letter in its comparisons with the play, since the letter circulated in manuscript and printed form before the discourse and before Greene's play appeared.

[230] Ibid., xxiv-xxvi.

for the philosopher's stone. The two halves differ in theme, tone, and diction; part one is "skeptical," and part two is "fanciful," according to Linden.[231] Linden tries to reconcile the two parts by suggesting that the second half is actually based on "experimentation" and a certain kind of logic within the discourse of alchemy.[232] This explanation problematically resorts to post-Enlightenment definitions of magic and science, treating as "fanciful" a field (alchemy) that many medieval and early modern people took seriously.

Another way to bring together the two parts of the text, then, is to think of it as distinguishing between two kinds of magic, one ineffective and/or diabolical and the other natural and potentially instrumental. This reckoning of the discourse maps onto Greene's representation of magic in the play: both the discourse and the play warn of the dangers and limitations of necromancy while at the same time lauding the value of natural magic. Both the play and the discourse validate alchemy and prophecy.[233] Greene's play, however, opposes Bacon's text by associating technological magic with diabolism and failure and by acknowledging instead the promise of political prophecy. Significantly, both the letter and the play associate magic with spectacle, and both texts lament the dangers of illusion generated by such spectacle; yet they both carve a space in which theatre can act like natural, beneficial magic. Just as Bacon's letter is a skeptical attack on predominantly spectacular forms

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[231] Ibid., xxvii.

[232] Ibid., xxix.

[233] Kevin LaGrandeur notes, "Even Bacon, despite his condemnation of magic in such works as his treatise, *On the Nullity of Magic* (*De nullitate magiae*), endorsed the occult sciences of astrology and alchemy" (411).

of mechanical magic, Greene's play is an attack on spectacle and on the mechanics of theatre; yet both texts make an uneasy claim in favor of the potential benefits of natural magic and of theatre despite their limitations and their associations with diabolism.

The introductory passages of Bacon's letter demonstrate its underlying premise to dispel the aura of magic surrounding mechanical marvels, arguing that what appears to supervene nature or art is actually illusion: "Indeed whatever is beyond the operation of Nature or of Art is not human or is a fiction and the doing of fraudulent persons."[234] The letter distinguishes carefully between what Bacon sees as false or diabolical magic—such as necromancy, magical charms and amulets, and ritual magic found in grimoires—and the "virtue of Art and of Nature"[235]—as in mechanical devices such as optical lenses and automata, natural marvels such as gunpowder and magnets, and alchemical wonders such as the alloying of gold, and, surprisingly, healing with the philosopher's stone. Careful to define these latter marvels as natural rather than magical or diabolical, Bacon also includes among these instrumental wonders the "Force of Personality" and the "Efficacy of Words to Help or Harm."[236] Bacon describes such "Natural Marvels" as having "no magic whatsoever"; rather, they are merely forces of nature or art. [237]

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[234] Linden, 15.

[235] Ibid., 19.

[236] Ibid., 22, 24.

[237] Ibid., 26.

For Bacon, artificial forces are actually superior to so-called magic, and yet both are dangerous because they have the power to deceive. Automata and mechanical marvels can be used as tools of deception to help win national power—just as Greene's brazen head is meant to work. It is not wondrous to Bacon that artificial engines can move or perform other feats. What fascinates Bacon is not the ability of mechanical marvels to move themselves, but rather the ability of such artificial creations to move others to credulity. When discussing natural wonders such as alchemy, Bacon contends, "More remarkable than the preceding is this, that the rational soul cannot be forced but can be effectively disposed, induced, and excited so that it alters its habits, its affections, and its desires according to the will of another."[238] Bacon marvels at the ability to move others to feel and to act against their own "rational" wills. Alchemical transmutations such as the alloying of gold are not at all surprising to Bacon, but the use of artificial devices to move people is truly mysterious.

The magnitude of such transformation is not lost on Bacon; his skeptical attack on magic is actually a commentary about the widespread powers of such illusion, as when he argues, "This may not be done only to a single person but to the entire army of a city or to the people of a countryside."[239] Bacon is referring specifically to an example in the *liber Secretorum* (attributed to Aristotle at the time) in which mirrors or burning glasses were used to deceive soldiers, but his broader

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[238] Ibid., 33.

[239] Ibid., 33.

point is that people can use mechanical devices to create spectacles that lead entire

nations to credulity. He thus aligns mechanics with both spectacle and magic in their

ability to generate illusions and to move people in mysterious, counter-logical ways.

Indeed, the letter begins by linking false magic with acting and dramatic

spectacle:

> There are those who, by quickness of movement and by the
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> appearance of the members, or by variations of the voice, or by the
>
> subtlety of instruments, or by shadows…for jugglers deceive many by
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> quickness of hand, and ventriloquists, by a variety of sounds in the
>
> belly and throat, and by mouth, produce human voices, at a distance or
>
> nearby as they wish, as if a spirit were talking the manner of a human
>
> being.[240]

Just as mechanical marvels can deceive through artifice, jugglers and ventriloquists

use the human body as a device that tricks spectators into believing their work is

magic. Like Theseus's estimation of the power of the imagination to turn a "bush"

into a "bear," Bacon argues that such spectacles lead the credulous to believe they are

something they are not: "When inanimate things are moved rapidly in the shadow of

dusk or of night, it is not truth but it is fraud or deceit."[241] Through mechanical and

optical illusions, "jugglers" fool people into believing they are experiencing magic.

Connecting these spectacular illusions with the invocation of spirits and the use of

magical symbols and rituals, Bacon condemns them as "spurious and counterfeit" and

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[240] Ibid., 15.

[241] Ibid., 16.

as "fraud and deceit," blaming "popular opinion" for allowing them to prosper.[242] The historical Bacon's argument about the deceptive, yet productive, power of artifice is undeniably useful for Greene's metatheatrical portrayal of failed, yet still dramatically appealing, mechanical marvels, such as the brass head or "glass prospective." Just as Bacon argues that theatrical spectacle is fraudulent, Greene warns of the dangers and limitations of mechanical and spectacular elements of drama.

Yet both Bacon and Greene offer the possibility that drama can mysteriously move its observers. Specifically, in the discourse, Bacon describes the power of drama to heal through a form of natural magic. Suggesting that medical charms work because people believe them to work, Bacon argues, "Games and plays are effective against infirmities," explaining, "Wherefore the mental state triumphs, and desire of spirit is hope over disease."[243] Bacon makes the claim that games and plays are effective against infirmities because they trick the mind into believing the body is well. While it seems as though Bacon is arguing once again that such a power is merely illusory and deceptive, the next section argues that such healing properties can arise sympathetically from bodies acting upon each other. Just as a contagious ailment such as leprosy "infects others who are present and contaminates them…healthy persons of good complexion, especially young men, comfort others and delight them by their mere presences." This effect is not merely a psychological phenomenon, but through the "virtues which they emanate," such men can use their

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[242] Ibid., 15-6.

[243] Ibid., 21.

"spirits, vapors, and influences" to "bring about great things by word and by deed."

Thus, like an infectious disease, healthy bodies engaged in "[g]ames and plays" can

cause physical changes in the spirits, health, and disposition of others. According to

Bacon, the reason is that "spiritual effects are produced by words" and by "the living

voice."[244] Although wondrous and mysterious, these effects are not magical, but

natural. Bacon's discussion of the natural healing power of the "living voice" paves

the way for the metatheatrical implications of the magic in Greene's play, which

favors a kind of drama that moves and tempers its audiences through natural

properties, as opposed to the bombastic, over-the-top spectacle associated with the

brazen head and "glass prospective." Both the letter and the play open up the

possibility that drama and other forms of sport can heal their audiences through

natural virtues, while decrying the limitations and dangers of the more illusory and

counterfeit forms of mechanical and spectacular artifice.

Both the discourse and *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* align mysterious

healing powers with the cryptic discourse of alchemy and with spectacle. While the

first half of Bacon's text outlines the dangers of spectacular uses of mechanical

marvels in deceiving people into believing they are magical, the second half describes

the philosopher's stone, first describing its healing properties, then offering three

recipes for making it. The first part of the letter emphasizes clarity and openness,

featuring a skeptical stance on magic, but this second part of the letter speaks in the

coded language of alchemy, frequently emphasizing the importance of secrets and

using aphorisms to obfuscate its meanings. One such aphorism resonates with the

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[244] Ibid., 22-5.

scene in which Miles and Bacon both fall asleep just before Miles hears the cryptic

aphorisms of the brass head. Bacon's recipe in his letter for the "philosopher's egg"

warns the alchemist, "Here you must not sleep; for, herein is contained a useful great

secret."[245] Just as Greene's Bacon warns his bungling apprentice not to fall asleep lest

he miss the performance of the brass head, Bacon's letter warns its recipient not to

sleep while concocting the philosopher's stone. Even more striking is the parallel

between the scene, in which thunder and lightning accompany the brass head's

movement, and the result of following the recipe in the letter: "And so you will make

thunder and lightning, and so you will make the artifice."[246] After the thunder and

lightning, Bacon's text concludes with a paradoxical aphorism: "Whoever will

rewrite this, will have a key which opens and no man shuts: and when he will shut, no

man opens."[247] Similarly, in the play, just after Bacon and Miles both fall asleep, the

brazen head moves and speaks its cryptic aphorisms, and it is accompanied by

thunder and lightning. Having similar dialogue and (stage) directions—a warning not

to sleep, thunder and lightning, and an aphorism—the letter and the play both depict

the spectacular as mysterious and enigmatic. Both texts revel in this inability to be

deciphered; for example, about the "artifice" of thunder and lightning, Bacon warns,

"But you must take note whether I am speaking in an enigma or according to the

truth."[248] Like the recipe for the philosopher's stone in the letter, the enigmatic

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[245] Ibid., 47.

[246] Ibid., 48.

[247] Ibid., 49.

[248] Ibid., 48.

presence of the brass head in the play eludes or conceals meaning. Much like the brass head's cryptic aphorisms ("Time is…Time was…Time will be"), the final passages of the letter resist signification.

Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay appears to celebrate the powers of drama as operating like the natural magic of alchemy in its ability to temper and to transmute its audiences. Just as the second half of Bacon's letter depicts as instrumental the mysterious properties and composition of the philosopher's stone, the second half of Greene's play offers alchemy and political prophecy as forms of natural, non-diabolical magic that have the ability to effect material transformations. By calling upon the historical Bacon's associations with alchemy and mechanical marvels, Greene launches a skeptical attack on the limitations of the commercial theatre, deploying the enigmatic discourse of alchemy as a dramatic device to enhance the energy, comedy, and tension of his play. But just as Bacon's letter offers a critique of spurious forms of magic coupled with a paean to the promise of alchemy, Greene's skepticism is tinged with hope for drama as a powerful medium to inspire change and sympathy. While Greene does not endorse alchemy as Bacon does, he suggests instead that drama's healing properties work in a similar fashion to the philosopher's stone or to the tempering resulting from its pursuit. In both alchemy and the play, trial leads to transmutation and to healing.

Magic and Metatheater

Figuring forth various forms of magic and drawing upon the historical

Bacon's skeptical attack on credulity, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* queries the

problems of perception and perspective associated with drama. Bacon famously

contributed to medieval and early modern understanding of optics, and Greene's play

picks up this strand of Bacon's interests in its depiction of technologies that play with

perception, such as the prospective glass. Dramatic spectacle is itself the key producer

of perspectival illusions in the play. The destruction of the head warns against

allowing oneself to be taken with such illusions, therefore representing the skeptical

admonitions of Roger Bacon and others not to be fooled by tricks of perspective or

technology. As a result, the play invites audiences to desire staged magic to be

convincingly real at the same time it parodies the credulity of those who believe that

such magic is possible.

Yet part of the pleasure of staged magic in the play is in the expectation for

audiences to allow themselves for deceived into believing in the possibility of magic

despite the play's self-conscious distancing of the audience from such deception. The

play invites audiences to be absorbed in the magic onstage at the same time that its

frame as a comic drama pushes back against such self-abandonment. The destruction

of the brazen head and prospective glass in the play evacuates the empty illusions

generated by limited marvels in favor of the power of truly mysterious natural forces,

such as love and beauty, sympathy, and reconciliation. Greene's transformative

drama makes the ordinary extraordinary, and therein lies its magic; the play suggests

that the mundane is itself miraculous and that the magic of sympathy, mercy, and love

are more dramatically moving than limited, brazen technological spectacle.

The play thus marks a turning point in Greene's public attitudes toward the

professional theatre. Whereas Greene's earlier prose and dramatic works emphasized

the limitations and even follies of theatre, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* offers a

glimpse of its promise as a moving, instructive medium that has the potential to

reform audiences. Greene puts himself, or the figure of the playwright, in the same

category as Roger Bacon, the magician, and John Dee, the alchemist. As a result,

Greene associates the power of theatre with the power of magic. Both Bacon and Dee

were vexed with accusations of diabolism and necromancy for their superior and

mysterious intellectual achievements. In aligning himself with these historical

characters, Greene tackles head-on the antitheatrical biases about theatre as a demonic

or dangerous force, suggesting that such fears are comical, like Friar Bacon's brass

head. At the same time, however, Greene capitalizes on the magical powers

associated with Bacon and Dee to make a claim for the ability of theatre to encourage

self-reflection, to move audiences to sympathetic identification, and to reform and

chasten them.

The brazen head is in some ways a paean to the magical powers of

professional theater. According to Reynolds and Turner, theater for Greene has the

ability to accrue cultural capital and to depict the social world in ways that other

discourses do not: "Bacon's power, in short, is nothing less than the power of

Greene's theatre: the power to penetrate beneath superficial appearances to reveal

occult processes that would be impossible to view directly."[249] As a distinctly occult

science, the magic of theater is one that reveals hidden truths. Reynolds and Turner

hedge this overwhelmingly positive view of Greene's attitudes toward theater by

suggesting that this power is often merely a projection of Greene's desires: "a fantasy

of social mobility and sudden transformation in status…a fantasy of professional

rivals vanquished and of international celebrity; a fantasy of grateful royalty."[250]

Their work fruitfully demonstrates the parallels between the magic of drama and the

magic in the play, and it carves a space for reading the brazen head as a symbol of the

power of drama to transform its practitioners and audiences.

Kent Cartwright also understands *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* as a defense

of theatre, arguing that it "valorizes techniques of humanist dramaturgy even as it

embraces a chastened view of humanist learning."[251] Cartwright identifies the source

of drama's power in its ability to move observers: "To the public stage, Greene's

humanist dramaturgy brings its 'cross-referenced' and doubled world, its exploration

of the possibilities of knowledge, and, finally its most vivid treasure, the

commonwealth of the present moment."[252] Such "humanist dramaturgy" dramatically

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[249] Bryan Reynolds and Henry S. Turner, "Celebrity in Robert Greene's *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*," in *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer,* ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008). Reynolds and Turner argue that Greene uses Friar Bacon as an example of the academic-cum-poet aspiring for cultural capital. They suggest that for Greene and other early modern academics understood magic as homologous to poetry (and drama), 92.

[250] Ibid., 92.

[251] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 225.

[252] Ibid., 225.

gives audiences a sense of communally shared experience.[253] For example, in his

treatment of Margaret, Cartwright demonstrates the ability of theater to encourage

audiences to experience identification with a character: "We occupy Margaret's

position sympathetically…With that imaginative, empathic, audience-activating

reconciliation, Greene makes Margaret a striking spectatorial figure, one who elicits

an emotional investment from the playgoer."[254] Thus, drama has the ability to move

audience sympathies in "imaginative, empathic" ways.

 Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay derives much of its affective force from the

productive tension between story and spectacle. Greene's *James IV* hinges upon this

tension, as well, according to Edward Gieskes: "Greene's play stages a debate over

the *ends* of drama by representing a conflict between *kinds* of drama and the kinds are

signaled by reference to particular kinds of stagings. Neither side in the staged contest

emerges victorious—Bohan's asceticism is contaminated by Oberon's aestheticism

and vice versa—but what does emerge is a sense of the representational capabilities

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[253] Brian Walsh also explains that the play's self-conscious theatrical spectacle demonstrates drama's ability to reassert the "fact of the *present tense* [the audience members] occupy and in which they are witnessing, and participating in, a real-time even in the theater" ("Deep Prescience," 75). Unlike Cartwright, for Walsh, the brazen head's prophecy is particularly problematic in its return to the present moment, since "it leaves audiences with a haunting intimation of stasis rather than the hope of future strength for the English nation" (65). Despite this less favorable view of the automaton as a symbol for theater, Walsh suggests that the "heightened sense of being present in the theater helps to create a 'historical distance' effect for audiences" that allows them to envision alternatives to such menacing stasis (75).

[254] Cartwright, *Theatre and Humanism*, 240.

of the professional theatre."[255] Gieskes argues that Greene allows both Oberon's

visual spectacle and Bohan's "thesis-driven demonstration" to fail in the play in order

to "call attention to various conventions of playing."[256] The play is itself successful

despite—and as a result of—this "conjoined failure."[257] Greene does not allow one

kind of drama to win the "*dramatic* contest," instead emphasizing the "collaborative"

nature of drama.[258] Like *James IV*, the different modes of drama within *Friar Bacon*

and Friar Bungay generate productive, engaging conflict, as they inhabit a shared

space.

  Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay, which appeared after *James IV,* goes one step

further, suggesting that the theater of ideas represented by Bohan in *James IV* is

indeed superior to the luxuriant bombast of Oberon (or of Bacon's brass head), yet

such a theatre is reliant upon spectacle. *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay* acknowledges

that the extent to which theatre can perform wonders depends upon what at first

glance appear to be the more limited dramatic elements of spectacle. Though Greene

attacks acting, for instance, as a "mechanical labour" in *Francesco's Fortunes*, *Friar*

Bacon and Friar Bungay acknowledges the necessity of "mechanical" and

spectacular elements of drama in order to achieve such mysteries as inspiring love,

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[255] Edward Gieskes, "Staging Professionalism in Greene's *James IV,*" in *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer,* ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 53.

[256] Ibid., 69, 71.

[257] Ibid., 69.

[258] Ibid., 61.

sympathetic identification, and reconciliation.[259] Greene's play lodges a more powerful defense of drama than his *Francesco's Fortunes*. In the play, Greene suggests that the collaborative aspects of theatre are the sources of its emotional and aesthetic force. The play is a celebration of theatre as a multiform medium that is especially moving, and dramatically appealing, because of its composite form: drawing equally upon story and spectacle.

The brass head in the play hails from a vast array of literary and historical sources, and it commands a good deal of attention and dramatic force in the play. Much of the automaton's appeal comes from its resistance to stable signification; it acts as a sort of floating signifier in the world of the play because it draws from many diverse traditions and thus flirts with various symbolic associations. Greene lures readers and audiences in with the promise of the automaton's wonder and mystique, only to frustrate attempts at rendering the brazen head into something that is either meaningful or spectacularly fulfilling. As a result, the head is a sort of red herring, generating expectations of its dramatic purpose and effect only to demolish those very expectations. Like a good stage magician, Greene seems to say, "Look at this shiny object"; and while audiences wait expectantly for the shiny object to do something amazing, they realize they have been fooled into focusing on the wrong thing. Greene uses the brazen head as part of an elaborate stage trick, a sleight of hand in which he makes audiences think that it will be the most magically and dramatically fulfilling

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[259] Quoted in Kirk Melnikoff's article "'That will I see, lead and ile follow thee': Robert Green and the Authority of Performance," in *Writing Robert Greene: Essays on England's First Notorious Professional Writer,* ed. Kirk Melnikoff and Edward Gieskes (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2008), 48.

aspect of the play while ultimately demonstrating that the play's true magical and dramatic power lies elsewhere: in the power of drama to temper its observers by inspiring sympathy, mercy, and reconciliation. Like Sidney's brazen world made golden through poesy, Greene, in a form of theatrical alchemy, transmutes his brass head into dramatic gold—or even better into a living, oracular head. Greene displaces the failed technological magic of the brass head onto the more powerful natural magic of a living oracular head.

Greene's play is far too cynical—and comical—to offer such a suggestion about drama's powers in a straightforward way. Instead, the bulk of the play warns of drama's lapses: its impotency, its diabolism, its deceitfulness, its overreaching ambition, and its limitations. As a result, the suggestion that drama has mysterious powers to move its observers is tentative and requires the authority of Horace in the printed text to endorse it. Thus, the dominant message that audiences receive is Bacon's renunciation of magical spectacle: that "magic's mysteries misled" (xvi.36). This message might be reinscribed to read as a renunciation of spectacle, that "drama's mysteries misled." Yet it is hard to dispel the energy of the dramatic spectacle that Greene offers in the play and the cautious optimism that a well-wrought drama just might have the extraordinary power to move its observers.

Chapter 3: Boiled Brains, "Inward Pinches," and Alchemical Tempering in *The Tempest*

> "To play safe, I prefer to accept only one type of power: the power of art over trash,
> the triumph of magic over the brute."
> --Vladimir Nabokov

In Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Prospero is a conjuror who, with the aid of Ariel, magically creates a terrible and illusory storm and shipwreck as part of a plot to regain his dukedom. Presented before King James at his daughter's wedding celebration, this play deals with the tricky issues of power, magic, and theatricality. Shakespeare knew his audience; the king wrote both a famous treatise on magic called *Demonologie* in 1597 and a tract the following year advocating the divine right of kings, *The True Law of Free Monarchies* (1598). *The Tempest* depicts spectacular conjurations with wondrous effects in order to suggest that drama has the mysterious power to move and to reform its observers. Among other deeds, Prospero produces an imaginary shipwreck, conjures an illusory banquet, and stages a masque with gods as actors—ostensibly in order to reform his "audiences." In essence, he uses his magic to effect ethical transformation, thus demonstrating that magic and drama, as twinned forces, can be instrumental rather than merely representational. Some of his observers appear to sympathize, learn, and repent through their experiences of staged magic. Even further, Prospero himself appears to be transformed by his use of magic. *The Tempest* thus explicitly capitalizes on the permeability of the boundary between theater and magic. Barbara Mowat perhaps sums it up best when she explains that the

presence of multiple magical traditions influencing a single character gets right to the "questions the play poses about reality and illusion, about creativity and theatrical fakery, and about disturbing resemblances between the dramatist and the magician."[260] She does not, however, lay out for us just what those "disturbing resemblances" are or how they impact the structure or effect of the play. To explore some of these parallels between the magic of drama and of Prospero, this chapter argues that Prospero is not merely a conjuror but is also an alchemist figure whose *prima materia* is not mineral but is the other characters; he refines the dross substance of his base, flawed fellows through mystical transformation. As a result, *The Tempest* enacts what this chapter calls an "alchemical poetics" in its portrayals of magic and self-transformation.

This study invokes early magical texts to establish a sense of the historical and cultural experience of magic that shaped the expectations of theatergoers. Further, it performs a close reading of a magical, specifically alchemical, term, "temper," as it appears both in these texts and in the play. Tempering is an alchemical process whereby a material is refined and strengthened as a result of mixing it with something else. Focusing on the role of tempering in the play elucidates how Prospero effects transformations in characters, as well as how the play presents itself as transforming its audiences. The purpose of this analysis is to explore the interplay between the language and performances involved in both the world of alchemy and that of the popular theater. Finally, the chapter hypothesizes that the play deploys alchemical

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[260] Barbara A. Mowat, "Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* The Tempest*,* ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (New York: G.K. Hall & Co., 1998), 207.

discourse in order to showcase its own magically transformative abilities, as well as its limitations and its darker purposes. Ultimately, understanding the prevalence of alchemy in the play, particularly of alchemical tempering, sheds light upon the way that vengeance, forgiveness, and reconciliation work within the play's world. If, as this chapter proposes, such emotional and political renewal works like alchemical tempering, then the play suggests that ideas such as mercy and reconciliation traditionally understood as natural, human emotions draw upon both natural and magical forces. Generated by affect, not reason, forgiveness and restoration require magic and mystery, something that is both natural and occult, in that its operations are to an extent hidden or unexplainable. The play further argues that drama—both Prospero's and Ariel's magical spectacles within the world of the play and potentially the mysteriously-moving drama of the play itself—is a powerful and effective, though suspect, medium through which such hidden virtues may be manipulated and transmuted.

Much critical ink has been spilled on the historical and cultural influences of Shakespeare's Prospero. His roots have been traced variously to the Neo-Platonic magus,[261] the Romance wizard, the demonic necromancer, the juggler or servant of a street magician,[262] Ovid's Medea,[263] the natural philosopher,[264] and the monster-

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[261] See, for example, Frances Yates, *Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age* (Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); David Woodman, *White Magic and English Renaissance Drama* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1973); and Frank Kermode's introduction to *The Tempest* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1958).

[262] Mowat, "Prospero, Agrippa, and Hocus Pocus."

master of early modern-fairs.[265] Such approaches seek to identify the source and

quality of what Prospero calls his "potent art" and his "rough magic" (5.1.50).[266]

Many studies attempt to cast Prospero's magic as either benevolent or malevolent, as

in Kermode's careful distinction between *magia* (white magic) and *goetia* (black

magic). Much is at stake in determining the source of Prospero's "art," a term also

regularly employed by alchemists to describe their craft. The effect of Prospero's

magic on audiences and readers relies specifically upon just what kind of magic he

appears to them to be using. If, for example, his magic is identified as Hermetic white

magic, then interpreters might follow the path of critics such as David Woodman and

Frances Yates in determining that Prospero uses his power for utopian ends, to

regenerate and restore his fallen society through benevolent philosophical magic. If,

however, audiences view Prospero's magic as necromancy or as witchcraft (whether

historical or literary in bent), as do Stephen Orgel or Richard Strier,[267] Prospero

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[263] Most notably, Stephen Orgel in his introduction to *The Tempest* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

[264] See Patrick Grant, "The Magic of Charity: A Background to Prospero," *The Review of English Studies,* 27, no. 105 (February 1976): 1-16; B.J. Sokol, *A Brave New World of Knowledge: Shakespeare's* The Tempest *and Early Modern Epistemology* (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

[265] Mark Thornton Burnett, *Constructing 'Monsters' in Shakespearean Drama and Early Modern Culture* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002).

[266] William Shakespeare, "The Tempest" in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997). All references to "The Tempest" are cited from this edition.

[267] Richard Strier, "'I Am Power': Normal and Magical Politics in *The Tempest*," in *Writing and Political Engagement in Seventeenth-Century England*, ed. Derek Hirst and Richard Strier (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

becomes a self-interested and even malevolent character who acts out of vengeance for the purposes of punishment and / or power.

This study's exploration of Prospero's magic diverges from some of the well-trodden analogues; instead of delineating his origins in the magus, the necromancer, the wizard, or the natural philosopher, it reads Prospero as an alchemist. Of course, alchemy does not stand in isolation from these other fields; the works of John Dee and Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa, for example, fall into several of these categories: natural philosophy and Neo-Platonism, in addition to alchemy. Indeed, alchemy is a useful lens through which to view the play *because* it straddles several magical and proto-scientific fields. The plethora of vastly different interpretations of Prospero's magic arises in part because it is an intermediate force, one that is ambiguous and one that draws upon multiple sources. As a result, a clearer picture of his magic might emerge when viewed through the lens of an equally intermediate endeavor such as alchemy. Thus, rather than following the familiar path of reading the magic of *The Tempest* as a response to the necromantic magic of Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, this chapter traces the path of influence from Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist,* which decries the charlatanism of false alchemists.

There are many explicit and implicit references to alchemy in the play, including Ariel's song to Ferdinand about his father undergoing an underwater mineral transformation:

> Full fathom five thy father lies;
>
> Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes:

Nothing of him that doth fade

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange. (1.2.396-402)

In this song, Ariel describes Alonso's body as turning into precious stones and becoming "rich and strange" in the process; just as alchemy transforms base metals into gold. Further, alchemical trials are often accompanied by music, and *The Tempest* is certainly the most musical of Shakespeare's plays. The play also features a mystical wedding celebration, and a centerpiece of the alchemical magnum opus is the chemical wedding, the joining of female and male principles. Why would Prospero want Ferdinand and Caliban to gather all that wood if not to fuel his alchemical furnace? Finally, at the end of the play, when Alonso describes its events—"This is as strange a maze as e'er men trod, / And there is in this business more than nature / Was ever conduct of" (5.1.242-4)—he invokes a term, maze, which hails directly from the alchemical lexicon; the alchemist's attempt at transmutation is often described as a *labyrinth*.

Alchemy takes many forms in early modern England, from the charlatan alchemist performing tricks in the markets to the hermetic philosopher pursuing transformation of the soul and of society. Early modern alchemists might be Paracelsian pharmaceutical healers or craftsmen creating dyes or performing metallurgy. Early modern women's kitchens often doubled as alchemical laboratories in which they distilled healing waters and mixed mineral concoctions for preserving

health.[268] Some early modern people found in alchemy the promise of restoration and healing, and others found it to be merely a trick used to cozen people out of money. And, of course, there was the strictly materialist view of alchemy as a means of turning base minerals into gold. Alchemy is therefore defined variously according to the particular practitioner. In his famous "The Mirror of Alchemy," Roger Bacon—a much-cited thirteenth-century English alchemist, scientist, and friar, and the subject of Robert Greene's play, *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*—defines alchemy in such a way as to capture several of these seemingly divergent views: "Alchemy therefore is a science teaching how to make and compound a certain medicine, which is called Elixir, the which when it is cast upon metals or imperfect bodies, does fully perfect them in the very projection."[269] In this definition, Bacon describes alchemy as natural philosophy or a way of knowing ("science"), as medical, and as *chrysopoetic* (turning metal into gold). This passage demonstrates that a single alchemical treatise can offer several different, though related, purposes. The overlaying of multiple goals and approaches within a single field makes alchemy a complex and at times suspect endeavor in the early modern world. Alchemy in the play thus suits Prospero's magic quite well. It can fit into the white magic model outlined by several critics: healing, restorative, transformative, and spiritually regenerative. Or it can equally apply to the

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[268] For more on the widespread presence of household, practical, and craft alchemy, see Bruce Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*: *Alchemy, Chemistry, and the Scientific Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005). For more alchemy as an artisanal tradition, see Pamela H. Smith's *The Body of the Artisan: Art and Experience in the Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[269] Roger Bacon, *The mirror of alchimy, composed by the thrice-famous and learned fryer, Roger Bachon, sometimes fellow of Martin Colledge,* (London, 1597), Early English Books Online, A3r.

black magic interpretation of Prospero's magic; alchemy can be a self-serving, greedy, materialist pursuit. Finally, alchemy, like Prospero's magic, might be viewed as mere charlatanism.

As with alchemy, Prospero's deeds and motives are not entirely straightforward. Deemed heretical by some, the practice of alchemy was mocked by others as ineffectual. For this reason, alchemy is as an apt symbol of dramatic art. Both are suspect endeavors that promise the possibility—and threat—of transformative power. Early modern anti-magical debates strikingly echo the antitheatrical ones. For instance, the complaints lodged against alchemy charge that it is at best heretical and at worst demonic. Like drama, alchemy was decried for its charlatanism, for cozening innocent people with false illusions and expectations. Bringing together theater and alchemy and debuting slightly earlier than *The Tempest*, Ben Jonson's *The Alchemist* takes this approach toward alchemy, representing a false alchemist who manipulates others by offering empty promises of transformation. The ambiguities of Prospero's alchemy—perhaps best signified by the mysterious nature of his book—suggest that the sources of dramatic power are vexed and even dangerous. Even as this ambiguity would clearly be problematic for antitheatrical critics and general audiences, *The Tempest* revels in the dramatic force and the possibilities inherent in such ambivalence and uncertainty. The play therefore posits that drama and magic have the power to enchant, charm, and move; yet they can draw on dubious forces to do so. As a result, the effects of drama's magical transformations remain questionable, even for modern readers of the play who continue to grapple with the problem of Prospero's magic.

Many critics recognize that the sources, motivations, methods, and effects of Prospero's magic are complicated. Several studies attend to this complexity in nuanced ways; for example, Patrick Grant's argument that Prospero is a symbol of both John Dee—Queen Elizabeth's physician, astrologer, and an angel conjuror—and Francis Bacon—the pioneer of the scientific method. As a result, the play both glorifies white magic while simultaneously demonstrating its limits. In another persuasive account of Prospero's magic, B.J. Sokol contends that although Prospero's magical spectacles produce wonder, a competing thread in the play diminishes wonder and reduces the mystery of magic. As a result, Sokol suggests, the play captures conflicting contemporary attitudes toward magic and natural philosophy in order to challenge the authority of *each* of these competing epistemologies. Studies such as Sokol's and Grant's reveal that for both modern and early modern audiences, the magic in *The Tempest* is ambiguous and ambivalent, drawing upon multiple valences to produce its effects. In addition to these historically informed analyses of the sources and qualities of Prospero's art is a long-developing strand of criticism about Prospero's art as a symbol of the playwright's art. Although many critics have noted this link, Alvin Kernan and Elissa Hare are among the first to generate sustained interpretations of the relationship between Prospero's magic and stage magic.[270] John S. Mebane suggests that Prospero's dramatic and magical art is so

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[270] For Kernan, Shakespeare's Prospero epitomizes the perils and promises of the artist: able to create artifacts that are pleasing and compelling, but also fleeting and illusory. (Alvin Kernan, *The Playwright as Magician: Shakespeare's Image of the Poet in the English Public Theatre* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979], 3); Elissa Hare aptly describes this relationship, stating, "Magic, in short, works like the dramatist's imagination to amend nature," further contending that the limited power of Prospero's magic yields to the limitless power of dramatic art and imagination:

powerful that it "brings nature into conformity with providence."[271] In other words,

Mebane contends that Prospero's magic has the impressive ability to restore order to

his world and even the Golden Age to his world. Similarly, A. Lynne Magnusson

agrees that *The Tempest* lays bare the desire expressed by art to create more order and

coherence than exists in the world—but Magnusson dismisses this lofty goal, arguing

that the play suggests ultimately that it is an impossible ideal.[272]

Many commentators on *The Tempest* allow that its magic is a *symbol* of

dramatic art, yet few entertain the possibility that the play might have itself appeared

to be *performing* a kind of magic. To fill this gap, this study demonstrates that

Shakespeare draws upon contemporary forms of magic, in particular alchemy, to

suggest that theater can be instrumental rather than merely representational—that it

can produce effects that mysteriously exceed its material causes. While this claim

appears to be radical, for early modern people, literature and rhetoric were perceived

as having magical or quasi-magical effects. John Ward, for example, suggests that

rhetoric could be viewed as a form of magic in its ability to control others.[273] Kent

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"The renunciation of magic draws us into the world of the play, and empowers our imagination to reach beyond what we know, and to discover our better selves" (*Enchanted Shows Vision and Structure in Elizabethan and Shakespearean Comedy about Magic* [New York: Garland Publishers, 1988], 141).

[271] John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age: The Occult Tradition and Marlowe, Jonson, and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 196.

[272] A. Lynne Magnusson, "Interruption in The Tempest," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 37 (1986): 52-65.

[273] John Ward, "Magic and Rhetoric From Antiquity to the Renaissance: Some Ruminations," *Rhetorica* 6, no. 1 (1988): 65-67.

Cartwright also argues for a kind of word magic in *The Comedy of Errors*: "words and thoughts in *The Comedy of Errors* unexpectedly acquire a certain magical agency and that the magical and the fantastical also acquire a certain potential for truth."[274] Similarly, in illustrating the effects of reading on the early modern passions, Katharine Craik cites Plutarch: "Poems 'worke strange events' in the imagination, exercising a form of conjuring which catches inexperienced readers off-guard, and constant vigilance is necessary to circumvent their dangerous tendency to stimulate, agitate or intoxicate young men from the outside in."[275] Craik builds upon this claim to suggest that many early modern people believed that reading could magically transform people, even without their knowledge.

For early modern theatergoers, this effect was even stronger than for readers, according to Cynthia Marshall. She invokes William Prynne's *Histriomatrix* (1633) to show how early modern people viewed audience members as vulnerable to the infectiousness of spectacle.[276] Indeed, the body was a site that could be disrupted by spectacle because of the physical nature of the humoral passions. Marshall contends that theater activated or stirred up the link between the higher rational soul-linked self and the appetitive physical self that was often associated with the lower body. As a result, anti-theatricalists worried about theater's ability to enable audiences to "experience an upheaval of the psychic organization through the working of extreme

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[274] Kent Cartwright, "Language, Magic, the Dromios, and The Comedy of Errors," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2007): 331.

[275] Katharine A. Craik, *Reading Sensations in Early Modern England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 2.

[276] Cynthia Marshall, "Bodies in the Audience," *Shakespeare Studies* 29 (2001): 51-7.

emotion."[277] While Marshall does not explicitly label such physical transformation as magical, her references to "psychic organization" and the "higher rational soul" suggest that theater worked within Neo-Platonic philosophy, which was heavily associated with natural magic.[278] Early modern literary theorists also often described literature of all stripes, and drama in particular, as having magical or quasi-magical effects. Even Sidney, who famously denies the magic of poesy when he says, "The Poet never maketh any circles about your imagination, to conjure you to believe for true, what he writes," describes the effects of poesy in an alchemical way.[279] He identifies what poesy does as "The purifying of wit." Learning through poesy is thus an alchemical, Neo-Platonic process: "the final end is to lead and draw us to as high a perfection as our degenerate souls, made worse by their clayey lodgings, can be capable of." Purification through the purging of "clayey lodgings" in order to reach a higher "perfection" is a notion at the heart of philosophical alchemical treatises, particularly those inflected by Neo-Platonic thinking. According to Sidney, poesy leads us "to know, and by knowledge to lift up the mind from the dungeon of the body to the enjoying his own divine essence."[280] In alchemy, the word "dungeon"

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[277] Ibid., 53.

[278] John S. Mebane also explicitly acknowledges *The Tempest's* magically performative power, when he argues: "Prospero's magic is a theatrical art, which Shakespeare sees as analogous to magic not only in that it creates visions, but also in that it strives to effect moral and spiritual reform" (*Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age* ,180). Mebane's assertion is problematic, however, in that he neglects the darker side of Prospero's magical and dramatic arts.

[279] Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," in *Sir Philip Sidney: The Major Works*, ed. Katharine Duncan-Jones (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 235.

[280] Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," 219.

(related to terms such as "cell" or "prison") describes the base state of matter before it is transmuted or the vessel in which the transformation takes place. Poesy, then, is like an alchemical alembic in which material transformations occur. The goal of poesy is to purify the soul and the wit, in other words to temper them, in order to create self-knowledge. Poesy thus has a mysterious, hidden force that can transform people. Indeed, Sidney's discussion of *energeia* and of poesy's ability to move people borders on the magical if it is not explicitly occult in character.

This study is not the first to recognize the influence of alchemy on theater. Perhaps most famous of the works that bring together theater and alchemy, with a specific discussion of *The Tempest*, is Artaud's *The Theater and Its Double*.[281] In a chapter titled, "The Alchemical Theater" Artaud famously argues:

> There is a mysterious identity of essence between the principle of theater and that of alchemy. For like alchemy, the theater, considered from the point of view of its deepest principle, is developed from a certain number of fundamentals which are the same for all the arts and which aim on the spiritual and imaginary level at an efficacity analogous to the process which in the physical world actually turns all matter into gold.[282]

Artaud understands both theater and alchemy as aiming for a kind of instrumentality; both fields transform things on a "spiritual and imaginary level." He extends this analogy further, when he contends: "But there is a still deeper resemblance between

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[281] Antonin Artaud, *The Theater and Its Double* (New York: Grove Press, 1958).

[282] Ibid., 48.

the theater and alchemy, one which leads much further metaphysically. It is that alchemy and the theater are so to speak virtual arts, and do not carry their end—or their reality—within themselves."[283] In this sense, both alchemy and theater are the "Double" of another reality. He distinguishes between theater and alchemy in that alchemy is merely the Double of a "direct, everyday reality…as empty as it is sugarcoated," whereas theater is a higher art that is the Double of "another archetypal and dangerous reality."[284] Artaud posits a split between the material world and the metaphysical or philosophical world. He suggests that theater and alchemy use the material world to symbolize this philosophical one, and they are thus "virtual" in this way, explaining, "All true alchemists know that the alchemical symbol is a mirage as the theater is a mirage." Thus, both theater and alchemy have a "*virtual reality*."[285] For many early modern plays and playgoers, however, theater and alchemy were not merely virtual worlds; rather, they both often positioned themselves as truly instrumental. Not always just mimetic or symbolic, theater and alchemy suggested the possibility of actual transformation in the material *and* metaphysical worlds.

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[283] Ibid., 48.

[284] Ibid., 48.

[285] Ibid., 49. While Artaud's argument is energetic and often compelling, there are limitations to this kind of archetypical reading of alchemy (and of theater). His argument assumes a divide between the mind and the body—as much performance and theater theory does. The existence of a "Double" relies upon the belief that we are divided creatures, but this is a post-Cartesian way of thinking. It does not apply wholly to early modern theater in which the divisions between the symbol and the thing, or the mind and the body, were far more fluid. I wish to argue instead that early modern theater at least at times presented itself as more than a Double, or rather as both a Double *and* something efficacious.

Artaud blames Shakespeare for the decline of Western theater, for leaving behind this powerful alchemical theater with its transformative powers: "Shakespeare himself is responsible for this aberration and decline, this disinterested idea of the theater which wishes a theatrical performance to leave the public intact, without setting off one image that will shake the organism to its foundations and leave an ineffaceable scar."[286] My reading of alchemy in *The Tempest* suggests the contrary: that Shakespeare (and other early English dramatists) did indeed invoke powerful, magical, or quasi-magical forces in their work, and that they claimed to have the power to move people in mysterious ways and to transform them. The "*theater of cruelty*" that Artaud proposes as a remedy for the demise of "true theater" can be found in the figure of Prospero, for instance.[287] Such a theater of cruelty can lead, according to Artaud, to the healing of Western culture by helping us recover "within ourselves those energies which ultimately create order and increase the value of life."[288] This kind of theater reminds people of their connection to the physical and metaphysical worlds: "Those who have forgotten the communicative power and magical mimesis of a gesture, the theater can reinstruct, because a gesture carries its energy with it, and there are still human beings in the theater to manifest the force of the gesture made."[289] In his theater of cruelty, Artaud will essentially perform an alchemical operation, though he does not say so in such explicit fashion. Instead he

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[286] Ibid., 76-7.

[287] Ibid., 79.

[288] Ibid., 80.

[289] Ibid., 81.

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"propose[s] to treat the spectators like the snake charmer's subjects and conduct them *by means of their organisms* to an apprehension of the subtlest notions."[290] Prospero's charmed circle refining his persecutors through torture—especially wracking them with guilt and "inward pinches"—might be a predecessor of Artaud's theater of cruelty, "in which violent physical images crush and hypnotize the sensibility of the spectator seized by the theater as by a whirlwind of higher forces."[291]

In addition to these theoretical versions of how alchemy and theater are analogous, a tradition of historical readings explores the relationship between the two. France Yates points out that Frank Kermode, for example, noted the influences of Agrippa's alchemical magic in the play when she made a connection between Prospero and John Dee, Elizabeth's court physician and astrologer who was also a practicing alchemist.[292] In her oft-cited *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, Yates argues that Prospero is a good magus who uses his power for utopian ends, and she points out that name "Ariel" is mentioned in Agrippa's work.[293] Arlene

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[290] Ibid., 81.

[291] Ibid., 83. Other critics have followed Artaud in his analysis of alchemy and theater, including Bettina Knapp, who takes as her starting point Artaud's opening line (*Theatre and Alchemy* [Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980]). Like Artaud, Knapp argues for a theater of change, suggesting that theater and alchemy can redeem humanity. In another vein, Noel Cobb offers another Jungian reading of alchemy in *The Tempest*, arguing that the alchemical symbols in the play reveal sites of psychic disturbance, in particular the ways in which the absence of the feminine principle causes turbulence in the world of the play (*Prospero's Island: the Secret Alchemy at the Heart of* The Tempest [London: Coventure Ltd., 1990]).

[292] Yates, *The Occult Philosophy,*188. This comparison between Dee and Prospero becomes even more likely when considering that Dee's main intermediary angel was named, "Uriel," whose similarity to "Ariel" is striking.

[293] Ibid., 187.

Oseman also argues that Prospero is like a good alchemist who uses his magic for benevolent ends.[294] In particular, she claims that alchemy can be seen as way to produce knowledge, especially self-knowledge; thus, she sees Prospero as an alchemist who causes knowledge in others and in himself. William R. Newman traces the ways in which alchemy positioned itself as a direct competitor with the arts; early practitioners of alchemy claimed that since it was a perfective art, it was therefore superior to the merely mimetic ones. According to Newman, alchemy aligned itself more with medicine in its healing capabilities. Early alchemists viewed alchemy as "providing the means by which nature itself can pass from an imperfect state to a regenerate one."[295] *The Tempest* surely acts as a response against this claim, positing instead that theater, like alchemy, can also be a "perfective art" in its ability to regenerate and to heal.[296]

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[294] Arlene Oseman, "Going Round in Circles with Jonson and Shakespeare," *Shakespeare in Southern Africa* 15 (2003): 71-82. Oseman goes so far as to suggest that Shakespeare sees his art as alchemically redemptive: "Both the process of transformation from a dream world to real life, or from possibility to realisation, and the process of soulish awakening, or metamorphosis from ignorance to knowledge, may be seen symbolically as a consequence of the "alchemy" in which both Shakespeare and Prospero are engaged. Unlike Jonson, who seems preoccupied with the corrective potential of drama but who achieves only limited transformation in both characters and audience, Shakespeare appears to exemplify the alchemical working of 'rectification', which is "a reiterated Distillation to perfection" (Du Chesne unpaginated)" (80).

[295] William Newman, *Promethean Ambitions: Alchemy and the Quest to Perfect Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 29.

[296] As with Yates and Oseman, Patrick Grant sees in John Dee a likely source for Prospero, and he also relates the early modern theater to alchemy. He points out that Inigo Jones, stage designer of Jonson's masques, was influenced by Vitruvius, who was reintroduced to England by John Dee. Like Yates and Oseman, Grant claims that Shakespeare "presents Prospero as a Hermetic magus, but the play acknowledges the

Deborah Harkness, a historian of science, has also explored the link between alchemy (specifically the alchemy of John Dee) and theater, reversing the direction of influence.[297] She offers an analysis of the theatricality of John Dee's rituals, in particular of his conversations with angels, which are inflected with his alchemical philosophy. Her goal is to make sense of these spectacular, occult, seemingly irrational practices in light of Dee's other interests in mathematics, logic, and medicine. She wishes to show how an otherwise rational man might have had such an elaborate and strange occult experience; as with many historians of science, she attempts to rationalize early modern magical practices according to post-Enlightenment scientific values. Since there are striking parallels between the angel conversations and early modern theatrical conventions, Dee's angel conversations were a "type of private theater" and as a "dramatization of Dee's interest in the power of alchemy to materially and spiritually transform the world."[298] She argues that Edward Kelley, Dee's sometime friend, staged these performances and that Dee was like an active audience member. While Harkness's attempt to explain away Dee's occult experiences is problematic, she paints a vivid and compelling picture of the connections between Dee's alchemical and magical practices and the early modern theater. In the figure of John Dee, clearly an influence for the character of Prospero,

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human hazards and characteristic illusions of this type of personality" ("The Magic of Charity," 10).

[297] Deborah Harkness, "Shows in the Showstone: A Theater of Alchemy and Apocalypse in the Angel Conversations of John Dee (1527-1608/9)," *Renaissance Quarterly* 49, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 707-737.

[298] Ibid., 709.

we can identify some of the exciting possibilities in considering the ways in which alchemy, theater, and magic—more broadly construed—work together in the play.

Peggy Simonds most explicitly articulates the relationships between alchemy and theater in *The Tempest* itself:

> Prospero is an alchemist as well as a magician, that his goal in *The Tempest* is to restore the Golden Age or, in terms of the future, to create a 'brave new world' by perfecting the people, including himself, who will live in it, and that the art or science of alchemy thus provides a major shaping pattern for the tragicomedy as a whole.[299]

Like Mebane, Yates, and others, Simonds sees Prospero's alchemy as healing and restorative, claiming that Prospero recognizes that

> his Opus magnum has preserved the ship and all its crew, has restored the reborn alchemical king in a purified form to his son and the reborn son to the grieving father, as well as perfecting Antonio and Sebastian who could not have withstood the corrosive boiling of their brains without inner change, and has gently led Ferdinand and Miranda to their projected chemical wedding. Finally, he has regained his own lost dukedom and a second chance at good government.[300]

While the play does seem to invoke alchemy to restore order within its world, this unabashedly positive reading of Prospero's intentions and methods has limitations.

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[299] Peggy Munoz Simonds, "'My Charms Crack Not': The Alchemical Structure of *The Tempest*," *Comparative Drama* 31, no. 4 (Winter 1997/1998): 541-2.

[300] Ibid., 553.

For, like alchemy, Prospero's deeds and motives are not entirely clear. He is

motivated in part by revenge, and he is cruelly manipulative at times. Further, the

effects of Prospero's magic are not clear in every instance; for example, as many

critics have pointed out, Antonio never responds to Prospero's accusation. And are

audiences expected to believe the most surprising of all transformations, that Caliban,

who calls himself a fool in his last lines, is really going to be "wise hereafter"?

Finally, what has Prospero learned about how to rule? Will he really drown his book?

Is he seeking revenge rather than repentance? Does he abuse his powers by torturing

Ariel and Caliban, tormenting Ferdinand and Miranda, or teasing Alonso? Simonds

contributes much to an understanding of the alchemical patterns and symbols in the

play, yet her emphasis on Prospero's benevolence limits its scope. In addition to

grappling with the less than savory elements of Prospero's magic, this study maps a

metatheatrical layer onto an analysis of alchemy in the structure of the play. Such an

investigation of alchemy brings together these diverse strands of criticism to reflect

the historical, aesthetic, and metatheatrical implications of alchemy within the play.

Discussing alchemy is problematic because of its scope, its complexity, and

its varying forms and practices. In order to limit the scope of this analysis, this study

focuses on a specific alchemical trope: tempering and temperance. The Latin root of

temper, *temperāre*, means "to mingle in due proportion…to arrange or keep in due

measure or proportion, to keep within limits, to regulate, rule."[301] Simon Forman, a

physician and alchemist—who notably treated Mrs. Mountjoy, Shakespeare's

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[301] Or "To bring (anything) to a proper or suitable condition, state, or quality, by
mingling with something else; to qualify, alloy, or dilute by such mixture or
combination." *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "temper, v."

landlady, and kept a still-extant journal of attendance at four of Shakespeare's

plays)—composed a seventeenth-century alchemical poem, "Of the Division of

Chaos," which compares alchemical creation to the creation of the world. Forman's

poem features a kind of alchemical tempering that involves mingling in "due

proportion": "If these four elements do work in the fire, / To engender and bring forth

some creature, / As the Salamander, ever living therein, / You must conceive well of

his commixtion, / Which is by Nature and elements tempered so well, / That he

delights as gold in the fire to dwell."[302] In this poem, tempering is the appropriate and

natural mixture of elements that creates a "Salamander" or a fire elemental.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* offers another definition: "to bring into a good

or desirable state of body or health; to cure, heal, refresh."[303] A text on alchemy

ascribed to Ficino includes this definition of tempering:

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[302] Bodleian Library Oxford, MS Ashmole 240, transcribed Adam McLean, accessed September 2011 <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/forman_chaos.html>.

[303] Although this chapter does not have the space to discuss another important root of "temper," I am interested in the connections between tempering and its root *tempus*, or time. Sokol, for instance, points out that "the single Latin word *tempestas* denotes both weather and time" (*A Brave New World of Knowledge*, 142). The play draws explicit attention to time's passage; indeed, as many critics recognize, *The Tempest* is nearly the only Shakespearean plays to run in (almost) real time or to follow the unity of time. Analogously, alchemy's ultimate goal is, in a sense, to control time by speeding up the natural processes of the elements. Also relevant is another 15th-century definition of "temper," which is to "tune, adjust the pitch of (a musical instrument)." Simonds mentions the relationship between alchemy and music, but she does not fully elaborate upon the ways in which the two work together in the play. She does note that one of the roles of music in the magnum opus is that "music is particularly required to calm the fancy of the adept himself, who often suffered vexations from the effects of mercurial fumes in his laboratory" ("My Charms Crack Not," 551). Thus, music tempers the alchemical practitioner as he attempts to create the philosopher's stone.

If so be you should take in victuals or in drink the weight of a grain of

mustard seed [of the philosopher's stone], it by its celestial vigor

would preserve in an equality the oil and fire of life, and would temper

and tie together the elements of your body in peace. Which being

tempered, the soul would abide with the elements and man would

remain always sound, until that end which the omnipotent God has

ordained by reason of the disobedience of our first parent. There was

in Christ's body so great an affinity, and so great a binding together of

the elements, because he was liable to sin, as also by reason of the

wonderful union of the divine essence, that he had never died

naturally, had he not for the sake of redeeming, man willingly desired

death.[304]

When ingested, the philosopher's stone—that elusive product of the alchemical

process that can transform other materials (generally into gold) by touching them—

tempers or moderates the body of man, healing him. Such tempering via the

philosopher's stone even unites the soul to the body, making it "sound" until death.

Christ's body was always in such a state of temperance, in that all of its elements

were bound together in an "affinity." Tempering thus involves purification,

combination, moderation, and regulation, issues that *The Tempest* is especially

interested in exploring.

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[304] Ficino, "An unknown concerning the Chymicall Art. But Lucerna Salis affirms him to be Marcilius Ficinus, an Italian of the Dukedome of Florence or Tuscany, in the year 1518," Ms. Sloane 3638, item 7, Transcribed by Justin von Budjoss, accessed September 2011 <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/ficino.html>.

Significantly, *tempest* likely shares the root *tempus* with *temper*. To temper

something requires agitating it or exposing it to extreme elements, just as we see in a

definition of "tempest": **"**To disturb violently (a person, the mind)."[305] As Mebane

and Simonds point out, a tempest is an alchemical "boiling process which removes

impurities from base metal and facilitates its transmutation into gold"; [306] in its

removal of impurities as preparation for transformation, this process is clearly related

to tempering. And of course, both temper and tempest are relatives of temperance, a

virtue that drama was regularly admonished for *not* possessing. As if to combat this

bad reputation, in *The Tempest*, two of the antagonists, Adrian and Antonio, mock the

virtue of temperance while deriding Gonzalo's utopian vision of the island, saying,

" [The island] must needs be of subtle, tender, and delicate temperance." Antonio

retorts, sarcastically, "Temperance was a delicate wench." One of the most deplorable

characters in the play speaks out against temperance, suggesting that temperance is

actually a virtue in the world of the play.

The virtue of temperance, in both its physical and metaphysical

manifestations, appears frequently in alchemical texts. The sixteenth-century

alchemical treatise, *Rosarium Philosophorum,* for example, describes the effect of an

alchemical mixture on animals and humans as bringing them into temperance: "Note

likewise, that the Salt of metals transmuteth Mercury into true Sol and Luna and thus

the Salt of Animals transmuteth every animal into true temperance and a good

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[305] *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, s.v. "tempest, n."

[306] Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 181.

complexion."[307] Similarly, gold is valuable to alchemists not simply because of its

material worth, but also because it is temperate or well-proportioned, as evidenced in

the text ascribed to Ficino mentioned above: "gold is the most temperate body, having

equal parts of hot, cold, moist and dry." The philosopher's stone, too, is valuable

because it is temperate; the same text reveals, "But Jupiter whom the physicians call

the patron of life, has infused into it temperance and an equality of the elements."

Temperance here means proportion and balance. Finally, many alchemical texts offer

purification rituals for the alchemists, as well as admonitions for them to be temperate

in their souls and bodies. Temperance, then, is a desirable trait in alchemical

materials, processes, and practitioners.

    This play deploys the many valences of *temper* in order to demonstrate the

powers and limitations of Prospero's and—by extension—theater's magic.[308] Indeed,

Prospero's opening gambit of conjuring the tempest demonstrates his power to

"disturb violently" not only the elements, but also the minds of the Neapolitans. His

stated goal is to demonstrate to them that once again he is capable of "temporal

royalties" (1.2.110). The word "temporal" also appears in alchemical texts. In

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[307] MS Ferguson 210, transcription by Adam McLean, accessed September 2011
<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rosary0.html>.

[308] Just as *temperance* and its variant forms appear regularly in alchemical treatises,
they also appear in many of Shakespeare's works. *The Tempest* does have a higher
concentration of these words than many of his plays, only matched by *I Henry IV* and
2 Henry IV, Romeo and Juliet, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Like *The Tempest*, each of
these plays deals with the challenges and necessities of moderation. For the *Henry*
plays, the issue of temperance specifically relates to right rule, as with *The Tempest's*
consideration of Alonso's, Antonio's, and Prospero's ability and right to lead. In the
other plays, temperance is linked more with desire and love, as we see in the
Miranda-Ferdinand subplot of *The Tempest*.

particular, a recipe ascribed to thirteenth-century alchemist, Johannes Trithemius, describes how to create "Two eternall unquenchable burning temporall lights."[309] Here, the alchemist is interested in creating something "temporall," or existing in this moment, that will magically last eternally: an eternal flame. Prospero's use of "temporal" here seems to mean something like "of the contemporary moment," or "of this time"; in other words, Prospero argues that rather than hiding himself away from the mundane duties of dukedom in favor of eternal or supernatural pursuits (such as, perhaps, creating an eternal flame), he is ready to take on the challenges of his particular moment. With its acoustic echo of "temper," "temporal" captures the many layers of Prospero's magical and political ambitions, including his desire to leave his esoteric studies and his island imprisonment for worldly pursuits by proving his ability to manage his dukedom. This phrase further suggests that he plans to temper the conspirators by purifying them and thus restoring them to their prescribed roles.

The idea of teaching a ruler (and therefore other leaders) how to be temperate through alchemical discourse is not original with Shakespeare's Prospero. George Ripley's fifteenth-century *The Compound of Alchemy*, for instance, includes an epistle dedicated to King Edward IV. Written in rhyme royal, this poem avers that the king can learn the secrets of alchemy only if he is temperate in mind and body. Ripley advises the king:

> The principall secret of secrets all,
>
> Is true proportion which may not be behinde,

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[309] MS. Ashmole 1408 p. 239-243, transcribed Adam McLean, accessed September 2011 <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/everbrn.html>.

> Wherein I counsel thee be not superficiall,
>
> The true conclusion if you thinke to finde,
>
> Turne earth into water and water into winde,
>
> Therefore make fire and beware of the flood
>
> Of *Noah*, wherein many men are so blinde,
>
> That by this science they get little good.[310]

Through "true proportion," which Ripley calls "temperance" later in the poem, the king may learn to transform the elements. This poem even warns the ruler to "beware the flood," by which he means in this case both the biblical flood of Noah and an overabundance of liquid in the alchemical process, which can ruin its efficacy. Just as Prospero's watery tempest indicates and punishes the intemperance of Alonso, Antonio, and their confederates, Ripley's alchemical flood stands as a warning to the king to be temperate.

But just how does Prospero's (and the play's) tempering work? Prospero's means of re-establishing control over his subjects is by directing Ariel to conjure theatrical illusions that disturb their minds and thereby promotes self-discovery. Their awareness of their guilt then leads to purification and repentance. Prospero's version of temperance includes achieving moderation, equality, and fitness through emotional purgation. Thus, Prospero combines conjury and alchemy in order to attempt ethical transformation of others. There are precedents for this pairing in conjuring manuals. The invocations of *The Sworn Book of Honorius*, a notorious manuscript of magic

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[310] Stanton Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 145.

popular in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries features an angel notably named

"Aryeil": "Temper most gentle Lord both my soul and tongue to have that glorious

vision by thy glorious and ineffable names."[311] Tempering here is a means of spiritual

purgation and transformation. As with other late medieval and early modern books of

ritual magic, *The Sworn Book* is quite concerned with the purification of the

practitioner; one invocation requests of God, "Put forth thy hand, and touch both my

soul and body, and make it clean as a new scoured sword";[312] another commands,

"Purify me for in thee do I put myself to be purified. Clarify me, for in thee do I put

myself to be clarified. Make me clean, for in thee do I put myself to be cleansed."[313]

After such purgation, the practitioner can receive knowledge of God; he "may see thy

divine majesty face to face."[314] Tempering is a form of purification in this text,

opening the practitioner to the possibility of knowledge and of direct contact with

God.

While generally classified as a book of ritual magic, a grimoire,[315] *The Sworn*

Book also draws upon alchemical language and processes in its conjurations; for

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[311] Because these manuscript texts are rare, I cite from a wonderful online archive of magical texts, *Twilit Grotto: Archives of Western Esoterica*, *Liber Juratus Honorii or The Sworne Booke of Honorius*, ed, Joseph H. Peterson (2009), <http://www.esotericarchives.com/juratus/juratus.htm>.

[312] Ibid.

[313] Ibid.

[314] Ibid.

[315] As in, for example, Frank Klaassen, "English Manuscripts of Magic, 1300-1500: A Preliminary Survey," in *Conjuring Spirits: Texts and Traditions of Medieval Ritual Magic*, ed. Claire Fanger (Stroud: Sutton Publishing, 1998), 3-31.

example, it conjures God to "wash [the practitioner] with the dew of thy grace with the which thou hast [moistened] the angels." Sentences following the appeal further associate conjury and alchemy with a tempestuous flooding, calling upon God to:

> Adorn me with the abundance of thine innocence, with the which thou hast adorned and beautified thy faithfull from the beginning, that the gifts of the seven-fold grace of the Holy Ghost may work in me, and the waters of the celestial floods of the celestial Jerusalem, coming with great vehemence may wash and fill the pit (i.e. well) of my conscience, that it may overflow with the brightness wherewith thou comest out of Heaven upon the waters of the holy and pure sacrament of the majesty and confirm in me the mighty things of this most holy vision.[316]

In this passage, the practitioner requests to be tempered and purged of guilt through the flooding of the conscience. The imagery is, of course, baptismal, drawing attention to the power of remorse, repentance, and mercy. Indeed, after an even longer section of invocations desiring God to purify (or temper) the practitioner, *The Sworn Book* calls for a ritual self-baptism.

Finally, after *The Sworn Book* conjures a baptismal, alchemical tempest, it includes an invocation that drives tempests away: the prayer of the "names of the living God," which

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[316] Ibid.

ought to be said in all perils and dangers, for it keepeth men in health,

it maketh sick men whole, it doth obtain remission of sins, it pacifieth

anger, and increaseth friendship, it comforteth desperate persons, it

cherisheth the poor, it mitigateth the wrath of God, it overcometh all

tribulations and perversities, it driveth away tempests, it doth frustrate

enchantments, it doth constrain and bind spirits. And it ought to be

said fasting and kneeling, and with great devotions, and he that shall

work by it must be humble patient and chaste.[317]

This prayer is restorative and healing; once tempered, the practitioner can cast prayer-like spells that drive away tempests and stop enchantments. Tempests in *The Sworn Book* are both the means of tempering and that which must be tempered. The *Tempest* also features stormy waters and a flood as a spur for purging guilt.

The language of reconciliation effected by conjury appears as well in the grimoire *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, which circulated widely in sixteenth and seventeenth-century England. In describing the spirits that the practitioner might invoke, the text explains:

But if his genius[318] be ayeriall [aerial] he reconcileth mens natures

Increaseth love and affection between them causeth the deserved

favour of kings and princes & secretly promoteth marriages.[319]

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[317] Ibid.

[318] Note that "genius" is the singular of "genii" here.

[319] *The Lesser Key of Solomon*, ed. Joseph H. Peterson (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2001), 144.

While I cannot make the claim that Shakespeare drew upon this grimoire as a source

for the play, the parallels between this passage and *The Tempest* are striking. An

aerial (Ariel!) spirit reconciles men's natures and increases their "love and affection,"

leading to the "favour of kings and princes" and "secretly promot[ing] marriages."

Further, as in the play, the tempering in this magical text relies upon a spirit's secret

machinations to effect "wonderfull & strange Effects" of love and reunification.

In *The Tempest*, Ariel's task is to lead the characters to self-knowledge and

guilt through spectacular acts of conjury, thus tempering them through magical

performance. After conjuring an illusory banquet for the conspirators, he makes the

feast vanish just as they are preparing to eat. When they attempt to draw their swords

to attack the invisible spirit, Ariel proclaims his reason for this disappearing act:

> I and my fellows
>
> Are ministers of Fate. The elements,
>
> Of whom your swords are temper'd, may as well
>
> Wound the loud winds, or with bemock'd-at stabs
>
> Kill the still-closing waters, as diminish
>
> One dowle that's in my plume. (3.3.60-2)

Ariel tells the men that their swords are of no use against elementals of the air like

him. Just as with Ferdinand's sword when he attempts to attack Prospero, Ariel stills

the men's swords, thus tempering their ability to lash out at that which they fear and

making them more moderate. The tempering of the men's swords to which Ariel

alludes is one that hardens them and makes them physically strong, yet this kind of

tempering is not the kind that Ariel seeks. Rather, Prospero's goal is for Ariel to make

them bow to his authority—or that of "Fate," as Ariel calls it. Prospero wants to moderate or to regulate the men according to his design, to temper them according to his view of just rule.

But it is not merely Ariel's enforced restraint that tempers the men; his conjuring and disappearing acts cause them suffering, which primes them for having sympathy for the torment they caused Prospero. As with *The Sworn Book*, which requires the practitioner to be flooded with guilt in order to be tempered, Ariel further elicits their sympathy and guilt by delimiting their crimes while they stand powerless to act:

> But remember…that you three
>
> From Milan did supplant good Prospero,
>
> Expos'd unto the Sea (which hath requit it)
>
> Him, and his innocent childe*: for which foul deed,
>
> The powr's, delaying (not forgetting), have
>
> Incens'd the seas and shores—yea all the creatures,
>
> Against your peace. Thee of thy son, Alonso,
>
> They have bereft; and do pronounce by me
>
> Ling'ring perdition. (3.3.68-7)

Through magical spectacle and moving narration, Ariel moves the men to feel sorry for the suffering they caused Prospero and his "innocent child" and to fear the punishment to come. Ariel reproduces the conspirators' crimes through vivid narration, painting their deeds as crimes by contrasting the "good" and "innocent" nature of Prospero and Miranda with the "foul" acts. In Ariel's recasting of their

deeds, even the elements are disturbed; the "seas and shores" and even "all the creatures" are "Incens'd." Their acts are thus disruptions of the natural order. Ariel even blames Alonso for his son's death.

Ariel's invective is meant to move the men to feel pity, thereby disturbing their minds as in an alchemical tempest, which requires perturbation before purgation. As in the tempering resulting from an alchemical tempest, the violently disturbed elements will not relent until the men experience "[l]ing'ring perdition"; the men must be purged of their sins through torments in order to be tempered. "Perdition" brings together multiple possible meanings, including purgatory. As a space of purging of sins, this version of "perdition" suggests that the men must experience the full guilt of their crimes before being cleansed of them. More broadly, "perdition" connotes loss, which implies that the men must experience loss themselves before achieving restoration of balance. Through suffering, they must lose their immoderate ambition and violent tendencies in order to experience freedom from the tempestuous elements of both the island and their spirits. Such "perdition," like "tempering," disturbs their minds with threats of "nothing but hearts-sorrow," but it also offers the possibility of purgation of guilt and reconciliation, "a clear life ensuing" (3.3.82). According to Ariel's version of tempering, powerfully agitating the men's spirits will lead to clarity and purification; like its alchemical correspondent, this form of tempering transforms something foul and muddy by first disturbing it and then making it clear and pure.

Prospero claims that his power lies in this kind of tempering: "My high charms work, / And these, mine enemies, are all knit up / In their distractions. They

now are in my power" (3.3.88-90). Their distractions are like the muddy swirling of

an alchemical tempest that precedes its material transformation. Like Hamlet's

mousetrap set to "catch the conscience of the king," Prospero's magical spectacles

expose the men's guilt, opening them to the possibility of repentance and

reconciliation. Prospero directs Ariel to "incite them to quick motion" (4.1.39) and

thus to move them to repentance through magical spectacle. Alonso responds, crying:

> O, it is monstrous! Monstrous!
>
> Methought the billows spoke, and told me of it;
>
> The winds did sing it to me*:* and the thunder…pronounc'd
>
> The name of Prosper; it did base my trespass,
>
> Therefore my son i'th ooze is bedded; and
>
> I'll seek him deeper then e're plummet sounded,
>
> And with him there lye mudded. (3.3.95-102)

Alonso is so moved by Ariel's scene, which he likens to the tempest at the beginning

of the play, that he blames himself for the death of his son. His remorse even leads to

a contemplation of death. Thus, Prospero's magical spectacle transforms Alonso

through emotional tempering.

Gonzalo's reaction to the magical spectacle, however, underscores one of its

more troubling effects: the intensity of the men's suffering. He exclaims, "All three of

them are desperate: their great guilt / (Like poison given to work a great time after)

/Now gins to bite the spirits" (3.3.104-6). The guilty emotions stirred up by the

tempests staged by Prospero are poisonous, making the conspirators "desperate"

through "bit[ing] the spirits." Rather than restoring the men to health, Prospero's

scenes torment them, just as his goblins "pinch" Caliban when he does not behave. In a fit of anger, Prospero announces, "I will plague them all even to roaring" (4.1.192-3). And after getting a taste of the power of his guilt-wracking, sympathy-inducing shows, Prospero appears to become even more focused on the suffering, rather than the reformation—or, as Lady Macduff would say, "All is the fear, and nothing is the love" (*Macbeth* 4.2.12). He applauds Ariel for drawing Stephano and Trinculo "through / Tooth'd briers, sharp furzes, pricking goss, and thorns, / Which ent'red their fraile shins. At last I left them / I'th' filthy-mantled pool beyond your cell, / There dancing up to th'chins, that the foul Lake / O'erstunk their feet" (4.1.179-84). Though both humorous and, arguably, deserved, such torture borders on the sadistic. And it escalates; Prospero sets spirits in the form of hounds (aptly named Fury and Tyrant) upon Stephano and Trinculo before conjuring Ariel to "charge my Goblins that they grind their joints / With dry convulsions, shorten up their sinews / With aged cramps, and more pinch-spotted make them, / Then pard or cat o' mountain" (4.1.258-261). The visceral, violent language of this command aligns Prospero more with Sycorax than with a beneficent reformer or a wise duke.

Prospero treats his own people just as he does his enslaved spirits—by subjecting them to threats and to torture. His model for this behavior is perhaps found in his book of magic. As with contemporary grimoires, Prospero's book may offer invocations of spirits that threaten them with suffering if they do not comply with the conjuror's request. Contemporary grimoires, such as *The Key of Knowledge,* similarly include such threats: "unles you doe as we commaunde you, we curse you…euen into the bottome of hell, and we will send you to y^t farthyst parte therof, yf you wyll rebell

against us and wthstand these our holy words."[320] The cost for rebellion in this

passage is damnation. Later in the text, the torment becomes even more vivid:

"knowe that vnles you come wthout any deformity you shall haue noe rest by day, no^r

by night, whersoeuer you bee: And you shalbe condemned into the flame of fier, and

of sulphur; we wyll burne you and yor figures for euer and euer." *The Lesser Key of*

Solomon similarly menaces its disobedient spirits by conjuring a fire to "Torment

Burne and consume this spirit N. everlastingly."[321] The threat of "Torment" arises in

part from an apparent obsession with controlling the spirit, which manifests itself in

the rest of the charm. This passage demonstrates the intensity of this desire for control

and the related fear of the spirit's rebellion:

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[320] *The Key of Knowledge (Clavicula Salomonis),* ed. Joseph H. Peterson, (1999),
Accessed April 2011 <http://www.esotericarchives.com/solomon/ad36674.htm>. An
aside: this grimoire also offers another precedent for Prospero's lines. Most editors of
the play note its very obvious borrowing from Ovid's Medea, but to my knowledge,
none has registered the parallels between Prospero's speech and this passage in *Key
of Knowledge*. Compare: "And they be the wordes, by the wch all the worlde doth
tremble, Stones ar rowled backe, the water doth not flowe, no^r the fier burne." with
the natural paradoxes in *The Tempest*: "I have bedimm'd / The noontide sun, call'd
forth the mutinous winds, / And twixt the green sea, and the azur'd vault / Set roaring
war; to the dread rattling thunder / Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak /
With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory / Have I made shake, and by the
spurs pluck'd vp / The pine and cedar" (5.1.41-8).

[321] *The Lesser Key*, 52. Significantly, these grimoires threaten spirits with fire and
Ariel is, like fire, elemented by the air. Indeed, Ariel describes his performance
during the tempest in fiery terms: "I flam'd amazement. Sometime I'ld divide, / And
burn in many places; on the topmast, / The yards and boresprit, would I flame
distinctly, / Then meet and join. Jove's lightnings, the precursors / O' th' dreadful
thunder-claps, more momentary /And sight-outrunning were not; the fire and cracks /
Of sulphurous roaring the most mighty Neptune / Seem to besiege" (1.2.198-205). Is
Ariel, then, Prospero's conjured fire, deployed to torment his demons—the men who
rebelled against him?

> I condem [condemn] thee thou spirit N. into fire everlasting, because
> thou art disobedient and obeyd not the command…for wch your
> averseness and contempt you are gilty [guilty] of grand disobedience
> and Rebellion, and therefore I…shall burne thee in immortall fire and
> bury thee in Immortall oblivion, unless thou Immediately comest &
> appearest visibly, affably, frendly, & curteously hear unto me before
> this Circle in this Triangle, in a faire and comly forme and in no wise
> terrible, hurtfull or frightfull to me or any other creatures whatever
> upon the face of the Earth and make rationel Answers to my requests
> and performe all my desiers in all things that I shall make unto you
> &c.[322]

Prospero's extreme punishment for rebellion finds a precedent in this sort of invocation, as does his desire to control and manipulate others.

In addition to finding a precedent in grimoires that have alchemical undertones, the idea of torture leading to tempering hails directly from alchemical texts. Indeed, in an historical analysis of the role of alchemy in the scientific revolution, William R. Newman reveals that punishment leading to transformation was a hallmark of early alchemy: "At times [the early alchemist] Zosimos even expresses his goal of radically transforming nature in graphic and violent terms. In *On Virtue*, Zosimos describes a dream in which he sees a flask filled with boiling water.

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[322] *The Lesser Key*, 52-3. In her important article, "Prospero's Book," whose call to investigate magical texts actually prompted my project, Barbara Mowat argues that Prospero's condescension and confidence would have been shocking to the writers of grimoires, yet here we have several examples of invocations that have a superior, if not downright condescending tone.

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Writhing and moaning within the vessel is an 'innumerable crowd' of men, being boiled alive. They too must undergo a transmutation into pneuma, which requires that they undergo this 'punishment.'"[323] Prospero's alchemical tempering of his subjects, including Ariel and Caliban, suggests that the source of his rising power is not conjuring but rather preying upon other people's vulnerabilities.[324]

Notably, Prospero performs the more extreme torments after he remembers the plot on his life, which interrupts his engagement with and pleasure in the masque that he has conjured to celebrate Ferdinand and Miranda's love—and to ensure their temperance and chastity until their wedding day. Prospero is very concerned with the temperance of the young lovers, and in his masque, the goddess Iris enjoins her "temperate nymphs" to "celebrate a contract of true love." When Prospero remembers the intemperance—and indeed the outright rebellion—of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo, he becomes a bad spokesman for the virtue of temperance. Ferdinand notes that Prospero is "in some passion / That works him strongly," and Miranda adds, "Never till this day / Saw I him touch'd with anger, so distemper'd" (4.1.143-5). While the source of Prospero's "passion" is not entirely clear, the imbalance in his passions is evident. Likely driven by his temper, Prospero requires some tempering of his own. Alchemical texts and grimoires both emphasize the importance of the practitioner's temperance, as noted earlier in this chapter about *The Sworn Book of*

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[323] Newman, *Promethean Ambitions*, 30.

[324] Notably, audiences never see Prospero using spells to conjure or to control Ariel and Caliban. Instead, his power over them is more like mind control, in which he threatens them with possible tortures (which never manifest within the action of the play), reminds them of their debts to him for his past deeds, or promises them future freedom.

Honorius, which instructs the practitioner to pray: "Purify me for in thee do I put myself to be purified. Clarify me, for in thee do I put myself to be clarified. Make me clean, for in thee do I put myself to be cleansed" (XCIII). Thus, Prospero's need to regulate his own temper hails also directly from the alchemical tradition. Indeed, magicians and alchemists often are advised to abstain from immoderate foods, from sexual contact, and even from impure thoughts for days before beginning their work.

Fittingly, Ariel uses some of the tricks he learned from Prospero to temper Prospero. Ariel describes the suffering of the men whom Prospero has now imprisoned in his cell, particularly that of Gonzalo who is an innocent supporter of Prospero. Ariel draws Prospero to sympathy not through reason, which arguably is what *should* move a ruler, but through affect, which is what Prospero has manipulated to reform others: "Your charm so strongly works 'em, / That if you now beheld them, your affections / Would become tender" (5.1.17-19). As with "temporal" at the beginning of the play, "tender" sounds suspiciously like "temper" (or "tempered"), and in many ways, these terms operate in the same way in Ariel's admonition. Ariel's aim is to temper Prospero's immoderate punishment of his offenders by playing with his "affections," making him more sympathetic to their plight.

Ariel's scheme to temper Prospero seems to be successful. Prospero retorts,

> And mine shall.
>
> Hast thou, which art but air, a touch, a feeling
>
> Of their afflictions, and shall not myself,
>
> One of their kind, that relish all as sharply,
>
> Passion as they, be kindlier moved that thou art?

> ...The rarer action is
>
> In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
>
> The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
>
> Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.
>
> My charms I'll break, their senses I'll restore,
>
> And they shall be themselves. (5.1.20-32)

Being composed of "passion," not "air," Prospero argues that he can be moved to sympathy more easily than Ariel. Prospero's inordinate desire for vengeance is moderated by Ariel's demand for sympathy with the torments of the men; he claims that "[p]assion" becomes "kindlier moved" than Ariel's airy spirits.

Prospero's tempering invokes another contemporary usage of the word: tempering as balancing of the passions. As the quite thorough title suggests, perhaps the most appropriate source for the idea of tempering as a balance of the passions is Thomas Walkington's 1607 tract, *The Optick Glasse of Humors, or The touchstone of a golden temperature, or the Philosophers stone to make a golden temper*.[325] A precursor to Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*, this treatise brings together humoral and alchemical theory. Chapter six deals solely with the "temperaments," and defines a temper as characterized by, among many other aspects, "a wise moderation of anger…the vassalizing of the rebellious affections."[326] Although Prospero claims in this scene that his sole purpose is the ethical transformation, or penitence, of his

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[325] Thomas Walkington, *An Optick Glasse of Humors*, (London, 1607), STC 24967, Early English Books Online.

[326] Walkington, Gr. Alchemical treatises similarly describe minerals as having tempers, or identifying characteristics.

sufferers, his torments far exceed his goal, and Ariel has to reveal to him that he has gone too far. Ariel tempers Prospero's passion by holding a mirror to his deeds, asking him to sympathize with the suffering he is causing others, thus pricking his conscience: the same strategy that Prospero uses on those he wishes to reform. The play thus operates like a Jonsonian humors comedy, in that Prospero and Ariel must "vassaliz[e]" the other characters, who serve as stand-ins for the "rebellious affections."[327]

Prospero's tempering makes him a more temperate ruler. Though he attributes Prospero's tempering solely to the control of Prospero and not to Ariel, Sokol similarly argues, "[Prospero's] own tempering of his anger and the reconciliation at the end 'become possible because, as a true spiritual alchemist, Prospero succeeds in working on himself as well as on others.'"[328] His anger and desire for revenge assuaged, he can focus on reform and reconciliation, which he effects through a combination of conjury and alchemy. After he promises to drown his book, Prospero conjures the prisoners just as he conjures Ariel throughout the play. The men even enter a charmed circle, as Prospero stands aloft, in a balcony. Oddly, Ariel's invocation does not require a circle; but, like spirits or demons, the men appear in circle, which clearly also represents the stage.[329] Prospero then calls for music to

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[327] In an interesting verbal echo, Caliban explains of Prospero's magic: "I must obey. His art is of such pow'r / It would control my dam's god, Setebos, / And make a vassal of him" (1.2.372-4).

[328] Sokol, 188.

[329] Indeed, in *Second World and Green World: Studies in Renaissance Fiction Making,* Harry Berger calls this conjuration scene a "dress rehearsal" ([Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988], 180).

remove their spell: "A solemn air, and the best comforter/ To an unsettled fancy, cure thy brains, / Now useless, [boil'd] within thy skull! There stand, / For you are spell-stopped" (5.1.57-61).[330] Their brains have been "boiled"; Prospero explicitly describes his spell in alchemical terms. His tempering is both necromantic and alchemical, as he continues to explain: "The charm *dissolves* apace; / And as the morning steals upon the night, / *Melting* the darkness, so their *rising senses* / Begin to chase the *ignorant fumes* that mantle / Their *clearer* reason" (5.1.64-8, italics mine). As Simonds points out, this scene is alchemical with its "rising senses" and "ignorant fumes." Even concepts such as "melting" and "dissolving" the senses to lead to "clearer reason" evoke alchemical processes associated with tempering, such as distillation, which operate on the senses and mind. This is also a scene of conjuring and one of tempering the passions.

This passage echoes chapter one of *The Optick Glass of Humors* on "self-knowledge," which yokes together multiple discourses to describe one who is "incanoped and intrenched in this darksome misty cloud of ignorance" as suffering a "malady and distemperature of the soul."[331] Such lack of self-knowledge leads to shipwreck; one suffering from this malady "hath no true lampe of discretion, as a polestar to direct the shippe of his life by…from being hurried vpon the shelues &

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[330] As noted earlier, Peggy Simonds explains that one of music's roles in the magnum opus is to temper the "vexations" of the practitioner; here, the alchemist (Prospero) uses music to temper his subjects.

[331] Walkington, Br.

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masty rockes of infelicity."[332] In both passages, people are shrouded in dark

ignorance, which leads to a "distemperature" that must be tempered. Agrippa

describes a similar magical-alchemical form of tempering by water in his *Occult*

Philosophy: "Such is the efficacy of this Element of Water, that Spirituall

regeneration cannot be done without it, as Christ himself testified to *Nicodemus*."[333]

    In a similar fashion, through alchemical-magical tempering, Prospero claims

that he has purified the men's minds of their "ignorant fumes" and made them more

reasonable. Significantly, Prospero does not appeal to the men through their reason,

but through their affections. He describes their offenses, attempting to make them feel

guilt [or, as he calls it, "inward pinches" (5.1.77)] and repentance. Prospero addresses

Sebastian, saying for his crimes, "Thou are pinched for't now" (74). Similarly,

Prospero says of Antonio,

> Flesh and blood,
>
> You, brother mine, that [entertain'd] ambition,
>
> Expell'd remorse and nature, whom, with Sebastian
>
> (Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong),
>
> would have kill'd your king, I do forgive thee
>
> Unnatural though thou art. (5.1.75-79)

Prospero scourges the men by describing their wrongs, with the aim of tempering

them, of moderating their ambition and their greed. As a result of this inward torment,

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[332] Ibid., Bv.

[333] *Three Books of Occult Philosophy* (London: Printed by R.W., 1651), Book I, ch. VI, 12, Early English Books Online, accessed September 2011.

Prospero claims, "Their understanding / Begins to swell, and the approaching tide / Will shortly fill the reasonable [shores] / That now lie foul and muddy" (5.1.79-82). Just as in *The Sworn Book*, tempering leads to an inundation of "understanding." This mirrors the process of alchemical tempering: a substance is purified of its foulness through violent agitation. As with alchemical tempering, the conspirators' metaphysical purification is described in material terms: their "understanding" is like a "tide" that will clarify their minds: "the reasonable shore / That now lies foul and muddy." Prospero believes that his magic has caused them to acquire self-knowledge and, thus, to transform themselves into more ethical people. Prospero's version of tempering works for Alonso, who begs forgiveness and seems genuinely to be changed: "Thy dukedom I resign and do entreat / Thou pardon me my wrongs" (5.1.118-119). Although it has been debated whether Caliban is truly reformed, his claim that he will "be wise hereafter / And seek for grace" (5.1.295-6) at least suggests it is a possibility.

In Prospero's view, tempering purges, clarifies, and ultimately, reconciles people through sympathy and self-knowledge. Elizabeth Spiller has recently drawn attention to Prospero's role in constructing knowledge, by arguing that the character of Prospero owes a debt to the early modern artisan tradition, which includes alchemy. Reading Prospero within this "maker's" tradition leads her to the conclusion that Prospero is ultimately a knowledge-maker. Spiller helpfully connects Prospero's knowledge construction to his theatrical and magical arts, as when she notes, "Like the alchemist's crucible, William Gilbert's magnetic terrella, or Francis Bacon's idea for experiments that use the 'vexations of art' to reveal the 'secrets of nature,' the

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island is a small world in which Prospero seeks to use art to control nature and, in doing so, create different forms of knowledge."[334] For Spiller, the alchemical undertones of Prospero's art suggest that according to this early modern experimentalist and artisanal tradition, the term "art" joins together *poesis* and *praxis* in a form of knowledge construction in which "art is the way to power."[335] To extend Spiller's argument, situating Prospero's alchemy within the maker's tradition also sheds light upon other experimental aspects of *The Tempest*; while Spiller recognizes that *The Tempest* is not an experiment but a play, indeed, it is in many ways both a play *and* an experiment. As the first (and only) of Shakespeare's plays staged at Blackfriar's, *The Tempest* is experimental theater: in form, it is a play-masque hybrid and, unlike most other Shakespearean works, it operates neo-classically. Carrying the Unities of Time, Place, and Action to an extreme, its events unfold practically in real time. Thus, like the alchemical magnum opus, the play is itself an experiment, one that, as Spiller suggests, plays with the possibility of art as a creator of knowledge. Finally, alchemy as an artisanal craft engages regularly in the art-nature debate; as practitioners of an art that attempts to transform nature, alchemists positioned themselves as supreme artists who performed the handiwork of God. In a similar fashion, *The Tempest* takes up the question of the role of art, specifically dramatic art, in effecting ethical and political transformation.

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[334] Elizabeth Spiller, "Shakespeare and the Making of Early Modern Science: Resituating Prospero's Art," *South Central Review* 26 (Winter 2009): 26.

[335] Ibid., 38.

Prospero's understanding of the play's events is Aristotelian. His tempering of

characters within the world of the play is cathartic; it arouses pity and fear

(Prospero's "pinches" capture both of these registers) in order to purge them and to

move the characters to temperance. Prospero's magical spectacles act as a sort of

philosopher's stone that transmutes the inhabitants of its world. Barbara Traister

follows this approach towards Prospero's magic, which she claims is remarkable for

its successes. She analyzes Prospero as a stage manager who effectively plans and

stages a succession of didactic dramas perfectly suited to each member of his

audience with the pervasive outcome of successful reform (except, notably, of

Caliban). Such successful use of magic as a practical, instructive tool, followed by his

abjuration of magic, suggest to Traister that Prospero recognizes the limits of art and

of magic, thereby teaching him what he lacked when in Naples: the necessity of

active participation in worldly affairs and a sensitivity to timing. Prospero's

application and renunciation of magic thus suggests that magic and dramatic art are

both temporary illusions, but they both have the possibility to educate.[336] Prospero's

educative successes through magical spectacle, according to this formulation, act as a

sort of catharsis. T.G. Bishop discusses just this kind of stage wonder as a tool for

transformation when he argues that in varied renaissance theories of

catharsis,"[w]onder became a 'pharmaceutical' element in a form of ethical

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[336] Barbara Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers: The Magician in English Renaissance Drama* (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1984), 144-5. Readings such as Traister's that bring together historical analyses of Prospero's magic with their metatheatrical implications improve our understanding of the ways in which the play might have affected its audiences and readers, and they help make sense of the multiple, often competing possible interpretations of the character of Prospero, and indeed, of the play as a whole.

therapy."[337] This "pharmaceutical" element of alchemy was central to applied alchemical practices; alchemists who followed the Paracelsian tradition focused on developing healing waters and mixtures. Bruce Moran notes that alchemists in this tradition saw illness as a fall from spirituality that could be treated by "restoring the virtue, or reviving the spiritual vitality, of the inner alchemist."[338] One way of viewing Prospero's alchemical tempering through dramatic spectacle, then, is that it can serve a healing, transformative function, much like the alchemical tempering of an adept and of his minerals.

Thus, for Prospero, the suffering of the characters serves a cathartic end: scourging them of their unsavory characteristics and ultimately purifying them. As a result, the punishments he doles out are a form of alchemical tempering, using perturbations of nature to transmute the conspirators into something more celestial. Indeed, Prospero claims that his torments are merely a test of the characters' "love," as with Ferdinand and Miranda, to whom he explains, "All thy vexations / Were but my trials of thy love, and thou / Hast strangely stood the test" (5.1.5-7). Notably, "trial" is an alchemical term, describing any transformational process; for example, *Rosarium Philosophorum* states, "Pure Gold is brought by the trial of the fire into a firm and fixed body."[339] Similarly, Prospero justifies his cruelty as "trials," as attempts to transform the characters into loyal subjects.

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[337] T.G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 40.

[338] Moran, *Distilling Knowledge*, 77.

[339] "Rosarium Philosophorum, (part 1)," *The Alchemy Website,* <http://www.levity.com/alchemy/rosary1.html>.

And yet, even Prospero suspects that his trials are excessive, when he explains to the lovers, "If I have too austerely punish'd you, / Your compensation makes amends" (5.1.1-2). Prospero effects his tempering by torture, by causing suffering, and by stirring of the passions. In this view, little separates Prospero's tempering from Antonio's Machiavellian machinations; with another conjury-alchemy link, Prospero explains he "new-created / The creatures that were mine, I say, or chang'd 'em, / Or else new-form'd 'em" (1.2.81-83). Further, Prospero's transformations of some the characters are suspect, particularly of the most reprehensible ones: Caliban and Antonio. Does Prospero's tempering even work on them? For that matter, is Prospero's temper truly moderated? Are his forgiveness and mercy sustainable? Is it truly possible for him to drown his book, an action that he has promised but not fulfilled at the end of the play? And, importantly, Prospero achieves his tempering through trickery, through staging magical illusions to torment and vex his victims.

In the character of Prospero, *The Tempest* stages the fraught discourse of alchemy. What kind of alchemist is Prospero, after all? Is he the Neo-Platonic magician, who, as Mebane claims, "as the supreme artist, is in love with the reflections of God which he sees in earthly creatures, and his love impels him to redeem those creatures by freeing them through his magic from all impurity?"[340] And like Paracelsus who sees alchemy as redemptive? Or is he more like the charlatans whose greed leads them to claim they can turn lead into gold, when really they are incapable of any transformation? This last possibility suggests a limit to Mebane's

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[340] Mebane, *Renaissance Magic*, 47.

claim that "*The Tempest* implies that Prospero's magical art provides genuine revelations, making us aware of our place within a harmonious cosmic order"; yet, with Prospero's alchemy, Shakespeare does seem to suggest, as Mebane argues, "that poetic drama, because it exerts a potent influence upon the audience's thoughts and perceptions, is a form of magic."[341] Further, Prospero as a figure for the dramatic artist is "a specific instance of the attempt to control the world by influencing the human mind and imagination."[342] Prospero's alchemical tempering is both problematic, because of its severity and self-interested aims, and promising, due to its ability to lead to self-awareness and reconciliation. At a metatheatrical level, then, the play suggests that drama's magical powers are both dangerous and valuable.

Through its irresolvable tensions, *The Tempest* itself enacts the Platonic suspicion of all poetry *at the same time* that it enacts an Aristotelian optimism for the possibility of transformation through catharsis. The play seems to posit that theater itself is a philosopher's stone that can lead to transformation despite and through sympathy and suffering, pity and fear. It does what both conjury and alchemy purport to do, and is thus, in a sense, magical. The promise of this view is that, despite its limitations, theater can mysteriously move its observers to experience repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The problem, however, with theater as a magical force is the abuse of that power, in the forms of manipulation or revenge. Magical theater that influences political outcomes would indeed be a scary proposition for

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[341] John Mebane, "Metadrama and the Visionary Imagination in Dr. Faustus and the Tempest," *South Atlantic Review* 53, no. 2 (May 1988): 26.

[342] Ibid., 26.

Jacobean audiences, and for King James, who believed that the supernatural could and did interfere with his reign. Through its attention to tempering, then, *The Tempest* stages the antitheatrical debate. At first glance, the play appears to side, as we might expect, with the champions of theater, and yet it is, after all, a play and not a thesis. To borrow another alchemical metaphor, it offers us the labyrinth, but not the thread.

Chapter 4: Chastity, Magic, and the Masque Form in *A Maske*

Performed at Ludlow Castle

> "Then temperance is not quietness, nor is the temperate life quiet."
> Plato, "Charmides"

> "These things are but toys, to come amongst such serious observations"
> Francis Bacon, "Of Masques and Triumphs"

In a *Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle*, Milton breaks the conventions of the court masque with his local river deity, Sabrina, who rises out of the water to release the virginal Lady from the magical bonds of the villain, Comus. According to the standard form established by Ben Jonson with the 1608 *Masque of Queens*, in the antimasque, the protagonist defeats the evil forces in the masque singlehandedly, just as Bel-Anna and her virtuous fellow queens defeat the twelve witches. In Milton's masque, however, the female hero is unable without supernatural aid to defeat the male witch, Comus, the son of Circe; the Lady needs the help of Sabrina to become free of Comus's spell. Further, in typical court masques, the male protagonist is often the ruler or a nobleman who completely eradicates the threat of the vice figures by defeating them with magic or some mysterious power, as in *The Masque of Blackness* (1605)*,* in which King James magically cleanses the black skin of African ladies, or in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court* (1615), in which Mercury causes twelve alchemists sporting alembic-shaped helmets to vanish. In *A Maske*, by contrast, the only magic instrumental against Comus belongs to a local, pastoral, and female deity, one who successfully dispels the effects of Comus's magic but does not defeat the source of magic. In his masque*,* Milton suffers a witch to live.

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Sabrina's powerful female magic, rooted in textual and cultural traditions though it may be, arouses more questions than answers. Why, for instance, would Milton represent a female magician with the benevolent powers of healing, restoring, and tempering those she touches? And why make an argument about the powers of art and the imagination through such a gendered lens? Finally, why is the magic in this masque of chastity focused specifically on healing and liberating, and why is such magic limited and unable to defeat Comus? As a partial answer to these questions, we may consider the dubious circumstances surrounding the staging of the masque. At the time that Milton was writing the masque, the Earl of Bridgewater's family was suffering an assault on its reputation: what has come to be known as the Castlehaven scandal, described as the "most sensational aristocratic scandal of the 1630s," with six "verse libels" written about it.[343] In 1631, the Earl of Bridgewater's brother-in-law was charged with, and eventually put to death for, a number of charges including sodomy and rape.[344] Barbara Breasted has argued that the Bridgewater performance manuscript of the masque, as a direct response to this scandal, eliminates the less savory, more explicitly sexual, language found in the 1637 printed text, so as not to besmear further the Bridgewater family's reputation.[345] Leah Marcus similarly reads

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[343] *Early Stuart Libels*
<http://www.earlystuartlibels.net/htdocs/castlehaven_section/Q0.html>.

[344] For more on the scandal itself see "An Egerton Family History," *Reformations of A Maske* <http://www.mith.umd.edu/comus/ceegertons.htm#community>.

[345] Barbara Breasted, "Comus and the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Studies* 3 (1971): 201-224. For more on the Castlehaven scandal, see John Creaser, "Milton's *Comus*: The Irrelevance of the Castlehaven Scandal," *Milton Quarterly* 4 (1987): 25-34; William B. Hunter, *Milton's* Comus: *Family Piece* (New York: Whitson Publishing,1983); Leah Marcus, "The Milieu of Milton's *Comus:* Judicial Reform at

Sabrina as a figure of cleansing and healing sexual crimes; but for Marcus, Sabrina is a figure of compassionate justice in response to the case of the rape of a serving girl, Margery Evans, over which the Earl of Bridgewater presided. For Marcus, "[Sabrina] thus offers a paradigm for the proper handling of such cases, and for the doing of justice in general—an example not of censoriousness, but of compassion, offering the victim not judgment but grace."[346] Whether or not Milton explicitly addresses this issue with his masque on chastity, his female character magically heals and purifies a young lady, who has suffered assault by a sexually ravenous and powerful older male; the connections between the masque and the scandals are undoubtedly clear.

As a symbol of the power of theater and of the imagination, Sabrina calls into question the role of art in the wake of (sexual) violence, scandal, and suffering. Through sympathy and charity, Sabrina heals and tempers the Lady; similarly, Milton's masque offers a possibility for art to heal the psychic wounds inflicted by the Castlehaven scandal. Where chastity-as-virginity proves vulnerable, chastity-as-charity strengthens, purifies, and heals. Sabrina's sympathetic, magical touch emblematizes the ways in which art can inspire compassion and thereby restore and transmute its audiences. Further, Sabrina's art allows the Lady—whose trial has left her isolated, numb, and mute—to re-engage in communal pleasures, restoring her

Ludlow and the Problem of Sexual Assault," *Criticism* 25 (1983): 293-327; Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk, "Dark Scandal and the Sun-Clad Power of Chastity: The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 15 (1975): 141-52; and Nancy Weitz (Miller), "Chastity, Rape, and Ideology in the Castlehaven Testimonies and Milton's Ludlow *Mask*," *Milton Studies* 32 (1995): 153-68.

[346] Leah Marcus, "A Local Reading of Comus," in *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 80.

sense of social identity and participation. The Lady's reentry to the communal world

is facilitated through indulging in aesthetic delight. Thus, the masque links social and

individual healing with art and the imagination. Milton depicts the magical healing

powers of art and the imagination as specifically female. This chapter develops this

claim, arguing that, particularly through the figure of Sabrina, the masque presents

itself as performing actual wonders in the world, while at the same time outlining its

limits. In *The Maske*, the wondrous powers of art and the imagination magically

produce effects that exceed their natural or material causes. The masque

acknowledges, however, that art can only do so much. Art cannot protect or restore

the physical bodies of virgins, and chastity-as-virginity is vulnerable.

Angus Fletcher offers one of the most influential and compelling discussions

of magic and genre in *A Maske*, suggesting, "At the heart of each masque there is an

arcanum, a secret, something to be veiled and revealed, a tabooed power."[347] While

Fletcher does not explicitly state that the masque genre is magically performative, his

claim that it has a "tabooed power" suggests that it is mysteriously moving. "[M]ost

of [the masque form's] methods," he claims, "can be subsumed under the category of

magic. For that reason the ultimate triumph of masque-making, the creation of

Comus, hinges upon a drama of conflicting magics, not, as is commonly said, upon a

moral debate."[348] Fletcher attributes the triumphant power of *Comus* to its synergy of

"conflicting magics." Despite his condescension towards what he calls "primitive"

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[347] Angus Fletcher, *The Transcendental Masque: An Essay on Milton's* Comus
(Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1971), 31.

[348] Ibid., 39.

beliefs in magic, Fletcher importantly recognizes that the source of the masque's dramatic power is in its deployment of magic, rather than in its "moral debate." Fletcher figures the masque maker as a sort of "daemonically possessed," vatic magician, a "virtuoso" who is a "godlike creator."[349] Fletcher links such power to religion when he suggests, "The same sort of identity between mimesis and conversion exists in the parallel Christian sphere," suggesting that *Comus* is not only a magical, but also a sacramental drama.[350]

While Fletcher's assessment of the Lady's chaste Orphic powers is convincing, it fails to account for the limitations of the Lady's magic and for the instrumentality of Sabrina's natural, healing, folk magic. Although the Lady does indeed manage to resist Comus's magic, for instance, it is important to note that she cannot be physically released from his bonds without Sabrina's magic. Fletcher belittles Sabrina's contribution, saying that her "benign thaumaturgy resembles nothing so much as a Christian rite of lustration," a purification ritual whose "whole dramatic effect…is simply to meet the Spirit's request."[351] On the contrary, whereas the Attendant Spirit's magic is impotent and his approach misguided, Sabrina's is truly effective. And though it resembles Christian lustration, it is not that; it is a ritual straight out of natural healing magic. Finally, Sabrina's charm exceeds the spirit's request in its dramatic force; her scene is moving, powerful, and beautiful, not merely functional in loosing the sorcerer's bands. Fletcher gives too much credit to the

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[349] Ibid., 133.

[350] Ibid., 162.

[351] Ibid., 174.

Attendant Spirit and to the Lady and not enough to Sabrina, with whom significant dramatic and narrative magical force lies. Fletcher contends that the dominant, valued kind of magic in the play is Orphic, Neoplatonic, intellectual, and celestial, yet he misses the natural, herbal, rustic, female, and non-intellectual magic that frees the Lady and ultimately triumphs in the play.

Thomas M. Greene offers a more nuanced account of the various and at times competing forms of magic in the play, even allowing for the masque to represent Milton's own conflicted attitudes.[352] For Greene, the struggle between "virginity and sensuality…is dramatized as an agon between versions of magic."[353] Greene notes that the masque draws upon historical sources of magic, including hermetic principles, Orphic Hymns, Neoplatonism, and various others. Further, the masque draws on literary versions of magic, including works about sorcerers and witches, both mythological and contemporary. Finally, it invokes the local practical magics of cunning men and women, also characterized as English folk magic.[354] Greene claims that the Lady's chastity "is transformed by a kind of transformative rhetoric into effective power," arguing that the "sacred rays of virtue acquire a miraculous protective power," which is not simply metaphoric but can actually repel assailants.[355]

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[352] Greene "assumes that the historical Milton may well have been more divided than he knew about some of the tensions acted out in his masque"("Enchanting Ravishments: Magic and Counter-Magic in *Comus*," in *Opening the Borders: Inclusivity in Early Modern Studies Essays in Honor of James V. Mirollo*, ed. Peter C. Herman [Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 1999], 298).

[353] Ibid., 304.

[354] Ibid., 301.

[355] Ibid., 304-5.

In creating magically efficacious virtues, Milton "repeatedly reaches for a kind of Christian anti-magic whose power could overcome the participatory spells of sorcery."[356] As a result, the masque dramatizes several competing viewpoints about what magic is and how it works in the world.

Greene refreshingly allows for the possibility that the magic in the masque is just that: magic, not symbolic, allegoric, or metaphoric, but instrumental, efficacious, and performative. Unlike Fletcher, who sees Sabrina's magic as merely a representational analogue for Christian rites, Greene significantly notes that this "redemptive moment of the masque lacks any theological note whatsoever."[357] Awareness of this fact makes room for the magical meanings in the play to come more fully into focus. Sabrina's magic—like the magic of the masque itself—combines "language, action, and substance" as it "demonstrates the superiority of the empowered animate word over pure abstraction." [358] Herein lies the most exciting aspect of Greene's argument: that Milton's masque deploys the natural magic of Sabrina in order to glorify performative language over allegory. Though he does not go so far as to suggest it, the next logical step in this claim is that the magic *in* the masque is a justification and demonstration of the magic *of* the masque. As a performative, multimedia text, Milton's masque has some power to effect change in

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[356] Ibid., 306.

[357] Ibid., 312.

[358] Ibid., 312. In Greene's view, Sabrina's "countermagical magic…combines the power of privileged language, action, and substance as such operations commonly do, drawing upon immemorial practices that vindicate the potency of the participatory sign" (Ibid., 314).

its world. And yet, Greene is quick to note that despite Milton's celebration of the magical possibilities of poetry, the masque at the same time recognizes that the "incarnational unity of word and thing envisioned by the poet does not exist" and that there "can be no union of word and thing."[359] Language and being are not the same, despite the poet's best efforts or deepest desires. The magic in the masque illustrates this tension between Milton's desire for his creative work to perform wonders and his frustration at its inability to meet his lofty aspirations.

Sabrina's Chastity-as-Charity

Through the figure of Sabrina—much neglected in critical accounts of magic and of chastity in the masque[360]—Milton revives and reconfigures the magical powers of the female imagination. A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush note that Sabrina's "beneficent magical powers and her special care of virgins are Milton's additions to the legend [of Sabrina]."[361] This chapter demonstrates that Milton's additions to the literary figure of Sabrina, her "magical powers" and "care of virgins,"

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[359] Ibid., 318.

[360] Barbara Traister, for instance, offers a convincing reading of Comus as a magician and the Attendant Spirit as a Neoplatonic daemon, but she largely ignores the magic of Sabrina (*Heavenly Necromancers: Magicians in English Renaissance Drama* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1984]). Elisabeth A. Frost likewise argues that the masque highlights poetry and song as magical forces that help to redeem the Lady, yet she credits the Attendant Spirit with this artistic redemption ("The Didactic Comus: Henry Laws and the Trial of Virtue," *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 22, no. 1 [1991], 98).

[361] A.S.P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush, ed., *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton, The Minor English Poems,* vol. 2, part 3 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1972), 960. See this work also for a detailed critical account of Sabrina's literary lives.

are central to understanding her purpose and effect. Just as the angel of chastity appears suddenly and mysteriously to the Lady, so, too, does Sabrina. A protective figure, Sabrina uses magical spells to free the Lady from Comus's charms. Structurally aligned with the form of chastity that the Lady invokes, Sabrina represents charity, the virtue displaced by chastity, in the Lady's conjuration of Hope, Faith, and Chastity. The Attendant Spirit draws upon Sabrina's sympathy for the Lady's plight to invoke her aid, and Sabrina similarly uses the magical power of sympathetic touch to free the Lady. Her countermagic liberates the Lady, and, unlike the restrictive dictum of chastity, Sabrina's richly poetic language and soothing touch license sensuality and female aesthetic creation. As a figure of sympathy, Sabrina and her magic do not represent chastity narrowly defined as virginity or abstemiousness; instead, her chastity accords with St. Augustine's definition of the cardinal virtue of temperance: "love giving itself entirely to that which is loved."[362] As in this version of temperance, Milton's Sabrina enfolds chastity into charity, as *caritas* or *agape.*

Sabrina's sympathy for the Lady as another virgin assailed by vice inspires her to minister to the Lady's plight. Chastity is the source of sympathetic correspondences between the female characters, and it leads to compassion and *caritas*. Whereas the Lady and the Brothers overemphasize virginity as the source of chastity's protective powers, Sabrina renders chastity as a more expansive virtue.

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[362] Augustine of Hippo, "De Moribus Ecclesiae Catholicae," in *St. Augustin the Writings Against the Manicheans and Against the Donatists: Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. Richard Stothert, vol. 4 (Whitefish, MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004), 48. St. Augustine discusses how the Christian may find a "happy life" through virtue, or "perfect love of God." The "object of this love is not anything, but only God"; thus, temperance "is love keeping itself entire and incorrupt for God."

Significantly, Sabrina's charm is the only effective counter-magic against Comus's charms, and it thus supplants the hyperbolically construed powers of chastity as virginity. Sabrina's chaste magic is ultimately more powerful than the Brothers' representation of chastity's protective charms and even more instrumental than the Lady's rigid, and therefore vulnerable, version of virginal chastity. Or, as William A. Oram contends, "The Lady's absolute rejection of Comus leaves her virtue, paradoxically, fugitive and cloistered, incapable of participating in the trials of a mortal life."[363] Although he misplaces the power as belonging to the Attendant Spirit, Oram recognizes that the magic in the masque enlarges the boundaries of chastity and thus reconciles "the Lady with herself."[364] Virginal chastity, then, is not the predominant virtue of the masque; rather it is charity—in its broadly defined sense of freely given love—that defeats Comus's temptations of lust, gluttony, and intemperance. The masque suggests that such sympathetic chastity-as-charity is the best means by which to heal and to restore psychic wounds inflicted by sexual violence.

This chapter builds on William Shullenberger's suggestion that Sabrina is a maternal figure who represents chastity-as-charity. Focusing on Sabrina's role in initiating the Lady in a social and sexual rite of passage, Shullenberger contends, "Sabrina releases the Lady from her rigorous self-containment through a ritual bath, a symbolic anointing that baptizes her into mature womanhood, a fulfillment and

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[363] William A. Oram, "The Invocation of Sabrina," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 24, no. 1 (Winter 1984): 134.

[364] Ibid., 135.

activation of chastity's potential in charity."[365] Further underscoring the

transformation of the Lady's chastity into charity, he continues, "Sabrina's ritual bath

and release of the lady complete her liminal ordeal and set her chastity in motion as

charity."[366]

According to Shullenberger, Sabrina is a magical, prophetic, healing, and

"redemptive figure" who "relibidinizes and sanctifies the Lady's erogenous zones for

an active life of chaste desire."[367] Nearly limitless in her powers, Sabrina not only

heals the Lady and transfigures her sexual desire into a form of ethical charity and

engagement in the world, but she also "translates the female position in the tragic

narrative from passive victimization to active heroism"[368] and "frees female sexuality

from the relation to shame and guilt fixed in exegetical and homiletic traditions."[369]

A maternal figure who facilitates the awakening of the Lady's desire and liberates it

from "shame and guilt" and "victimization," Sabrina thus represents chastity as guilt-

free desire, liberating the Lady from the strictures of virginity and opening her

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[365] William Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth: Milton's* Comus *as Initiation* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 250. Stella A. Revard also sees Sabrina as a figure of the maternal, easing rites of passage into womanhood in *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair: The Making of the 1645 Poems* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1997). Similarly, Kathleen Wall argues, "By having Sabrina rescue her, Milton emphasizes the extent to which the Lady must depend upon the feminine for guidance" ("A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle: The Armor of Logos," *Milton and the Idea of Woman*, ed. Julia M. Walker [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988], 60).

[366] Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth*, 251.

[367] Ibid., 243.

[368] Ibid., 244.

[369] Ibid., 245.

experience to include sensual pleasure. Sabrina transforms the Lady's virginity into mature chastity, which opens into the possibility of desire, and she "thus provides an exemplary figure of inviolable virginity translated, through trial and sacrifice, into immaculate, protective, magic-bearing maternity."[370] Shullenberger links chastity and charity through Sabrina's reawakening of the Lady's desire, saying, "Sabrina releases the bound energy of the Lady's erogenous zones for the active life of chaste desire. Since desire is reborn with the teleological impetus of charity here, the Lady's rediscovered bodily freedom is a spiritual awakening as well."[371] B. J. Sokol also views Sabrina as a maternal figure, or "a figure of womanliness," one whose actions demonstrate "public charity."[372] Sokol suggests that Sabrina's cure allays female suffering associated with the onset of menstruation. Drawing upon Agrippa, Sokol notes that self-help manuals also described women as having access to a host of magical and natural cures for the pains associated with distinctly female ailments. For Sokol, the Lady's trial "expresses the difficulty of the testing moment of menarche, signaling the beginning both of fertility and chastity."[373] Both Shullenberger and Sokol aptly acknowledge Sabrina's power to enlarge the Lady's definition of virginity into chastity-as-charity.

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[370] Ibid., 246.

[371] Ibid., 250.

[372] B. J. Sokol, "'*Tilted Lees*,' Dragons, Haemony, Menarche, Spirit, and Matter in Comus," *Review of English Studies* 16 (1990): 320.

[373] Ibid., 319.

Adding to these critical accounts of Sabrina, this chapter argues that Milton aligns the distinctly female healing magic of chastity-as-charity with the restorative power of the masque form. Attributing magical powers to both virginity and chastity-as-charity, the masque suggests that these virtues have the ability to perform material and spiritual wonders. Sabrina's magic heals, liberates, revives, and purifies the Lady. The greatest source of magic in the masque, then, is natural, local, sympathetic, and female. Sabrina's magic notably is a form of sympathetic magic, in which a ritual charm, an herbal unguent, and a healing touch counteract an evil spell. Milton's masque draws force from its representation of folk healing charms and rituals, as well as from the learned traditions of Paracelsian alchemy. Further, Milton disrupts the conventional narrative that magical women are dangerous witches, casting his witch as male and his beneficent cunning woman as female. Unlike Comus's lust-inciting revels, Sabrina's magical performance offers both pleasure and temperance at the same time; her magic purifies and restores her audience through aesthetic delight, not through utter restraint.

In addition to serving as a symbol of the maternal or of charity writ large, then, Sabrina also represents a temperate masque form that translates and heals its audiences through pleasure, inspiring them to reform their characters and to engage in charity as active engagement in the world, rather than as a "fugitive and cloistered virtue." For Shullenberger, Sabrina is emblematic of literary history, of poetic creation, and of *poesis* as "a curative, regenerative principle in language itself," symbolizing the "harmonic power of poetry" to join heaven and earth.[374] Woodhouse

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[374] Shullenberger, *Lady in the Labyrinth,* 92.

similarly recognizes that Sabrina represents the power of art, when he explains of the epilogue:

> if Virtue feeble were, there is still the grace of God which Virtue can invoke—that grace symbolized by Sabrina's intervention…This is surely not the merely negative and ascetic doctrine that too many of the critics have found in *Comus*. Rather it betokens the realization of a genuine religious experience by the poet—a sense of dependence on the grace of God, of the liberating effect of grace bestowed, and of nature transfigured when viewed from the vantage ground of this experience. And the experience was realized, and could be realized, only through the poem, only by the fusion of aesthetic and religious experience which the poem effects.[375]

The "liberating effect of grace" that the "poem effects" frees the poet to experience God's grace. As part of a masque, Sabrina's magic also has an effect on her audience and readers.

This chapter claims that Sabrina's magic specifically represents the healing, ritual magic of the performance arts, in particular the masque form. Richard Neuse argues for just such a power, when he says: "For an assumption of the masque is that its Platonic forms, enacting a ritual drama, can transform the (social) reality which they serve."[376] Neuse suggests that masque's ability to "transform…reality" hails

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[375] Woodhouse and Bush, *A Variorum Commentary*, 976.

[376] Richard Neuse, "Metamorphosis and Symbolic Action in *Comus*," *English Literary History* 34, no. 1 (March 1967): 63.

from its "very hyperbole," through which it "could insist on a kind of magic, a magic

mediating between the world of ideal forms and the world of social fact."[377] Though

this chapter suggests that these powers are not merely neo-Platonic ones, but also

local, folk, and female, it contends that as a figure of the imagination and of

performing arts, Sabrina represents the ways in which theatre can be generative and

can shape and heal its audiences. Sabrina thus embodies the magic of a chaste,

charitable masque form, which though limited, has a magical ability to heal and to

restore its audiences.

Virgin Magic

The central virtue of temperance, which the masque variously styles as

chastity or virginity, is also the subject of one of its critical debates. Readers struggle

to account for chastity's definition or role in the masque.[378] John Rogers, for instance,

argues that the Lady's chastity has a decidedly magical power: "Claiming for her

capacity as virginal orator the potency at once of an Orpheus, a Prospero, and a

Samson, she threatens her seducer with an apocalyptic power that far surpasses the

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[377] Ibid., 63.

[378] See, for example, Catherine Thomas, "Chaste Bodies and Poisonous Desires in Milton's 'Mask,'" *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 46, no. 2 (Spring 2006): 435-59; Rosemary Karmelich Mundhenk, "Dark Scandal and the Sun-Clad Power of Chastity: The Historical Milieu of Milton's *Comus*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 15 (1975): 141-52; Julie Kim, "The Lady's Unladylike Struggle," *Milton Studies* 35 (1997): 1-20; Georgia B. Christopher, "The Virginity of Faith: *Comus* as a Reformation Conceit," *English Literary History* 43, no. 4 (Winter 1976): 479-99; and Kathryn Schwarz, "Chastity, Militant and Married: Cavendish's Romance, Milton's Masque," *PMLA* 118, no. 2 (March 2003): 270-85.

strength required to destroy a petty magus such as Comus."[379] Rogers suggests that

Milton drew upon natural philosophy for his example of a magically-charged

virginity, explaining, "the renewed English interest in the 1650s in the esoteric,

hermetic philosophers of the sixteenth century, Cornelius Agrippa and Paracelsus in

particular, can in large part be attributed to the degree of mystical, almost

alchemically based powers they bestowed on virginity."[380] Religion also offers

accounts of virginity effecting change in the material world.[381] Such potency can

ensure the virgin's "autonomous liberal self," or even, by extension, be an "actual

historical precipitant for a spiritual, even political, revolution."[382] Though he does not

specifically articulate just what that change might be, other than to grant the virgin

autonomous selfhood, Rogers reads the magic in Milton's masque as actually

instrumental, able to effect change in the material world. Indeed, chastity-as-virginity

in the masque is at times instrumental as a protective or healing virtue. Comus's

magic, for instance, is sensitive to virginity. When the Lady draws near, he

recognizes her to be "some virgin sure / (For so I can distinguish by mine art)" (148-

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[379] John Rogers, "The Enclosure of Virginity: The Poetics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Revolution," in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, ed. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994), 231. Rogers argues Milton's Lady "articulates a figurative version of what was becoming in seventeenth-century England the normative affirmation of temperate conjugal sexual behavior, the doctrine of 'married chastity'" (230).

[380] Ibid., 234.

[381] Ibid., 237.

[382] Ibid., 238, 239.

9).[383] The Lady's chastity interrupts Comus's crew's dance: "Break off, break off, I feel the different pace / Of some chaste footing near about this ground" (145-6). Even further, Chastity's visible form has the power to embolden the Lady and to give her hope; she decides to call out for her brothers in a song, saying, "for my new enlivened spirits / Prompt me" (228-9). Chastity-as-virginity has the ability to move the Lady to create art, just as it inspires her to have hope and faith. While not quite magical here, Chastity's spirit-enlivening force is certainly mysterious, powerful, and visionary.

Comus's interpretation of the lady's virginity further suggests that it is a curiously powerful force. When he hears her song, he calls it "such divine enchanting ravishment" (245). It is no small detail that the sorcerer in the play uses the language of magic to describe the art inspired by the Lady's virtue and chastity. Comus recognizes the power of her song as a kindred art, one with the ability magically to ravish him. He further describes the relationship between her song and her virtue as one of occult movement: "Sure something holy lodges in that breast, / And with these raptures moves the vocal air / To testify his hidden residence" (246-8). For Comus, the Lady's virtue is "something holy" that is "hidden" within her; it is a mysterious source of energy that "moves the vocal air." In his description, the Lady appears to be possessed by a strange force that controls her body and moves the air to produce art. Thus, the Lady becomes a sort of divine vessel in which "something holy" animates her to create art that is "enchanting ravishment." Comus's description of the Lady's song differs little from the way in which she herself described Chastity's ability to

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[383] John Milton, *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Hughes (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Co., 2003). All citations of *Comus* are from this edition.

enliven her spirits and to prompt her to song. Thus, it is possible to understand the Lady's virginity as a mysterious force with the ability to move others.

Comus's assessment of the Lady's chaste and magical art distinguishes it from the dark, illicit magic of Comus's ilk: of his mother Circe and the Sirens, in particular. Their music has the ability to "take the prisoned soul, / And lap it in Elysium" (256-7); in other words, it can trap souls and cause forgetfulness. Further, the music of Circe and the Sirens can cause Scylla to weep and Charybdis to applaud; it has a tremendous impact on natural forces. The magic of Circe and the Sirens numbs bodies and destroys souls: "Yet they in pleasing slumber lulled the sense, / And in sweet madness robbed it of itself" (260-1). Although they are like cunning women with "potent herbs, and baleful drugs" (255), they do not use their natural magic or their magical art to heal; instead, they poison their victims, muddling their minds and lulling their senses. Comus juxtaposes their powerful but poisonous art with the Lady's magical song, which is much more potent and "sacred" than their magical music; it is a "homefelt-delight" (262) that inspires "sober certainty of waking bliss" (263). Rather than causing forgetfulness, insanity, and confusion, the Lady's holy art causes clarity and sobriety. The song inspired by her chastity pleasingly returns people home; it creates a "homefelt-delight" that returns people to themselves rather than driving them to madness. Comus calls the Lady a "foreign wonder" (265), underscoring the gulf between his dark magic and the holy art that the Lady's chastity inspires. Just as Milton contrasts the riotous, masque-like spectacle of Comus and his crew with the simple, rustic performance of the Attendant Spirit, he

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also dramaturgically juxtaposes the poisonous magical art of Circe and the Sirens with the Lady's holy and chaste powers.

In addition to having the power to inspire hope, faith, or "ravishment," the Lady's virginity has protective powers, according to the Lady's elder brother. He does not worry as much as the younger brother about her wandering in the woods, believing that because she is virtuous she is not in danger. Even her mind is safe from error, as nothing "Could stir the constant mood of her calm thoughts, / And put them into misbecoming plight" (371-2). Dark and spooky woods cannot interfere with the power of virtue to temper the unruly mind, since "Virtue could see to do what virtue would / By her own radiant light, though sun and moon / Were in the flat sea sunk" (373-4). Virtue carries with it an inner light that guides lost souls through danger in addition to calming wild thoughts; it has the ability to guide and protect. While the brother's claims seem naively optimistic, even to the point of parody, we have just seen such powers in operation in the preceding scene when Chastity's form calmed the Lady's racing fancy and inspired her to seek help. Such confirmation of the Elder Brother's seemingly hyperbolic expectations of chastity emphasizes its surprisingly potent force. Of course, the masque hedges this possibility with a healthy dose of skepticism in the voice of the younger brother, who claims that virtue can protect itself, but beauty requires a "guard" in the form of a "dragon" to "watch with unenchanted eye, / To save her blossoms, and defend her fruit / From the rash hand of bold incontinence" (394-7). In other words, he is not worried about his sister's chastity but about the intemperance and violence that her beauty might inspire. Virtue may protect her mind, but what can protect her "blossoms" and "fruit"? Milton stages

this conflict dramaturgically by placing the scene in which Comus lures the Lady to follow him immediately after the scene in which the form of Chastity soothes her soul and inspires song.

Yet the elder brother persists in his claim that virginity has a powerful force that can protect against those who threaten it, suggesting that someone who has the "hidden strength" of chastity "is clad in complete steel" (420-1). He continues in his hyperbolical praise: "through the sacred rays of chastity, / No savage fierce, bandit, or mountaineer / Will dare to soil her virgin purity" (427-7). Virginity thus has a protective power that exceeds the physical limitations of the person wielding it. Virginity appears as a form of mind control; enemies fear to assail its hidden force. The brother codes this power as explicitly magical when he explains that virginity can defend itself against mystical creatures: "Some say no evil thing that walks by night / In fog, or fire, by lake, or moorish fen, / Blue meager hag, or stubborn unlaid ghost, / That breaks his magic chains at curfew time, / No goblin, or swart faery of the mine, / Hath hurtful power o'er true virginity" (432-437). Despite their "evil," "stubborn" strength, unearthly creatures cannot break the defenses of one who is chaste. Against supernatural creatures, virginity can mysteriously defend itself by transforming the bodies and souls of its assailants and of its protected ones. The elder brother describes, for example, the "unconquered virgin" like Minerva's "Gorgon shield," which freezes "her foes to congealed stone" (447-9). He describes "rigid looks of chaste austerity, / And noble grace that dashed brute violence / With sudden adoration, and blank awe" (450-2). Minerva's chastity quells violence with a mythical

strength, transmuting it into wonder. Virginity transforms its attackers physically and psychically with a mere look.

Whereas the elder brother believes that the Lady's inner virtue alone will protect her, the Attendant Spirit offers another means to "secure the Lady from surprisal" (618). He offers the brothers some *haemony*, an herb given to him by a rustic lad skilled in the occult properties of herbs. *Haemony* can only stall Comus and his crew momentarily, however; the Attendant Spirit warns the brothers that after the herb stuns the brood, the brothers must immediately destroy Comus's "glass, / And shed the luscious liquor on the ground, / But seize his wand" (651-3). The brothers must destroy the sources of Comus's power, his poisonous cup and his wand, in order to save their sister. Thus, while the elder brother believes that the inner power of his sister's virginity will defend her, the Attendant Spirit warns that external methods are required. And even another local, chaste, and natural magic, like the Lady's chastity, will not suffice. The violent destruction of Comus's magical tools will be necessary. Magic will not be enough to fight magic, according to the Attendant Spirit's plan.

As the masque reveals, neither the brother nor the Attendant Spirit is entirely correct. In one sense, the elder brother's claim is accurate—that chastity will protect his sister's soul from intemperance's degrading powers. She easily withstands all of Comus's temptations, calling the luxuries and dainties "brewed enchantments" (696). Through her virtue, she easily recognizes that "such as are good men may give good things, / And that which is not good, is not delicious / To a well-governed and wise appetite" (703-5). The Lady is like the Son in his temptation in *Paradise Regained*, another work interested in temperance and principled restraint. Her chastity is proof

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against intemperance and other vices that might lead her soul to degradation. She smoothly repels Comus's persuasive rhetoric, that nature wants people to indulge her abundance, by arguing that nature "Means her provision only to the good / That live according to her sober laws, / And holy dictate of spare Temperance" (765-7). Her chastity helps maintain her temperate virtue. Even the Lady describes her chastity as having a mysterious, magical protective power when she describes "the sun-clad power of Chastity" (782). Nothing impure can penetrate this defensive force, especially not Comus, and the Lady explains that the vice-filled soul cannot even penetrate its mysteries by understanding it: "Thou hast nor ear, nor soul to apprehend / The sublime notion, and high mystery / That must be uttered to unfold the sage / And serious doctrine of Virginity" (784-7). Virginity can only be "unfold[ed]" through uttering a "sublime notion, and high mystery." It is sublimely charmed, proof against the ravages of the intemperate.

In addition to its defensive powers, the Lady's chastity also has the ability to inspire a form of holy passion that can move others to sympathy, make the earth tremble, and destroy all vile forms of magic; the Lady explains that if she were to attempt to describe the virtue of chastity,

> the uncontrolled worth
>
> Of this pure cause would kindle my rapt spirits
>
> To such a flame of sacred vehemence,
>
> That dumb things would be moved to sympathize,
>
> And the brute earth would lend her nerves, and shake,
>
> Till all thy magic structures reared so high,

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Were shattered into heaps o'er thy false head. (793-9)

As when she was walking alone in the woods and experienced a vision of Chastity that prompted her to sing, chastity can again move the Lady's "spirits" and cause her to create art—in this case, rhetoric—that will then transform those who encounter it. Chastity even has the power to affect the material world through sympathetic, natural magic. Comus confirms the Lady's claims about the magical powers of chastity when he admits that her virtue physically and psychically alters him: "She fables not, I feel that I do fear / Her words set off by some superior power; / And though not mortal, yet a cold shuddering dew / Dips me all o'er" (800-3). Just as the Attendant Spirit confirms that mythical creatures and magical forces are not merely figurative, Comus suggests that chastity's magical powers are not allegorical ("She fables not"), but actually performative; he can sense the "superior power" that animates her discourse on chastity, which causes him to break out in a sweat. So the scene appears to corroborate the elder brother's claim that chastity will defeat any assailant.

The Limitations of Chastity-as-Virginity

While Milton sets up audiences to expect virginal chastity to perform miracles, he limits its powers. Comus persists in his temptation of the Lady despite his encounter with chastity's magic, for example, and the Lady's body remains manacled to the chair even after his departure. Her chastity has not broken the material bonds caused by Comus's magic. At the level of spirit or soul, then, the Lady's chastity has protected her, but at the level of the body, it has not "shattered" Comus's "magic structures." Apparently, the Attendant Spirit and the second brother

are correct in arguing that chastity-as-virginity requires some other, external force to defend it. Just as Comus once more offers his cup to the Lady ["Be wise, and taste" (812)], her brothers "rush in with swords drawn, wrest his glass out of his hand, and break it against the ground" (69). Their violent dramatic spectacle intervenes in the Lady's restrained rhetoric. The brothers' attempt at defending chastity is not entirely effective, either. While they break the cup, or the instrument and symbol of temptation, and drive out Comus and "his rout," they are unable to free the Lady from her "stony fetters" (819) because they did not take Comus's wand, reverse it, and speak "backward mutters of dissevering power" (816-7). So the use of necromancy as a source of power is also deferred. Indeed, the Attendant Spirit undercuts his own claim that they must use necromantic magic in reverse in order to undo Comus's magic when he tells of another method that he learned, once again, from a shepherd: invoking the maiden river goddess, Sabrina, to use chaste natural magic to free the Lady.

Despite the Lady's and the brothers' descriptions of virginity as magical and all-powerful, Milton refuses to demonstrate these magical powers in the masque. As a result, the hyperbolic claims of the brothers are suspect. Indeed, their long-winded excurses on the powers of virginity would appear especially comical and unrealistic when delivered by the Earl of Bridgewater's two young sons, aged nine and eleven. Further, when Comus affixes the Lady to the chair, he demonstrates the physical limitations of virginity as a protective charm against all assailants. The claims of the brothers prove to be false, and even the external aids of *haemony* and of the brothers' swords cannot save virginity from its attackers. Instead of an omnipotent defense,

virginity proves to be vulnerable. In light of these limitations and because the Lady

never causes the earth to tremble, the powers of virginal chastity that the three

children invoke appear to be quite limited. By posing such hyperbolic claims and then

denying them, Milton highlights the foolishness of expecting too much of virginity.

The Dangers of the Virgin Imagination

Even more problematic, the Lady's encounter with Chastity as a "hov'ring

Angel" introduces questions about the source and application of the Lady's powers.

When the heroine, lost and wandering alone in the wood, first hears the sound of

Comus's wild rout, her imagination likewise runs wild, and she cries, "A thousand

fantasies / Begin to throng into my memory" (205-6). From her "memory," she paints

a vivid description of these "calling shapes and beckning shadows dire, /And airy

tongues" (207-8). As if infected by the spectacular sounds, her imagination draws

upon some undisclosed, internal, and dark remembrances, and such "fantasies"

threaten to overtake her reason. At just this moment, the Lady perceives a vision that

prompts her invocation and revision of the cardinal Christian virtues: "O welcom

pure-ey'd Faith, white-handed Hope, / Thou hov'ring Angel girt with golden wings, /

And thou unblemish't form of Chastity, / I see ye visibly" (213-6). Milton's masque is

famous for substituting chastity for charity as one of its virtues. These lines seem to

suggest that faith, hope, and chastity are more than allegorical symbols, but rather

visible protective beings who magically chasten and dispel the "calling shapes" of her

imagination. As visibly present figures, these virtues seem to represent the immanent

presence of God and His ability to bridle the forces of the powerful, yet controllable,

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female imagination. As a result, the Lady's speech suggests that Faith, Hope, and Chastity are miraculous spirits who can protect the Lady from self-harm as well as from the physical threat that Comus's lusty crew represents. Because the figures temper the Lady's imagination, it seems apt at first glance that the virtues replace Charity with Chastity as one of their sisters.

This scene draws affective force from contemporary anxieties about both the powers and weaknesses of the female imagination, and the Lady's experience seems to offer chastity-as-virginity as a remedy for the potential injuries inflicted by the "fantasies" of women. Further, it redirects the Lady's imaginative and aesthetic powers into an appropriate form. Encouraged by the visions of Faith, Hope, and Chastity, the Lady claims that her "new enliv'n'd spirits / Prompt [her]" (228-9) to sing a beautiful song to call her brothers to her. The presence of the virtues works wonders in her body, and her "enliv'n'd spirits" convert her "fantasies" into a tempered aesthetic form. Yet, like Samson's "rousing motions," the source of the Lady's inspiration and her imaginative and creative powers is ambiguous. Even the Lady questions her perceptions: "Was I deceiv'd, or did a sable cloud / Turn forth her silver lining on the night?" (221-2). Though she eventually decides that she "did not err" (223), the question hovers and unsettles the effect of the scene. Like Spenserian heroes, Milton's Lady has the potential to "err." Indeed, instead of drawing her brothers to her, the Lady's song invokes Comus in what he codes as magical and sexual: it is "enchanting ravishment." As the figure most closely aligned with chastity—and in particular chastity defined narrowly as virginity—the Lady's potential misperception and the effects of her art on Comus suggest that the masque

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likewise questions the virtue and power of chastity-as-virginity. This early scene invites observers and readers to consider throughout the masque whether the Lady's substitution of charity with chastity is actually appropriate. Chastity's signifying instability finds its source in the related issues of the Lady's perception, imagination, and artistic creation. Just as the masque both celebrates and questions the powers of chastity, then, it both glorifies and limits the power of art and the imagination.

As these scenes demonstrate, virginity's powers are not as good as the character's initial claim portray it to be. Chastity as virginity is not magically protective, and indeed, not only is it assailable, but also it is instrumental in luring the vice characters to the maiden. The hyperbolic rhetoric and assumptions surrounding virginity heighten the critique of its omnipotence, as do the language of ravishment and the questionable figure of Chastity. Thus, the Lady's substitution of charity with chastity proves doubtful. In this portrayal of virginal chastity, Milton underscores an anxiety about the powers of the imagination—in particular the female imagination—and of the creative arts vis-à-vis the vexed depiction of magical virginity. Unlike the figures of chastity in romance, such as Delia in George Peele's *Old Wives Tale*, Milton's Lady cannot be defended successfully against the powers of vice; in *Comus*, romance is dead. Milton does not allow his boys to run in and to save the day by defeating Comus with their little swords. Virginal chastity does not live up to its praise; it must be assailable. In Miltonic fashion, in order for chastity to be a virtue, it must be subjected to trial. Virtue must be free to be virtuous. Sabrina's liberation of the Lady at the end of the play likewise frees her from the shackles of chastity construed narrowly as virginity. The crux of Sabrina's magic, then, is liberty.

Sabrina's Performative, Natural, and Healing Magic

Whereas the Lady's virginal chastity, her brothers' physical violence, and the Attendant Spirit's magic fail to save chastity, Sabrina's story and her magical deeds confirm that a kind of magical chastity can effect change in the material world. In Milton's reimagining of Sabrina's story, when the "virgin pure" Sabrina was "flying the mad pursuit / Of her enraged stepdame Guendolen," she threw herself into the river, or "Commended her fair innocence to the flood / That stayed her flight with his cross-flowing course" (826-32). Her chastity, however, saved her from drowning. Nereus took her in, and his daughter nymphs bathed her in nectar, "asphodel," and "ambrosial oils" to revive her and to transform her into an immortal goddess (838, 840). With the help of water nymphs, her chastity rendered her immortal and gave her magical powers, including the ability to heal the herd "with precious vialed liquors" (847), to reverse the charms of elves, and, importantly for the Lady, to "unlock / The clasping charm, and thaw the numbing spell" (853). In addition to reviving her body and making her immortal, then, chastity imbued her with natural healing and protecting magic.

Sabrina's chaste, natural magic frees the Lady from her fetters. Sabrina sprinkles water drops on the Lady and, "with chaste palms moist and cold" (917-8), touches the Lady's breast, lips, and the chair, which is famously "smeared with gums of glutinous heat"; in direct response to Sabrina's charm, the Lady "rises out of her seat" (72). Sabrina's chaste touch works magic in the material world; thus, the masque suggests that chastity-as-charity can be magically instrumental not only in protecting the spirit, but also in defending the body. Her "liquors" are restorative

balms. Her magic further engages sympathetic touch, in which she restores energy

and strength to the numbed limbs of the Lady. Sabrina's story and her magical

liberation of the Lady represent a rustic, female magic that heals, revives, and

purifies.

In addition to unguents, liquors, and healing touches, Sabrina's magic

requires—and therefore licenses— the hallmarks of the masque form: spectacle, lush

and sensuous poetry, and song. She rises and descends dramatically from the stage, in

a *deus ex machina* typical of court masques. Her poetry is richly evocative, drawing

upon imagery associated with the elements of earth and water:

> By the rushy-fringed bank,
>
> Where grows the Willow and the Osier dank,
>
> My sliding Chariot stayes,
>
> Thick set with Agat and the azurn sheen
>
> Of Turkis blew, and Emrauld green
>
> That in the channell strayes,
>
> Whilst from off the waters fleet
>
> Thus I set my printless feet
>
> O're the Cowslips Velvet head,
>
> That bends not as I tread. (890-899)

Audiences can practically feel the breezes blowing on Sabrina's "rushy-fringed

bank," smell the "willow and osier," see the "agate" and "azurn" and "emerald" of the

river. In this sensuously-realized passage, Milton borrows here from Shakespeare's *A

Midsummer Night's Dream*: "I know a bank where the wild thyme blows, /Where

oxlips and the nodding violet grows, /Quite over-canopied with luscious woodbine, /With sweet musk roses and with eglantine" (2.2.249-53).[384] As such, Milton renders Sabrina even more intensely a figure that represents and celebrates the techniques of theatre, with her elaborate and sensual narrations as emblematic of theatrical world making. Sabrina's magic then is natural, rustic, and female—but it is also, notably, theatrical. Her magic celebrates the powers of the creative, generative, and female imagination, specifically in relation to the masque form.

As a heightened theatrical moment and the climax of the masque's action, the staging and language of Sabrina's scene are not merely sensual, but also sexy. In administering her charm, Sabrina first captures the gaze of the Lady: "Brightest Lady look on me" (910). She then sprinkles drops on her breast, rubs them "thrice" on her "finger's tip" (914) and "thrice" on her "rubied lip" (915) before touching the "seat" (916). Staring into each other's eyes, the female character intimately touches her chaste counterpart in order to revive her numbed limbs.[385] In a lecture on this masque, John Rogers, citing John Guillory, describes this moment as Sabrina "activating the

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[384] William Shakespeare, "A Midsummer Night's Dream," *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997). Among others, John M. Major recognizes the debt that *A Maske* owes to Shakespeare, contending, for example, "*The Tempest* touches *Comus* at so many points that it would seem to deserve being recognized as one of the principal 'sources' for Milton's poem" ("Comus and *The Tempest,*" *Shakespeare Quarterly* 10, no. 2 [Spring 1959], 177).

[385] For this scene of female friendship, sensuality, and intimate touch, Milton may have been inspired by Book Four of the *The Faerie Queene*, in which Britomart and Amoretta spend the night together in a chaste embrace. While critics often cite Milton's borrowing of the Sabrina figure from Spenser and her relationship to female characters in the first three books, none to my knowledge has considered the relationship between the female characters in Book Four.

Lady's 'erogenous zones.'"[386] Importantly, then, the only scene in which magic is instrumental is sensual, erotic, and spectacular—adjectives not typically associated with chastity as virginity. The power in the masque does not derive from chastity as a highly restrictive, spare ideal, but as a liberating, indulgent, and capacious virtue, one associated with the pleasures of theatre and of the senses.

At the same time, however, Sabrina's magic and her scene are "chaste" (917), cooling, and temperate. Her magic seems to move along opposite vectors, both sensual and restrained; her touch is cold, but her words are sensual. When the Attendant Spirit invokes her, he draws attention to this paradoxical depiction of Sabrina: "Rise, rise, and heave thy rosie head / From thy coral-pav'n bed, / And bridle in thy headlong wave, / Till thou our summons answer'd have" (885-8). The Attendant Spirit calls for Sabrina's powerful motion, rising and heaving her heavy head, using alliteration and monosyllabic, active verbs that evoke the substantial force of Sabrina's body. Further, her "headlong wave" implies motion, energy, a forward-moving power at once unstoppable and weighty. Yet he asks her to "bridle" her wave, to restrain and to temper her thrusting motion as she rises. Sabrina's invocation requires gorgeous, vigorous poetry as well as temperance.

In addition to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Sabrina's charm echoes Prospero's invocation in *The Tempest*: "Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes and groves, / And ye that on the sands with printless foot / Do chase the ebbing Neptune,

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[386] John Rogers, "Lecture 5 – Poetry and Marriage," Open Yale Courses, 19 September 2007 <http://oyc.yale.edu/transcript/209/engl-220>.

and do fly him / When he comes back" (5.1.33-6).[387] Sabrina is like one of the deities

of nature that Prospero invokes, when she cries, "Thus I set my printless feet / O'er

the cowslips velvet head, / That bends not as I tread" (897-9). Prospero conjures and

bends to his will those who walk with "printless foot," whereas Sabrina herself, with

her "printless feet" gently works her magic without disturbing nature and without

imprisoning others. Similarly, like Comus's magic, which binds the Lady to a chair

and freezes her limbs, Prospero's magic imprisons and freezes, whereas Sabrina's

magic loosens the Lady from her bonds. Prospero conjures tempests, whereas Sabrina

inspires and embodies temperance when she bridles her "headlong wave." Sabrina's

magic, while sensuous and indulgent, is tempered and restrained. She thus represents

aesthetic pleasure that is both robust and restrained, moving and measured. So, like

the Lady, Sabrina represents chastity, but unlike the Lady, whose chastity is narrowly

construed as virginity, Sabrina's chastity is a form of temperance that allows for the

experience of sensuous pleasure. Milton's Sabrina tempers Shakespeare's "rough

magic," symbolizing a dramatic form that embraces its visual and sonic pleasures

without sacrificing its temperance.

As a figure of tempered indulgence, Sabrina frees the Lady from her

restrictive understanding of chastity as virginity. Her sympathetic touch, inspired by

her empathy for another chaste maid, liberates chastity's narrow definition in the

masque, as it restores the subterranean virtue of charity to its rightful place as a sister

of faith and hope. The Lady's narrowly defined understanding of chastity renders her

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[387] William Shakespeare, "The Tempest," *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G.
Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

frozen and numb, stuck to a marble seat when confronted with vice. Sabrina's magic, on the other hand, enlarges the Lady's definition of chastity to one that includes charity and temperance, and this version of chastity liberates and revives her. In her encounter with Comus, the Lady learns to resist temptation, but through Sabrina she learns to surrender to the senses. Sabrina's chaste magic tempers the hyperbolic versions of magical virginity presented by the brothers. Too much work is expected of virginity narrowly construed, especially in the 1637 printing of the masque, which includes the Lady's long speech on the virtues of virginity. The masque emphasizes these wild claims about virginity's power in order to contrast them with the truly liberating and natural healing power of Sabrina's magic. Her touch, her salve, and her spectacular and gorgeous song temper the extreme version of virginity envisaged by the young people, just as they counteract the sorcery of Comus.

Sabrina's magic outlines the contours of a more temperate, yet powerful, version of natural magic. The error of the imagination, especially the female imagination, is corrected by her powerful, yet tempered female magic. Sabrina's version of chastity as charity bridles the "headlong wave": the potentially seductive, generative, and overwhelming power of women's imagination and art. The Lady's imaginative powers are dangerous, creative, and powerful, perhaps even more so than Comus's magic and performances, yet they are tempered and restrained when she experiences temptation and trial. Grounded in healing and charity, rather than in imagining wild spectacles, Sabrina's magic offers a model of natural, female, and chaste magic. Her magic eases some of the sensual and even sexual tensions of the masque, which sanctions the softly sensual touch of Sabrina as opposed to the rough

magic of Comus and his rout. Sabrina's chaste, charitable magic offers a

transmutation, purification, and liberation of the Lady and of the masque form.

Inspirations for Sabrina's Female Healing Magic

Milton perhaps borrowed from Ficino his version of chastity as temperance,

which magically heals bodily and spiritual sickness. John Arthos notes, for instance,

that in the masque, the meaning of chastity shifts (261), and he argues that Ficino's

commentary on the *Charmides*, in which he discusses *sophrosyne*, translated as

temperantia, is a likely source of Milton's version of chastity.[388] In this version of

chastity, or temperance, stoic restraint or withdrawal from worldly pleasure is not

desirable and is not true temperance; rather, in Ficino's commentary of Plato,

Socrates advocates for indulgence in pleasure and art, so long as they "effect

purification of the mind" and are "directed towards likeness with the divine and the

acquirement of wisdom."[389] Such temperance is a form of both magic and philosophy,

through which the "Pythagoreans expelled sickness both from soul and body in such a

wonderful way."[390] Further, this virtue is nearly impossible to define and therefore

nearly impossible to achieve. For Milton, Arthos claims, the "power of chastity is

magical," just as it is in Ficino's commentary.[391] Hope and faith are required for the

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[388] John Arthos, "Milton, Ficino, and the Charmides," *Studies in the Renaissance* 6 (1959): 264.

[389] Ibid., 267.

[390] Ibid., 268.

[391] Ibid., 273.

chastity invoked by Ficino and by Milton, and this chastity has the ability to heal both the soul and body.

Sharon Rose Yang's "female pastoral guide" offers a long literary tradition for specifically female healing magic.[392] From goddesses to cunning women to mages, "[A]ll versions of the guide restore the human soul. They revive fellowship, compassion, and empathy amongst fellow humans. They open their charges' eyes to love and appreciation of the transcendent beauty in valuing the spiritual as well as the physical, balancing reason and emotion."[393] For example, Boccaccio's Venus in his pastoral romance, *Ameto*, attempts, like Sabrina, "to recreate an ancient fusion, to heal the wound of psyche and soul."[394] Reconciling earthly and spiritual elements, Venus also, again like Sabrina, embodies (and, in *Ameto's* case, defends) charity: "When unconditional love or Charity (Agape) is degraded by lustful, possessive sexuality, she answers the nymph's plea for fulfilling salvation by bringing a lover who will enable the girl to give of herself productively, unselfishly."[395] There are many other such female literary healers, such as Cynthia in Lyly's *Endymion*, *The Arraignment of Paris,* and *The Lady of May;* Spenser's Coelia; and Lady Mary Wroth's Melissea in *Urania*: "wise women whose sacred studies and personal

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[392] Sharon Rose Yang, *Goddesses, Mages, and Wise Women: The Female Pastoral Guide in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century English Drama* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2011).

[393] Ibid., 35.

[394] Ibid., 51.

[395] Ibid., 60.

holiness enable them to heal the bodies and souls of the injured brought to them."[396]

Yang argues that in *A Maske*, "The Lady acts out a unique twist on the guide's

attempts to maintain or restore the golden age within the individual's soul and in

society. This work does not show the wise woman merely struggling with the folly or

egotism of misdirected lovers but portrays her under siege and striving to use her wit,

insight, and strength to save her own soul from damning corruption."[397] Interestingly,

Yang casts the Lady as the pastoral guide, though Sabrina seems the better fit.

Literary guides more contemporary with Milton's masque invoke Paracelsian

and folk magic. Yang surmises that this is because women in this time had regular

experiences with these forms of healing: "Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth

centuries, the 'useful' science of medicine was a particularly practical course of study

for women, which they practiced regularly in caring for the health of spouses;

children; and…servants."[398] There were two sides to women's involvement in

medicine, however, as Yang explains, "[M]ost women's connection to health care

was through folk traditions as herbalists and cunning women—sometimes with the

stigma of being associated with witchcraft."[399] Literary incarnations of the pastoral

guide that may have influenced Milton's masque include John Fletcher's *The Faithful

Shepherdess*, written early in the seventeenth century but performed before the queen

the same year as *A Maske.* Fletcher's Clorin is a scholar who "balances expertise in

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[396] Ibid., 140.

[397] Ibid., 141.

[398] Ibid., 148.

[399] Ibid., 150.

practicing both the lower stratum's female folk remedies (even white magic) with the

upper stratum's Paracelsian medical theory."[400] Like Sabrina, Clorin applies her folk

and Paracelsian magic in the interest of charity, or, as Yang noes, "Clorin adheres to

the mage's code of wielding magic under Pico's virtues of 'charity, faith and hope'

for Paracelsus's 'love for one's fellow creatures.'"[401] Perhaps drawing upon the figure

of Clorin, Sabrina also operates under Pico's principles for the charitable use of

magic, and both guides work to heal as "by promoting temperance against bodily

excesses."[402] Pico's attempt to bring together magic with the Christian virtues,

particularly charity and temperance, similarly undergirds Milton's Sabrina. According

to Yang, Shakespeare's Helena and Rosalind also bring together "the lower stratum

of women's folk cures with the upper of men's learned Paracelsian medical

treatments."[403] Perhaps even more usefully for the argument of this chapter, these two

Shakespearean guides "both stand in direct disputation to that incarnation of fears

about the female Other, the witch with her diabolical sources and uses of 'magical'

power." Instead of playing into fears of diabolical female magic, these two guides

"function as healers of physical and spiritual ills and, in consequence, bring society

back to order rather than lead others into sin and society into chaos."[404] Sabrina's

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[400] Ibid., 162.

[401] Ibid., 162.

[402] Ibid., 164.

[403] Ibid., 175.

[404] Ibid., 214.

chaste and charitable magic likewise opposes the sexual and malevolent powers of the witch figure, healing and restoring physical and spiritual health.

Another possible source for local, female, healing magic exists in a variety of printed texts and manuscripts of magic spells and healing potions. Sokol notes in her argument that Sabrina offers a balm to soothe the pains associated with menarche, and indeed, collections of the herbal remedies of housewives, midwives, and cunningwomen offer promising repositories of natural cures from which Milton may have drawn to create the character of Sabrina. Such texts bring together natural magic, healing liquors, and admonitions of temperance. "A Rich Storehouse or Treasury for the Diseased," for instance, includes many unguents to cure agues and aches. Though compiled by a male physician, this collection sets forth many remedies of local healers and advertises remedies for "the common sort"[405] to use in the home. Like the cooling touch of Sabrina and her "liquor," these oils require tempering or distillation. One such treatment for a fever includes laying a plaster on the breast of the patient, just as Sabrina places her healing salve on the Lady's breast, and several other involve plasters for the wrists and arms, just as Sabrina touches the Lady's finger tips.[406] The collection of herbal remedies also warns practitioners and patients to be temperate in their diets and lifestyles, testifying, for example, that things

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[405] *Rich storehouse, or, Treasurie for the diseased wherein are many approued medicines for diuers and sundry diseases, which haue bin long hidden, and not come to light before this time / first set foorth for the benefit and comfort of the poorer sort of people that are not of abilllitie [sic] to go to the phisitions, by A.T.* (At London: Printed by Ralph Blower, 1607), Harvard University Library, Early English Books Online, Bv.

[406] Ibid., D4r, Er-v.

"wholesome for the brain" include drinking wine measurably and smelling red roses, whereas things "ill for the brain" include gluttony, drunkenness, late suppers, anger, milk, cheese, garlic, onion, and smelling white roses.[407] With its healing oils, its advice for temperance, and its local magic, this herbal—and the many others like it— serves as a possible inspiration for the magic of Sabrina. Like the home physician described in this text, Sabrina is a healer. Barbara Traister suggests, "Sabrina's capacity—and willingness—to cure domestic animals as well as humans aligns her art with that of the folk healers common in the English countryside."[408] Sabrina's charitable healing powers draw directly from the folk traditions of cunningwomen and midwives.

Alchemy is another discourse from which Milton could draw images of tempering, healing, and purifying magic. As John Rogers notes, Milton invoked natural philosophy with his example of a magically charged virginity. Paracelsian alchemy, with its interest in herbal distillations and medical cures, was both in vogue and hotly contested at the time that Milton was writing his masque, and Paracelsian medicine has much in common with Milton's masque. Stanton Linden notes that in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, there is an "emergence of a new pattern of alchemical imagery which places primary emphasis on change, purification, moral transformation, and spirituality."[409] Linden explains that Milton drew directly from

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[407] Ibid., Iv.

[408] Traister, *Heavenly Necromancers*, 203.

[409] Stanton Linden, "Mystical Alchemy, Eschatology, and Seventeenth-Century Religious Poetry," *Pacific Coast Philology* 19 (November 1984): 79.

this discourse in *Paradise Lost*, claiming, "Milton's conception of Christ and the Last Judgment [in terms of alchemical eschatology] was commonplace in alchemical books of the time."[410] Paracelsian medicine is interested in sympathy, in correspondences between like and like, just as Sabrina is drawn by sympathy to heal the Lady through sympathetic touch because they are both chaste maids pursued by vice. Further, the Lady is mysteriously stuck to her seat, her massy body drawn through some occult virtue to the chair, resembling the way in which the iron is drawn to the lodestone in magnetism. Paracelsian cures invoke the law of correspondences, in which the occult virtues of plants and minerals resonated with and cured ailments of the body with similar occult virtues.

A famous example of an extreme version of a Paracelsian cure is the weapon salve, which was at its peak fame and notoriety in the few years preceding Milton's masque. Doctor Robert Fludd and his supporters argued that a person wounded with a weapon could rub some mummy, or dead flesh of a hanged criminal, on the weapon that caused the wound (or a weapon similar to it). Drawing upon long-standing beliefs in the power of the weapon salve, Fludd contended that this salve could perform its cure at a distance; even without touching it to the wound, the victim could be cured. In a defense of this cure, Fludd argues that such sympathetic cures are not magical, but natural, suggesting that natural phenomena, such as magnetism and the plague, prove the possibility of occult action at a distance.[411] The source of the efficacy of the

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[410] Ibid., 83.

[411] William Foster, *Hoplocrisma-spongus: or, A sponge to vvipe avvay the weapon-salve. A treatise, wherein is proved, that the cure late-taken up amongst us, by applying the salve to the weapon, is magicall and unlawfull By William Foster Mr. of*

weapon salve is the *anima mundi*, or God's spirit which animates all things: "the

Quintessentiall or AEtheriall spirit of life, which by his presence is viuified and

animated; and this AEtheriall spirit being the immediate vehicle of that incorruptible

spirit of life, is carried in the grosser elementary or sublunary ayr."[412] Sabrina's

magical touch similarly draws upon sympathy, which Milton portrays as naturally

healing the lady.

Yet her cure, unlike the weapon salve, requires touch. As a result, Sabrina's

magic relates more to the more prevalent versions of sympathetic magic, which

require contact between healing agent and wound. Parson William Foster forcefully

contested Fludd's theory, calling such sympathetic applications at a distance

"superstitious and magicall Cures."[413] His purpose in writing was to save the

Protestants from the calumny of "*Magi-Calvinists,*"[414] to shed the taint of the magical

reputation provoked by Fludd's cure and Protestant engagement in Paracelsian

alchemy more broadly construed. Belief in sympathetic healing was so prevalent and

spiritually damaging that Foster printed his treatise against the weapon salve to stop

the common sort from being misled; he was especially concerned that he has "seene

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*Arts, and parson of Hedgley in the county of Buckingham. With: Robert Fludd. Dr.
Fludds Answer vnto M. Foster,* Folger Shakespeare Library,(London: Printed by
Thomas Cotes, for Iohn Grove, and are to be sold at his shop in Furnivals Inne Gate
in Holborne, 1631), E3r.

[412] Ibid., K2r.

[413] Ibid., A2v-A3r.

[414] Ibid., A2v.

the Salve in the very hands of women."[415] Sabrina's healing touch is one such version

of a local, female, healing magic of dubious origin.

Notably, Foster does not argue that weapon salve is ineffective, but rather that

it is diabolical: "it is no lawfull cure, but a magicall, done by the helpe of the divell

the corrupter of nature."[416] Foster defines the line between natural and magical cures

in part by their distance from the wound: "Whatsoever workes naturally, works either

by corporall or virtuall contact."[417] He does not contest that sympathetic cures can be

effective, but argues that they require touch. According to this model, Sabrina's

sympathetic, healing touch with her lotion is natural, not magical. Foster is not,

however, entirely comfortable with sympathetic cures, using sympathy as a term of

slander when he calls the weapon salve "the Sympathizing or Starry-working *unguent*

of *Paracelsus.*"[418] His anxiety about the unholy, magical powers of sympathetic

healing emerges when he compares the weapon salve to the voodoo-style dolls of

witches, "who make pictures of men in waxe, and pricking them, the party for whose

picture it is made, is tormented; and burning them, their limbes are burned and

blistred."[419] Citing *Medea*, a central source for both *The Tempest* and *A Maske*, Foster

frames his fear of magical cures in a gendered way, as an anxiety about women

performing and being influenced by magic. Foster claims that the only lawful

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[415] Ibid., A3r.

[416] Ibid., C2r.

[417] Ibid., C3r.

[418] Ibid., D3r.

[419] Ibid., D2v.

medicines use "no inchantments, no spels, no characters, no charmes, no invocation, no compact with the Divell, no superstitious observations."[420] According to Foster's Protestant understanding of healing potions, Sabrina practices unlawful, diabolical magic because she uses a charm to cure the Lady. The tension between magical and natural healing, its relationship to the gendered discourse of witchcraft, and its connections with the powers and dangers of the imagination undergird Milton's masque. In the figure of Sabrina, Milton flouts Foster's limited version of healing, endorsing Sabrina's cure for the Lady as natural and positive and thereby licensing the powers of her local, female magic.

In addition to Paracelsian healing cures, the broader arena of alchemy offers Milton a positive model of natural purifying magic. Sabrina's most impressive magical feat in the masque is liberating the Lady from Comus's marble seat, to which she is affixed with "gums of glutinous heat" (917). Sabrina uses a liquor to wash away the "gums," an action bearing resemblances to the processes of alchemical distillation. The word "gum," particularly unusual in seventeenth century poetry and otherwise absent from Milton's repertoire, is a fundamental alchemical term for the "prima materia which contains the seed or sperm of metals, the mercurial medium of conjunction synonymous with the glue or mercurial sperm of the philosophers," which effects the "chemical wedding" that creates the Philosopher's Stone.[421] In other

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[420] Ibid., D4v.

[421] Lyndy Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 94. Debora Shuger argues, "the gums are (or are like) birdlime" Citing Augustine's *Confessions* and tracing the theological ramifications of this symbol*,* Shuger notes, "Wet dreams are birdlime. The metaphor, based on the shared 'stickiness' of the substance in question, likens the soul's bondage to carnal

words, the gum that affixes the Lady to her seat may refer to the agent of coagulation uniting the male and female agents during the creation of the philosopher's stone. Glutinous, too, is a common alchemical term, as the adjectival form of "glue," which is the alchemical "medium of conjunction."[422] When Sabrina applies her "moist" and "cold" hand to the coagulants, she cools and distils the "heat" of the "gums." The Lady is no longer numb and stiff but free to dance and move. She is no longer smeared with the filth of Comus, but cleansed with the Lady's ablutions. A stage of the alchemical *magnum opus* requires alchemical bodies to be washed of impurities and whitened through ablution, so that spirit and body can reunite.[423] Another process is known as "solve et coagula," in which the alchemist dissolves the bodies into solids then coagulates them into liquids: "the solve is the softening of hard things, and the coagula the hardening of soft things."[424] This alchemical process mirrors the Lady's: the Lady first is frozen into a solid in the chair, then liquefied and liberated through Sabrina's liquors. During this stage, the reentry of the soul into the body purifies it, and Sabrina's healing unguents distill and cleanse the Lady's body so that her chaste soul can return to its home.

Reading Sabrina's magic alchemically helps make sense of its natural healing and distilling powers, but what is such natural magic doing in the masque of a

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compulsion to the plight of a bird held down by lime-twigs, its wings useless" ("'Gums of Glutinous Heat' and the Stream of Consciousness: The Theology of Milton's *Maske*," *Representations* 60 [1997]: 2).

[422] Abraham, *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, 86.

[423] Ibid., 38.

[424] Ibid., 187.

Puritan? How does it map onto the theology of the masque? Though Puritan theology is notably absent from the masque, just before the time Milton was writing *A Maske*, the Puritan Thomas Tymme and others were identifying correspondences between theology and mystical alchemy. For instance, Tymme's translation of Joseph du Chesne's *The Practice of Chymicall and Hermeticall Physicke* (1605) provides in its epistle dedicatory a potential source for Milton's alchemical description of the Creation in *Paradise Lost*, just as it brings together alchemy and theology. Tymme argues that "*Halchymie*" has "concurrence and antiquitie with *Theologie*."[425] Citing Moses, Tymme describes the Creation alchemically: "the *Spirit of God moued vpon the water*: which was an indigested Chaos of masse created before by God, which confused Earth in mixture: yet by his Halchymicall Extraction, Separation, Sublimation, and Coniunction, so ordered and conioyned againe, as they are manifestly seene a part and sundered: in Earth, Fyer included, (which is a third Element) and Ayre, (a fourth) in Water, howbeit inuisibly."[426] Tymme describes Creation as "Gods *Halchymie*,"[427] and he goes on to talk about the apocalypse as an alchemical distillation and purification: "For the combustible hauing in them a corrupt stinking feces, or drossie matter, which maket the[m] subject to corruption, shal in that great & general refining day, be purged through fire: And then God wil

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[425] *The practise of chymicall, and hermeticall physicke, for the preseruation of health. Written in Latin by Iosephus Quersitanus, Doctor of Phisicke. And translated into English, by Thomas Timme, minister* (London: Printed by Thomas Creede, 1605) accessed February 2013, Early English Books Online.

[426] Ibid., A3r.

[427] Ibid., A3v.

make new Heauens and a new Earth, and bring all things to a christalline cleernes, & fixed in themselues, that al things may be reduced to a *Quintessence of Eternitie.*"[428] Resembling Sabrina's alchemical purification of the Lady's corrupt body, God's alchemy purifies the "feces" of the earth, purging and "refining" matter. Tymme justifies practicing the "natural *Phylosophy*" of alchemy as a form of spiritual healing and purgation, a "Physick speculatiue" that is good "for the health of the body."[429] He regards studying mystical alchemy as central, then, to his pastoral duties in its purification, purgation, and healing of the bodies and spirits of himself and his flock.

Like Sabrina, Tymme's Nature is a female figure with a generative power: "it giueth being to all things, it putteth matter on the forms, it beautifieth, and suffreth nothing to bee corrupted, but preserveth all things in their estate."[430] Tymme's Nature gives form or soul to weighty matter, suffers nothing to be corrupted, and aims to make clean and chaste all the things of the world. Tymme's description of creating the philosopher's stone for the purposes of healing the body and spirit recalls the alchemical process in Milton's masque, with its binding of the Lady to a chair followed by her revival with healing liquors into a purer essence. Tymme explains that after distillation,

> out of the grosse, terrestrial: and material lead, shal arise and spring yp
> a certaine celestial and true dissoluer of nature, and a quintessence of
> admirable virtue and efficacie: the true, liuely, and cleare shyning

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[428] Ibid., A3v.

[429] Ibid., *2r.

[430] Ibid., C2r.

fountaine wherein…*Vulcan* washed *Phoebus*, and which clenseth

away all impuritie, to make a most pure and perfect body, replenished

with vital spirits, and full of vegetation.[431]

This quintessence springs up out of a fountain, like Sabrina, and cleans away

impurities, rendering the body perfect and restoring the body's vital spirits. The

quintessence also frees itself from chains and defeats a vicious enemy: "and both so

rid himself from his adamantine fetters with the which he was bound, and hindered

from the victorie against the Serpent *Pytho*, and both in such wise shake off all

impediments that being free from all duskie cloudes of darkenesse, with the which he

was couered and ouerwhelmed."[432] Sabrina loosing the Lady from the chair echoes

this moment in Tymme, in which the quintessence liberates itself from fetters and

defeats a dark enemy.

Like Tymme, Milton, draws on the figure of Medea in his masque, and her

female, magical powers underscore (and provide a contrast to) the positive powers of

Sabrina. Like the Lady, the quintessence comes through the trial with even more

virtues than before its transmutation: "So that the same thing which afore was

altogether cold without blood, and deuoided of life seeming as dead, being washed in

this fountaine, it ariseth and triumpheth in glory, in might, and furnished with all

vertues, and accompanied with an exceeding army of spirits."[433] Ultimately, just as

Sabrina's magic heals the Lady, the purpose and effect of the philosopher's stone is

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[431] Ibid., Er.

[432] Ibid., Er.

[433] Ibid., Er.

healing, "to restore and corroborate the strength of our radical balsome, with his onely looke and touch, thoroughly weeding and rooting out all the causes and seedes of sicknesses lurking in vs, and so consuming them, that without al trouble, it preserueth our helth, vnto the appointed end of our life."[434] The stone works its healing magic by tempering, or bringing into balance and moderation the elements of the body.[435] Sabrina, too, tempers the Lady, moderating the Lady's heat with her chaste palms. With her cool and moist touch, Sabrina also resembles a salt that dissolves heat, a Paracelsian remedy against fever: "For such heates and feauerous passions, doe proceed out of the spirits onely, either Niterous, or Sulphurus or tartarus of our body, and lifted vp into euaporations, which cause such unkindly heates."[436] Sabrina may be read, then, as a spiritual version of the philosopher's stone or another alchemical agent, which heals through cooling, distilling, and tempering.

Women, Magic, and the Imagination

Alchemy also sheds light on why Milton encodes his natural, purifying magic as female. While many sources exist for demonic female magic, particularly in the witchcraft treatises, alchemical texts offer a counter-narrative in which female natural magic is positive. Published in 1617, Michael Maier's popular alchemical emblem book, *Atalanta Fugiens,* serves as a case study for this counter-tradition. The central figure of the work is, of course, Atalanta herself, a symbol of divine Nature pursued

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[434] Ibid., Er-v.

[435] Ibid., O3r.

[436] Ibid., Q4r.

by the alchemist or artist. More powerful than her male counterpart, art, Atalanta represents as well the philosopher's stone. Maier similarly uses gendered language to describe the transmutation of prima materia. In the second discourse, Maier invokes the image of the nursing mother conveying health and strength to her child:

> But for an infant newborn to be nourished with the Milk of Animals is a thing not repugnant to Nature, for milk will become of the like substance with it, but more easily if it be sucked from the Mother than any other Creature. Wherefore Physicians conclude that it conduces to the health & strength of an infant as likewise to the conformity of temper & manners if it is always fed & nourished by the milk of its own Mother, & that the contrary happens if it is done by that of a Stranger.[437]

Through nursing, the mother strengthens and tempers the infant. Sabrina's liquor, which heals and tempers the Lady, resembles this alchemical process of using liquids to strengthen and temper. Philosophical alchemy thus provides a foundation for the magically maternal powers that Shullenberger and Sokol attribute to Sabrina. Maier describes the entire basis of sympathetic magic and of alchemical transmutation using the language of breastfeeding and generation: "This is the Universal Harmony of Nature: That Like delights in its Like & as far as it can possibly follows its footsteps in everything by a certain tacit consent & agreement. The same thing happens of course in the Natural work of the Philosophers, which is equally governed by Nature in its Formation as an Infant in its Mother's womb." Drawing from a longstanding

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[437] *The Alchemy Website,* accessed February 2013
<http://www.levity.com/alchemy/atalanta.html>.

tradition in which Nature is figured as female, Maier's maternal figure of Nature resembles Milton's Sabrina, a natural, maternal, and female magical spirit.

Maier describes distillation in gendered language, as well. In the third discourse, he likens this process to the women's work of laundering:

> When Linen Clothes are soiled & made dirty by earthy Filth, they are cleaned by the next Element to it: Namely Water; & then clothes being exposed to the Air, the moisture together with the Faeces is drawn out by the heat of the Sun as by fire, which is the fourth Element, & if this be often repeated, they become clean & free from stains. This is the work of women which is taught them by Nature.

Natural, domestic, and female, alchemical purification aids natural processes. Interested in the processes of alchemy and alchemy's relationship to art and music, Maier's fugue styles both nature and art as female allegorical figures whose tempering, healing, and cleansing offer Milton a positive source for his figure of Sabrina. Though many early modern texts of magic, medicine, and natural philosophy depict the female imagination as weak and susceptible to the devil's magical influences, Maier's work is one of many that emphasize its generative or creative powers.[438]

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[438] Focusing on Maier's *opus*, Sally G. Allen and Joanna Hubbs discuss a larger alchemical tradition in which the powers of nature appear as female and generative, saying, "Alchemical symbolism…presents the image of the opus as the wresting of an embryo from the womb of the earth, embodied in woman, a birth from a man-made alembic." For Allen and Hubbs, Maier's depiction of pregnancy and nursing and alchemy as a broader discourse demonstrate "the continuous effort to gain control over a recalcitrant nature for the benefit of humanity" ("Outrunning Atalanta: Feminine Destiny in Alchemical Transmutation," *Signs* 6, no. 2 [Winter, 1980]: 213).

In focusing the magical and dramatic energies of the masque on a female and

natural, healing magic, Milton's *A Maske* works against the dominant contemporary

tradition of women as easily influenced by and more than men likely to use magic for

demonic and self-interested ends. The witch in the play is, after all, male, and, unlike

other court masques in which the hero is typically the male ruler or nobleman, the

virtuous protagonist of the masque is female, as is the most powerful, benevolent

magician. Of course, most early modern commentators on women, magic, and the

imagination saw this very malleability as a source of vice and demonic influence.

Preacher Alexander Roberts printed just such an anti-witchcraft treatise in 1616,

including a narration of Mary Smith's confession and trial of witchcraft.[439] In it, he

argues that there are one hundred times as many female as male witches, not because

women are weak in will, but because they are gullible. Like the Lady, they have

overactive imaginations. It is not "from their frailitie and imbecility, for in many of

them there is stronger resolution, to vndergoe any torment then can bee found in

man." Roberts gives two violent examples of women who underwent physical torture,

including one who bit off her own tongue not to reveal her accomplices and spitting it

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[439] *A Treatise of Witchcraft. Wherein sundry Propositions are laid downe, plainely
discouering the wickednesse of that damnable Art, with diuerse other speciall points
annexed, not impertinent to the same, such as ought diligently of euery Christian to
be considered. With a true Narration of the Witchcrafts which Mary Smith, wife of
Henry Smith Glouer, did practice: Of her contract vocally made between the Deuill
and her, in solemne termes, by whose meanes she hurt sundry persons whom she
enuied: Which is confirmed by her owne confession, and also from the publique
Records of the Examination of diuerse vpon their oathes: And Lastly, of her death
and execution, for the same; which was on the twelfth day of Ianuarie last past. By
Alexander Roberts B. D. and Preacher of Gods Word at Kings-Linne in Norffolke*
(London: Printed by N. O. for Samvel Man, and are to be sold at his Shop in Pauls
Church-yard at the signe of the Ball, 1616), F4r, Early English Books Online.

in her aggressor's face. Rather than weakness, the women easily give into the powers of the imagination because they are "credulous, and therefore more easily deceived" and they "harbour in their breast a curious and inquisitiue desire to know such things as be not fitting or conuenient."[440] Their curious, easily misled imaginations are paradoxically too powerful and too weak at the same time**.**

Women are also physically more impressionable than men: "their complection is softer, and from hence [they] more easily receiue the impressions offered by the Diuell."[441] Milton's Lady's overactive fancy hails from works such as this that position the dangers of women and magic as a problem of imaginations at once too frail and too powerful. The Puritan clergyman, William Perkins, also penned a famous anti-witchcraft treatise (1608), warning against the weaknesses of the female imagination.[442] Like Roberts, Perkins inveighs against female curiosity, citing it as an inducement to witchcraft. He also compares the devil with Circe (whom Milton imagines as the mother of Comus), changing men into swine through the power of magic acting on the passions. Milton's masque offers a countercharm to this version

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[440] Ibid., Gv.

[441] Ibid., Gv.

[442] William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft, So Farre forth as it is revealed in the Scriptures, and manifest by true experience,* accessed February 2013 <http://ebooks.library.cornell.edu/cgi/t/text/text-idx?c=witch;cc=witch;view=toc;subview=short;idno=wit075>. Of course, Agrippa's relationship with magic is at best ambiguous. Christopher I. Lehrich, suggests that Agrippa leaves "room for a legitimate and non-demonic magic, as in Marsilio Ficino or Pico, as opposed to the wicked vanity condemned in *De vanitate*" (*The Language of Demons and Angels: Cornelius Agrippa's Occult Philosophy* [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 41).

of the devil's magic. Instead of Comus turning the Lady into a beast, Sabrina restores and heals the Lady.

Sabrina's powerful healing magic similarly works against the common conception of female magic as evil and demonstrative of a weak imagination. Her presence further serves as a counter-charm against her theatrical precursors. Staged female magicians are nearly always witches, but Sabrina is a beneficent cunning woman. Sabrina's charm even appears to undo the words of the witches of *Macbeth*. Her "Thrice upon thy fingers tip, / Thrice upon thy rubied lip" (913-4) echoes and undoes their "double, double" and "Thrice to thine, and thrice to mine, / And thrice again, to make up nine" (1.3.35-6).[443] In the figure of Sabrina, Milton revives and restores the reputation of the staged and real-life female magician. His woman wonder epitomizes the benevolent powers of the female imagination and of its related artistic creation. Instead of transforming men into beasts, Circe-like, Sabrina's song and charm heal, revive, and cleanse.

In offering a gendered argument for the instrumentality of the imagination, Milton—as a student of hermeticism—could turn to Agrippa and his followers as a source. Agrippa argues that the imagination is powerful enough to effect physical and material changes, and he aligns this power with the woman's ability to conceive, to generate, and to shape new life. To demonstrate this power of the imagination, he offers the commonplace example of a pregnant woman's imagination marking her unborn fetus. Agrippa relates the ability of the imagination to transform bodies to the

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[443] William Shakespeare, "Macbeth," *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blackmore Evans and J.J.M. Tobin, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997).

peculiarly female powers of creation and forming the body of another. He further

demonstrates this property of the imagination by describing the ways in which

women use the magic of their imaginations to induce love in others:

> Now how much imagination can do upon the soul, no man is ignorant:
> for it is neerer to the substance of the soul then the sense is; wherefore
> it acts more upon the soul then the sense doth. So women by certain
> strong imaginations, dreams, and suggestions brought in by certain
> Magicall Arts do oftentimes bind them into a strong loving of any one.

In addition to shaping and creating bodies, women's magical imaginations inspire

love, and Agrippa explains that women have an especially powerful ability to exert

their imaginations upon others in this way, listing Medea's charming of Jason as an

example. In *Occult Philosophy*, Agrippa typically warns of this power as dangerous

or hurtful, often associating it with witchcraft: "Now by these examples it appears

how the affection of the phantasie, when it vehemently intends it self, doth not only

affect its own proper body, but also anothers. So also the desire of Witches to hurt,

doth bewitch men most perniciously with stedfast [steadfast] lookes." According to

Agrippa, female witches draw upon the imagination's ability to transform bodies to

do harm with their looks.

Milton, of course, inverts this commonplace, associating the corrupting

powers of the imagination with the male witch, Comus, and attributing to Sabrina the

healing ones. Agrippa, in his contribution to the *querrelle des femmes*, also provides a

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model for the benevolent magical powers of the female imagination.[444] The mother, for instance, through her ability to use her imagination to shape her fetus, induces greater love than the father:

> we are naturally more affected towards our mothers than to our fathers, so as we seem but to respect our father, and to love only our mother. And this leads us to make some reflection on that which is our first commons in this World, our mother's milk, a thing of that catholick virtue, that it not only nourishes infants, cherishes the sick, and restores consumptive and languishing nature, but may in case of necessity suffice for the preservation of life to persons of any age.

Further, Agrippa suggests that mother's milk, like Sabrina's lustration, has wondrous abilities to nourish, strengthen, heal, restore, and even to promote longevity. Women have particularly strong healing powers because they "have obtained this excellent book from the indulgence and bounty of Nature, That in all diseases whatever, they of themselves, from their own proper stock, are furnisht with remedies, and can cure themselves, without praying in aid of any forreign help, or far-fetcht medicament." Like Sabrina, women are natural healers, with a mysterious ability to draw on occult virtues to find remedies.

Milton could also find in Agrippa an inspiration for the mysterious powers of chastity, in particular female chastity:

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[444] *Declamatio de nobilitate et praecellentia foeminei sexus* (*Declamation on the Nobility and Preeminence of the Female Sex*, 1529) <http://www.esotericarchives.com/agrippa/preem.htm>.

If we look of Chastity, 'twas a Woman first vow'd virginity to God. If

the gift of prophesie [prophecy] be required, Lactantius, Eusebius, and

St. Austin [St. Augustine], can tell us with what a divine spirit the

Sybils were inspired: and holy Writ records Miriam the sister of

Moses, and Olda, Jeremiah's unkle's wife; and no less than four

sisters, daughters of Philip, all eminent prophetesses. If constancy and

perseverence in virtue be regarded, you will find Judith, Ruth, and

Hester, so gloriously celebrated by the holy Spirit, Inditer of those

sacred Volumes, that the books themselves retain their Names.

Female chastity imbues them with the divine spirit and the magical powers of

prophecy. Thus, through Agrippa, Milton could have found a source for the magical

healing powers associated with the female imagination. By figuring the powerful

forces of the imagination through a strong female character, Milton rehabilitates the

claims against women's art and magic.

**Sabrina's Translation of Shakespeare and Spenser: A Chaste and Charitable
Embrace**

Sabrina also is a vehicle for Milton's relationship to his literary past.

Nicknamed "The Lady" at university, Milton calls upon this gendered argument about

the powers of the artistic imagination in order to style his relationship with his literary

predecessors as one not of competition but of charitable friendship. Milton translates

the figure of Sabrina from her earlier depictions by Geoffrey of Monmouth, Spenser,

Drayton, and Giles Fletcher, both enlarging her presence and giving her agency. In

both Drayton and Geoffrey, she is small and pitiful, and in every tale, she is the victim of her stepmother's wrath. Milton, however, allows Sabrina to choose to cast herself into the river Severn rather than being hurled by others. Unlike her earlier incarnations, Milton's Sabrina has a powerful voice, a sensual material presence, and instrumental magic. Milton thus translates the character, giving her agency. His Sabrina is also a figure of poetic pleasure, and Milton specifically recasts her as a paean for the masque form. Elizabeth J. Bellamy reads Milton's reconfiguration of Spenser as a "symptom," wondering, "Is the Lady's chastity symptomatic because Milton could not articulate his own repression of Spenser?"[445] Tracing Milton's borrowings from the first three books of *The Faerie Queene*, Bellamy suggests that Milton's Sabrina "becomes transformed into a kind of topos for virginity itself."[446] Bellamy argues that with Britomart and the Lady, "we are left to wonder why representations of chastity persistently result in these anticlimactic (and symptomatic) stand-offs."[447] She suggests that there is an "odd symbiosis between allegory and chastity in particular" in which "literal chastity, the ongoing and 'stedfast virgins stage,' must always be occluded—sacrificed, if you will—so that (male) allegory can be written."[448] Milton's Lady is thus a symptom of this occlusion of actual female chastity and of his "repressed" literary past. Bellamy hints at the possibility of a

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[445] Elizabeth J. Bellamy, "Waiting for Hymen: Literary History as 'Symptom' in Spenser and Milton," *English Literary History* 64, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 394.

[446] Ibid., 400.

[447] Ibid., 407.

[448] Ibid., 403.

feminist reading of the masque by "demanding a shift of focus from the Lady's static (symptomatic) chastity to the circumstances of her rescue, and in particular to Sabrina, river nymph of the Welsh Severn, as her principal agent of release," yet she emphasizes instead the "symptomatic" transmission of Spenser through the relationships between the Lady and Amoretta.[449]

Through a reading of the figure of Sabrina, this chapter suggests that rather than a symptomatic relationship with Spenser, Milton instead reconfigures his poetic material: Sabrina and Spenserian allegory. Prompted perhaps by Book Four on friendship—rather than the earlier books on holiness, temperance, and chastity—Milton's model is working with his literary past, rather than repressing it. Just as he foregrounds chastity-as-charity rather than virginity, he gives love freely to his beloved Spenser, first embracing and then translating his limiting form of allegory into the performative and multi-media masque. Sabrina is thus a proving ground upon which Milton can engage his literary forbears, a site through which he can reckon romance, pastoral, and dramatic traditions vis-à-vis Spenser and Shakespeare. In contrast with Bellamy, George F. Butler claims that Milton's literary borrowings do not demonstrate error or an anxiety of influence, but a deliberate re-envisioning of Spenser. Citing Milton's famous misconstruing in *Areopagitica* that Spenser's Palmer enters the Cave of Mammon with Guyon, Butler views Sabrina's transformation as another of Milton's creative misreadings of Spenser.[450] *Areopagitica*'s "sage and

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[449] Ibid., 398.

[450] George F. Butler, "Milton's 'sage and serious Poet Spencer': Error and Imitation in *The Faerie Queene* and *Areopagitica*," *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 48, no. 2 (Summer 2007): 105.

serious" Spenser finds a precursor in the Lady's "sage / And serious doctrine of Virginity."[451] Demonstrating the "inadequacy of cloistered virtue," *Areopagitica* licenses creative misinterpretation and reimagining of literary predecessors.[452] Milton's reformation of Sabrina, then, is an exercise in tempered indulgence that represents a chaste, companionate relationship with his literary ancestors.

Sabrina's representation both as chastity-as-charity and as a figure of the magical power of the masque form aptly captures this relationship between Milton and his literary heritage. Erin Murphy's work on Sabrina's relationship to the "making of English history" illuminates Sabrina's translation in Milton. Murphy fruitfully suggests that Sabrina's "radical presentness" renders her "a figure disconnected from mortal time and history."[453] She explains that the earlier Sabrinas are embedded in royal and historical politics, whereas Milton's Sabrina "fails to sing the song of monarchs and gives birth to herself."[454] Murphy thus contends, "[T]he shifts in historical consciousness represented by the hybrid text of Drayton and Selden point to Milton's early engagement with the changing ideas of national temporality that later inform his critique of the tyranny of hereditary monarchy."[455]

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[451] Ibid., 106.

[452] Ibid., 101.

[453] Erin Murphy, "Sabrina and the Making of English History in *Poly-Olbion* and *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle*," *Studies in English Literature 1500-1900* 51, no. 1 (Winter 2011): 101.

[454] Ibid., 104.

[455] Ibid., 104.

Milton's Sabrina, who seems to stand outside time and royal prerogative, demonstrates his attitudes toward political reform. At the same time, she is a figure of poetic self-birth, and this chapter demonstrates that Sabrina represents the healing powers of the theatrical arts.

Sabrina also signals the then-virginal Milton's assertion of himself as an inspired poet whose poetic force derives from his temperance. Like Sabrina, Milton styles himself as self-invented, though connected to literary tradition. Andrew Escobedo and Beth Quitslund read Milton's relationship to Spenser along similar lines, noting that the masque "delineates the meaning of chastity by invoking and rejecting an obsolete version found in Spenser, sometimes in terms of a shift from allegory to mimetic narrative, sometimes by redefining or overwriting Spenser's allegory."[456] This chapter pushes this understanding of Milton's "redefining or overwriting of Spenser's allegory" even further, suggesting that *A Maske* translates Spenserian allegory into performative masque. Just as it affords Sabrina agency and even instrumental magic, the masque highlights the powers of the masque form to effect change in the spiritual and material world. Unlike the Lady's "cloistered and fugitive" virginity or Spenser's limited allegory, Milton's masque works like Sabrina's chastity-as-charity, licensing sensual and aesthetic pleasure and healing and reforming its audiences. Milton's relationship with Spenser and his other literary forbearers also follows this model of chastely charitable friendship, translating and liberating his sources with a sympathetic touch.

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[456] Andrew Escobedo and Beth Quitslund, "Sage and Serious: Milton's Chaste Original," *Milton Quarterly* 37, no. 4 (December 2003): 180.

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Sabrina and the Masque Form

Sabrina emblematizes the translation of Spenserian allegory and Shakespearean drama into the instrumental and socially engaged masque form. As a mode of performative mimesis, the masque is different from other arts in that it actively participates in its material and social world. With nobles as actors and audience as dancers, the masque invites and requires participation and communal assent in its performance. It is also, like all drama, a ritualistic form, and Sabrina's healing charm likewise draws from magical practices and rituals derived from literary sources and contemporary practices. In addition to representing charity, Sabrina also symbolizes a theatrical art that is at once spectacular, magical, and sensual. Her scene is one of the most visually and poetically stunning moments in the masque, and her performance has the power to set free her audience, the Lady, who was formerly riveted to her seat by Comus's magical performances. As a liberatory charm, the spell of Sabrina invites her observer to be more than a mere spectator glued to her seat; instead, Sabrina's performance, in which she physically touches her audience, invites participation and freedom. The Lady's response as a spectator of Comus's magical performances causes her to become stuck and voiceless, thereby outlining the limitations of chastity when it requires withdrawal or complete restraint from the power of the imagination. However, her response to Sabrina, who invites her to move out of her chair and to dance, validates sensual, poetic, and powerful imaginative performance, aligning it with the powers of charity as love. Sabrina thus liberates the masque form from its associations with vice.

Affiliated with music, poetry, and spectacle, Sabrina represents theater, specifically a kind of theater that has mysterious, even magical, powers over its audiences. Sabrina's sympathetic touch frees the Lady from her material bonds, suggesting that a chaste dramatic form can allow audiences to indulge in a sensual, imaginative, aesthetic experience without descending into vice and ribaldry. Restrained and pastoral, Milton's temperate masque invites active participation, literally inspiring audience members to dance, without inciting gluttony, drunkenness, and riot. Indeed, it may even temper or chasten its audiences, just as the Lady's trial moderates her overactive fancy. Milton's masque therefore advocates against Puritan restrictions on theatre, and it advocates in favor of indulging in the imagination and experiencing rich, sensual entertainments. Catherine Gimelli Martin offers a detailed assessment of Milton's non-puritan views on the pleasures of masquing, arguing that Milton believed that "real virtue requires not ethical negation but an informed voluntarism capable of reuniting the poles of reason and passion, mirth and melancholy."[457] Anticipating his argument against censorship in *Areopagitica*, in *A Maske*, Milton does not banish from his republic the dangerously spectacular masque form, even including the wild routs of Comus and his crew. Even more surprising, the masque celebrates its potentially instrumental—and godly—power: tempering or purifying audiences, rather than inspiring vice.

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[457] Catherine Gimelli Martin, "The Non-Puritan Ethics, Metaphysics, and Aesthetics of Milton's Spenserian Masque," *Milton Quarterly* 37 (December 2003): 223.

Conclusion: Where Grimoires Meet Playtexts: Dramatic Art, Magic, and the Powers of the Imagination

When I told my three-year-old daughter that I was writing about magic in plays, I explained that I was trying to figure out what they had in common, why drama is so interested in magic. She had just attended her first play, a Shakespeare-in-the-park performance of *As You Like It*, directed and performed by students in my course on comedy. She thought for a moment before offering an answer to my question, one surprisingly apt: "Maybe it's because the characters go and then don't come back." In other words, both drama and magic require vanishing acts. In plays, people bring characters to life who then disappear, not only offstage for exits and entrances but also into thin air at the end of the show. The relationship between drama and magic is so strong that even a young child attending her first play intuits that the line between illusion and reality undergirds both arts.

This dissertation has explored a few exemplary dramatic renderings of magical acts in order to demonstrate some of the ways in which theater borrowed from and reimagined some contemporary forms of the magical arts. While it does not offer is an exhaustive survey or catalogue of every instance of magical representation, it presents case studies that offer in-depth analyses of the complexities and nuances of drama's deployment of magic. The first chapter examines the implications of staging legerdemain and alchemy in a late medieval religious drama. Moving forward into Elizabethan and Jacobean works, the second and third chapters also consider these

forms of magic, along with prophecy, in terms of their political and interpersonal powers. The final chapter brings us nearly to the close of the theaters to a Stuart masque that invokes alchemy and folk healing magic to explore the powers of the individual and of the female imagination.

Hailing from diverse genres—medieval religious miracle, comedy, romance, and masque—all of the plays share an interest in the role, and even the necessity, of magic and of drama to heal individuals and to restore social cohesion, albeit with varying levels of success. As a result, they all consider the ways in which drama and magic attempt to negotiate contradictory, often competing, epistemologies and values, and the plays gain dramatic appeal through staging ambivalent discourses. Rather than demonstrating a progression (or decline) of magic, these case studies suggest instead a complex artistic transmission of staged magic. For instance, in in its celebration of a divine, healing power effected through a quasi-baptismal lustration, *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle* shares more with the Croxton *Play of the Sacrament* than with *The Tempest* or *Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*, despite the wide gap between the masque and the late medieval play. While I do not wish to argue that Milton's masque suggests a widespread return to a (or a nostalgia for) a magical, medieval past, his and other contemporary plays that celebrate religiously-inflected natural magic qualify arguments that skepticism or the Reformation eradicated serious interest in magic, causing it to decline in force. This study demonstrates that interest in and representations of magic held dramatic appeal well into the seventeenth century. Many dramatic works capitalize on the appeal of magic by staging a wide variety of magical practices and forms and by presenting them as both

positive and negative. Aligning its powers with the magical arts, plays that staged magic offer both an apology for and a critique of their own art.

This dissertation represents an initial foray into the overwhelming connections between early English theater and magic. Because this project limits its scope to single plays, by necessity it inspires as many questions as it answers. Further lines of inquiry demonstrate the significance of the relationship between magic and theater. For example, are there differences in the ways in which various theatrical genres portray magic? To what extent does the theater borrow from actual magical performances—from juggling, from the ritual magic of necromancers, from practicing alchemists, and from cunning folk—in its staging or effects? What might grimoires, spells, and charms tell us about the conventions of performance more broadly construed? Can we read magical texts, for instance, in the same way that we read playtexts? In a related vein, what is the relationship between page and stage, between reading staged magic as textual moments and considering them as performance events? Do representations of different forms of magic operate in different ways, whether aesthetically, thematically, or dramatically? An even trickier question to investigate is the problem of audience response. Would different audience members respond differently to instances of staged magic? Similarly, what is the impact of the venue on the selection, staging, and experience of magic in plays? We might usefully extend this project into the Restoration, considering what happens to staged magic after the theaters reopen. In particular, what happens to representations of magic when female actors take the professional stage? Or how does the emphasis on spectacle in these later plays transform staged magic? These—and many other—

questions require further research and analysis if we are to gain a clearer understanding of the practices of both magic and theater at the time.

At the heart of this study of the relationship between magic and theater is an attempt to capture the sense of wonder that theater, particularly early English theater, inspires. With its characters giving embodied substance to imagined creations and its ability to transform, theater purports to do things that other modes of literary endeavor cannot. As a newly burgeoning and rapidly developing medium, early English theater recognizes that wonder is its central resource, and it playfully and powerfully taps into that source of energy. Recreating and reimagining the magic of early English theater has proven to be a source of fascination itself, and it opens up the ways that such theater is understood and experienced today.

Appendix

Early English Plays with Magicians, 1461-1637

1. *Play of the Sacrament*
2. *Mankind*
3. John Skelton*, The Nigromancer*
4. *Second Shepherd's Play*
5. *Sir Clyomen and Sir Clamydades*
6. *Common Conditions*
7. John Bale, *Three Laws*
8. Anthony Munday, *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*
9. *Fedele and Fortunio (Two Italian Gentlemen)*
10. John Lyly, *Gallathea*
11. -- *Mother Bombie*
12. George Peele, *Old Wive's Tale*
13. *The Wars of Cyrus*
14. Anthony Munday, *John A Kent and John A Cumber*,
15. Robert Greene *Medea in Alphonsus*
16. --*King of Arragon*
17. --*Friar Bacon and Friar Bungay*
18. -- *John of Bordeaux*
19. Robert Greene and Thomas Lodge, *Looking Glass for London and England*
20. Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus*
21. *Woman in the Moon*
22. *The Wisdome of Dr. Dodypoll*
23. Thomas Dekker, *Old Fortunatus*
24. *The Mayde's Metamorphosis*
25. *The Merry Devil of Edmonton*
26. George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois*
27. Thomas Heywood, *Wise Woman of Hodgson*
28. John Marston, *The Tragedie of Sophonisba*
29. Barnabe Barnes, *The Devil's Charter*
30. John Marston, *Entertainment of Dowager-Countess of Derby*
31. *Birth of Merlin*
32. John Fletcher, *The Faithful Shepherdess*
33. *Speeches at Prince Henrie's…*
34. Ben Jonson, *The Masque of Blackness*
35. –*The Alchemist*
36. --*Sad Shepherd*
37. –*The Masque of Queens*
38. –*Mercury vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*
39. –*The Fortunate Isles and Their Union*
40. William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*
41. --*The Tempest*

42. --*Comedy of Errors*
43. –*King Lear*
44. –*A Midsummer Night's Dream*
45. –*Macbeth*
46. –*Pericles*
47. –*I Henry IV*
48. –*Romeo and Juliet*
49. –*Cymbeline*
50. –*Henry VI*, Part I
51. John Webster, *The White Devil*
52. Thomas Middleton, *The Witch*
53. Thomas Campion, *The Squires Masque*
54. –*The Lord's Masque*
55. –*A Masque at the Marriage of Somerset and Howard*
56. William Browne, *Circe and Ulysses*
57. John Fletcher, *The Chances*
58. *Two Merry Milkmaids*
59. Philip Massinger and Thomas Dekker, *The Virgin Martyr*
60. *Two Noble Ladies*
61. John Fletcher, *The Prophetess*
62. --*The Fair Maid of the Inn*
63. John Milton, *A Maske Performed at Ludlow Castle*
64. Aurelian Townshend, *Tempe Restored*
65. William Davenant, *Temple of Love*
66. –*Brittania Triumphans*
67. Thomas Heywood and Richard Brome, *The Late Lancashire Witches*
68. John Kirke, *The Seven Champions of Christendom*
69. –*Puritaine Widow*
70. Thomas Dekker, *The Witch of Edmonton*

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