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Shared Borders: The Puppet in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*

The Records of Early English Drama from Kent, Somerset, and Cambridge reveal connotations of vagrancy, transgressive sexual behavior, and theft associated with both puppets and puppeteers. Puppets had been commonplace for over 300 years before Jonson features them in his 1614 Bartholomew Fair. *From the puppets' first appearance in the list of the 'Persons of the Play' to the puppets' triumph in the final scene, puppets-as-props and puppets-as-players are conflated with actors, exposing the tensions along shared material borders. The puppets both mimic and parody the social construction of the self. Theatrical props such as handkerchiefs and gloves materialized value, power, and sexual availability. They represent and often commodify the absent human character, becoming extensions of the human body.*

In the induction at the beginning of Ben Jonson's 1614 *Bartholomew Fair,* a Scrivener reads to the audience a contract that lays out their rights and obligations. After several paragraphs, the Scrivener gets down to what they can expect to see: 'a strutting horse-courser', 'a leer drunkard', 'a fine oily pig-woman with her tapster', a 'wise justice of the peace', 'a civil cut-purse', 'a sweet singer of new ballads', and 'as fresh an hypocrite as ever was broached *rampant*' (induction 118, 120, 122–5).[1] According to the Scrivener, these entertainers are guaranteed. The Scrivener then mentions the possibility of an additional pleasure: 'if the puppets will please anybody', he promises, 'they shall be *entreated* to come in' at the end of the play (induction 131–2, emphasis added). Two things are happening here: first, the puppets are 'entreated', as if they have a choice about whether or not they will perform, and true to the Scrivener's word before the fair is over the audience sees the puppet play performed: *The Ancient Modern History of Hero and Leander, otherwise called The Touchstone of True Love, with as true a trial of friendship between Damon*

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and Pythias, two faithful friends o' the Bankside (5.3.6–10). Second, and perhaps more important for this investigation, before *Bartholomew Fair* officially begins the boundary is blurred between the puppets and the human actors who manipulate them. In fact during the course of the plays (the puppets' and the actors'), the audience also learns of a glove puppet's 'naked leg and goodly calf', hears various puppet scatological jokes, and sees the Puppet Dionysius vanquish an anti-theatrical Puritan, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, in a one-on-one debate on the legitimacy of theatre (5.4.125). Yet after the show is over and all the puppets' human-like activity is finished, they are packed up again in a basket by the actors and carried off stage. The audience stands and stretches; the boundary between person and prop is restored once again.

The *Bartholomew Fair* puppets' refusal to remain mere props fits Andrew Sofer's description of a unique category of props that achieve a 'life of their own'.[2] Props like this, Sofer writes, 'insist on [their] own materiality [and an] uncanny oscillation between subject and object, person and prop'.[3] Indeed, because they constantly distort the edges of personal identity and the materiality of a prop, puppets can epitomize that 'oscillation' with a vividness that both reveals and obscures the social creation of the self. We can see this oscillation between agency and materiality when Puppet Cole beats his 'mouth' over the head with a stick. The puppet's 'mouth' is actually the human puppeteer, Lantern Leatherhead, who earlier told Cokes that 'Indeed, [he] is the mouth of 'em all', and thus gives all of the puppets a voice (5.3.77–8).

PUPPET COLE *Ay, Hogrubber o'Pickt-hatch.*
Take you that! (*The puppet strikes him over the pate.*)
LEATHERHEAD *Oh, my head!* (5.4.161–3)

Here a prop, which is a puppet, beats a human actor, a puppeteer, who is supposed to be in control. To illustrate this movement between puppet and puppeteer even more, later in the same scene Lantern Leatherhead is reduced to repeating what the puppets say instead of speaking for them:

PUPPET PYTHIAS *A pimp and a scab.*
LEATHERHEAD *A pimp and a scab?*
I say, between you you have both but one drab.
PUPPET DAMON *You lie again.*
LEATHERHEAD *Do I lie again?*
PUPPET DAMON *Like a rogue again.*

LEATHERHEAD *Like a rogue again?* (223–6)

Shortly after this exchange the puppets again attack Leatherhead with sticks, effectively subjugating him to a subservient position for the rest of the scene. Only at the end of the scene, after Puppet Dionysius confounds Puritan Busy, are the puppets once again regulated to the role of props by Leatherhead's placing them back into their basket.

Because the puppet is just one of many props which can embody a larger early modern 'cultural preoccupation with the uneasy reciprocity between man and thing', analyses of other prominent props may prove helpful in thinking about the puppet as used on the early modern stage.[4] In my examination of how the puppet works as a material character, which simultaneously binds and frees the audience from an uneasy relationship to its own materiality, I will first consider two investigations into early modern props that work in ways similar to that of the puppet: the handkerchief and the glove. Both the handkerchief and the glove are hand-held props that are easily transportable and carry specific, widespread cultural weight in early modern society outside the theatre. In addition they both have strong, almost metaphysical, associations with the physical bodies of their owners. I argue not only that the puppet is a prop that can attain, like the glove and the handkerchief, a 'life of its own', but also that its use in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair* centres that life on the intersection of agency and materiality.

I begin with Paul Yachnin's inquiry into the prop of Othello's handkerchief. Yachnin traces the complex journey a small square of fabric makes as it evolves from being a love token and a simple hand-prop on the early modern stage to an object of wonder, 'a possession that possesses the possessor'.[5] Yachnin states that the handkerchief has two remarkable features.[6] First, the handkerchief is an *unremarkable* object, just a commonplace Elizabethan love token recognized primarily for its conventionality. The audience soon understands that Desdemona is quite attached to the small white piece of cloth despite its conventionality; in fact, she 'loves the token [so much] / That she reserves it evermore about her' (3.3.297, 299).[7] She carries it continually with her, keeping it close so she can have it 'To kiss and talk to' when Othello is not there to receive her attentions in person (300). Only when Desdemona drops it do we find out it is not so unremarkable after all. In fact, we learn that the handkerchief's second remarkable feature is that it is truly remarkable. Othello reveals to Desdemona that

> There's magic in the web of it.

> A sibyl that had numbered in the world
> The sun to course two hundred compasses
> In her prophetic fury sewed the work.
> The worms were hallowed that did breed the silk,
> And it was dyed in mummy, which the skiful
> Conserved of maidens' hearts. (3.4.68–73)

The handkerchief is made of a magical material that binds bodies together. Indeed, Othello warns Desdemona that in her possession it will tie Othello's passions and loyalty to her — or so says the 'Egyptian' who gave it to Othello's mother (54). If, on the other hand, she loses it or gives it away, he 'will hold her loathed', and no longer feel bound to her (60). Of course, Desdemona loses the handkerchief. And, although Desdemona's 'napkin' indeed seems unremarkable, 'too little' to carry the weight of her innocence as the scrap of linen moves from Emilia to Iago to Cassio to Bianca, and finally, with an unseen Othello watching, back to Cassio (3.3.291), it nonetheless increasingly marks the passage of Desdemona's unrelenting fate. As the audience watches, the handkerchief becomes an object that is 'remarkable' in its ability to direct action, absorb meaning, and create unease.[8]

Furthermore, with every unfolding possession, the unease that characterizes the relationship between the handkerchief prop and the female body becomes more intense. In addition to being the repository of Othello's passion, both figuratively and magically (as Desdemona's body would be literally), and Desdemona's kisses (also as her body would be), the handkerchief also becomes Emilia's failed offering to Iago's 'fantasy' (3.3.3) and Cassio's gift/payment to Bianca (4.1). Iago is well aware of the handkerchief's importance; he has 'a hundred times / Wooed [Emilia] to steal it' (3.3.296–7). With it he manipulates the audience's unwilling complicity.

Obviously, this prop functions on a multitude of levels. In addition to its associations with early modern courtship rituals, the handkerchief works to motivate stage action. Although at first we do not know how Iago will wreak malevolent havoc, we do know what he will use; he will use the handkerchief. Increasingly, the handkerchief carries not only the weight of the energy invested in it by the characters, the actual handlers of the cloth, but also that of an audience who understands the prop's layers of social and dramatic significance. Indeed, the recognition of an audience's understanding of, and its investment in, the power of the prop, both cultural and theatrical, is critical

for the success of the play and our understanding how that power manifests both inside and outside the theatre.

In a similar investigation into the relationships of props, culture, and materiality of self, Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones explore how another unremarkable object, the glove, materializes aspects of early modern cultural value, as well as religious and political power. Stallybrass and Jones focus on 'objectification as a form of power' in early modern England.[9] They argue that articles people wore on their bodies like clothing or jewellery; ie, 'detachable parts — rings, jewels, [and] gloves', serve to materialize 'the power of people to be condensed and absorbed into things and of things to become persons'.[10] Stallybrass and Jones illustrate the resultant fetishizing of the glove as it is no longer constrained by normal usage; rather, uncoupled from its pair, the glove is handled, held, given, or rejected as an extension of and inseparable from the physical hand to which it originally belonged. Both on and offstage, the glove thus emerges as a material object which not only *reminds* us of its owners, but which has the power to physically bring us into *his or her presence.* Stallybrass and Jones describe the process of the transference of a physical presence to an inanimate object as a 'material haunting'.[11] Going back to the example of Othello's handkerchief, we can see this process at work, although perhaps not to the same degree, as the handkerchief prop moves from person to person. Instead of becoming increasingly distanced from Desdemona as it moves away from her in both time and space, the handkerchief becomes inextricably linked to her. As noted, props can, and often do, function on many levels simultaneously. Gloves and handkerchiefs are among the props that on one level operate as a small article of clothing and on the next level as social markers of power and intimacy. Therefore the glove and the handkerchief require consideration in terms not only of function and representation, but also of prior ownership.

Stallybrass and Jones's concept of 'material haunting' is important when we think of what one does with gloves. If the glove, for example, is considered to be an extension of its owner's bodily presence and a different person puts it on, then whatever that person does to the glove is, by extension, done also to the original owner. A notable example of this potentially obscene abuse is De Flores's handling of Beatrice's glove in *The Changeling.*[12] When the repellent

De Flores picks up Beatrice's fallen glove to return it to her, she will have nothing to do with it anymore:

> Mischief on your officious forwardness!
> Who bade you stoop? They touch my hand no more.
> There, for t'other's sake I part with this.
> Take 'em and draw thine own skin off with 'em. (1.1.236–9)

The glove has been so defiled by De Flores's touch that Beatrice does not want to have it back. In fact, she does not even want to keep wearing its mate, although it has never been in his hands. Beatrice's disgust at the thought of De Flores's handling her gloves (her body) is palpable. When she says 'draw thine own skin off with 'em', it is obvious that she is imagining him putting his hands into her gloves (239). It is also obvious that she finds the thought revolting. In their article, Stallybrass and Jones describe the materializing of the body (particularly the woman's body) as 'constituted through presences and absences'.[13] In other words while the owner is physically absent his or her presence remains active in the materiality of the glove, even as the possessor inserts his/her presence into the materiality of the empty glove. We can see this in De Flores's handling of Beatrice's glove. When De Flores picks up Beatrice's glove it is empty; her hand no longer fills it. The empty glove, marked by the absence of Beatrice, remains haunted by her physical presence, the materiality of the glove. Beatrice imagines De Flores putting her glove on his hand, thereby filling it (her) with his material and physical presence. Thus Stallybrass and Jones's 'material haunting' is transformed into a 'corporeal site of agency', in which gloves and hands are more than related: they both animate and embrace one another.[14] In other words, a prop like the glove, or the 'corporeal site of agency', not only receives action, but also *participates* in the action through the presence of an absent owner who both embraces and animates an inanimate object. In the case of Beatrice's glove, the glove becomes a site where De Flores can fondle Beatrice's body. Contextually, the glove is now endowed with significance beyond *personification,* in which the prop is a mute stand in for the absent character; it *reflects* the interplay of prop and person, it absorbs and reflects action, and, because it animated through prior ownership, it is materially linked to the human body.

As we can see, the handkerchief and the glove are similar in their embodiment of early modern attitudes and assumptions about human intimacy and sexual availability. Both are inanimate objects with culturally intense

relationships with, and to, the human body. Both are invested with a ritualized social iconography associated with a world outside the theatre before they are brought inside and given the additional emphasis of theatrical props imbued with dramatic action. More than reminders of general social mores and specific plot developments, props such as these increase the tension which exists between a social structure which is material, visual, and rigidly hierarchical and the representational theatrical prop.

The establishment of this pattern leads us back to the original question: What significance attaches to a prop like the *Bartholomew Fair* glove puppet? This prop not only has a close association with the human body but also actually depicts the body, albeit satirically. It is slipped on the hand like the glove, and can be transferred easily from person to person like both glove and handkerchief. Again, these similarities evoke the questions: Do puppets, like the handkerchief and the glove, carry into the theatre specific early modern cultural understandings and assumptions? And if so, then how do these understandings and assumptions play into the puppet's function as a prop in early modern theatre? While I explore these questions in the next section, let us keep in mind that the answers lead us to the point where we must ask (of ourselves and of the play): If the puppet conflates the fetishized glove with the social anxieties surrounding identity, agency, theatrical performance, and more specifically the performing body, then how does this conflation help (or hinder) our understanding of early modern perceptions of these dynamics both inside and outside the theatre? I contend that the puppets of Jonson's play give us a unique opportunity to explore this question specifically with regard to gender construction through the materiality of the body and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the social prop/construct of gender specific apparel.

To return to the first two questions the *Bartholomew Fair* glove puppets raise, we know that in order for the puppet to bring to the theatre recognizable social and cultural weight, it must be both available and familiar; that is, the audience must have previous knowledge of the puppet and its social connotations. Jonson's celebrated puppet show, which culminates the fairgoer's and the theatregoer's afternoon at Bartholomew Fair, is set against at least 300 years of puppetry in England and Western Europe. George Speaight writes in *The History of the English Puppet Theatre* that references to puppets in medieval England are scarce and doubtful, but even these few records register sufficient authority for us to believe that both glove puppets and marionettes, used in a fully dramatic manner, were familiar forms of popular

entertainment by the fifteenth century, and that a tradition of both secular and religious puppet shows had been established here long before the Elizabethan age.[15]

The scarcity of documentation seems to speak to the possibility that in popular culture puppets were actually more commonplace than rare. In London alone there are eleven known sites where puppet shows were consistently pitched.[16] As James Gibson notes in his introduction to *The Records of Early English Drama: Kent,* many popular customs were only mentioned if interrupted or discontinued.[17] He continues that the 'caveat that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence is nowhere more pertinent than in attempts to assess extent and longevity of these popular mimetic customs'.[18] Furthermore, Scott Cutler Shershow, in *Puppets and 'Popular' Culture,* emphasizes that the puppet theatre was 'a pervasive presence in the streets and marketplaces of early modern England'.[19] Indeed, if we consider who is sharing the streets and marketplaces with the puppeteers, the groups which come most readily to mind are those most likely to be overlooked by the official and the elite, unless, of course, they run afoul of local authorities. The puppeteers themselves, often called 'motion men', were accompanied by a wide variety of street performers: 'jongleurs, jugglers, tumblers, minstrels, "histriones," "mimi," "ioculatores," "pleyers," [and] "beare or bull bayters"'.[20] Indeed, the puppeteer's place in the early modern cultural landscape is barely above that of the vagrant or the pauper. As Henryk Jurkowski notes in *A History of European Puppetry,* 'the puppet players had to make every effort to avoid being mistaken for thieves or beggars against whom the Elizabethan Vagrancy acts were aimed'.[21] To keep on the safe side of the law street players, including puppeteers, had to ask permission to play from town or city councils, seek patronage from noblemen, or go to England's highest authority in charge of public performance, the master of the revels. Puppeteers thus occupy a shifting liminal space that encompasses and crosses the borders between legal and illegal, safe and subversive. The puppets' widespread presence also suggests a widespread popularity; so, without a doubt, when Jonson's audience heard that the puppets 'shall be entreated to come in', the audience already knows to whom the Scrivener refers (induction 132). We see the puppeteers' tenuous hold on legal and social legitimacy borne out in *Bartholomew Fair* when the puritan Busy charges the 'stageplayers, rhymers, and morris dancers' with 'contempt of the brethren and the cause' (5.5.11–12). Leatherhead, *Bartholomew Fair*'s puppeteer, defends his right to play, responding that he 'present[s] nothing

but what is licensed by authority' (13–14). In fact, he claims he has permission to play directly from the '"Master of the Revels" hand for't' (18). This kind of protection is essential if the puppeteer is to stay free to perform.

The audience, however, comes from all walks of life: from the lowest beggar to the wealthiest nobleman. Unfortunately, for the most part the puppet theatre's spectators have not left records detailing their experiences. Yet their presence as the puppet theatre's audience is the first recognizable cultural assumption that the puppet brings with it onto the stage in *Bartholomew Fair.* In Jonson's earlier play, the 1606 *Volpone,* Venetian merchants remark on Sir Politic Would-be's encasement in a tortoise shell disguise: 'Twere a rare motion to be seen in Fleet Street … Or Smithfield, in the fair' (5.4.76–8).[22] The merchants' reference to Fleet Street, a main thoroughfare from the City of London to Westminster as well as an early centre for publishing, and Smithfield, a field used for public executions and the yearly Bartholomew Fair, illustrates both the familiarity of the street puppet theatre and an audience comprised of many different social classes including the moneyed and the educated. The specific stage audience at the puppet theatre in *Bartholomew Fair*'s last act is made up of middle-class women, street urchins, middle-class men, puritans, a justice of the peace, pickpockets, fortune hunters, and prostitutes. Although we do not have many records of the puppet theatres or their audiences, we do have pictures of them. The earliest known illustrations of a glove puppet appear in the 1388 French manuscript *The Romance of Alexander.* These illustrations show a puppet theatre not unlike those in use today. The audiences, made up of men and women, stand before raised, transportable puppet theatres and watch glove type puppets engage in sword play (see figures 1 and 2).

An invaluable tool for researching the question of the puppet theatre's place in society outside the theatre is the extensive collection of manuscripts found in the Records of Early English Drama (REED). In these volumes are collected manuscripts from private homes, judicial courts, and civic governments. In contrast to personal reactions to specific puppet plays, REED contains a recording of an overall societal stance towards puppets and puppet theatres. For example, original regional records disclose that the master wardens of Dover made six payments to puppet players from 1475–1610, most without any explanatory comments. Interestingly enough however, the Dover Chamberlain made a payment in 1609 so that the puppet player *would not* perform.[23] An examination of the rest of the records shows that this instance is by no means an isolated case, and a picture begins to emerge

Figure 1. Men at a puppet theatre from *The Romance of Alexander* (1338), with permission of The Bodliean Library, University of Oxford, ms. Bodl. 264; fol. 54v.

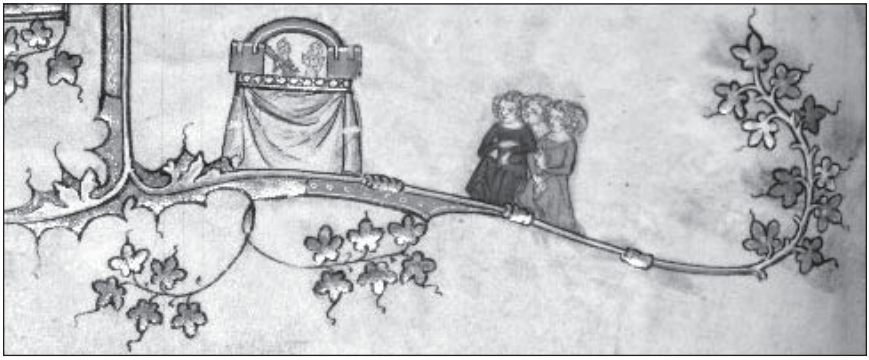

Figure 2. Women at a puppet theatre from *The Romance of Alexander* (1338), with permission of The Bodliean Library, University of Oxford, ms. Bodl. 264; fol. 76r.

Figure 3. The 'Stang Ride' or 'Skimmington Ride' plasterwork panel, complete with a 'Cowle' staff and music, in the Great Hall at Montacute House, Somerset. ©National Trust Images/Nadia Mackenzie.

as to the extent of the suspicion and distrust with which puppeteers — and indeed all performers — were regarded.

REED: *Cambridge* gives a slightly more complete picture of cultural attitudes, although the documents cover a shorter time span: 1573–1615. Again, echoing the Dover entry, two of the Cambridge entries are statutes attempting to control access to puppets by university students. A 1573 entry records a statute forbidding university students to watch the puppet plays.[24] This law is not surprising. Puppet theatres not only take the students' minds off their studies, but also seem to be hotbeds of subversion. Puppets 'carnivalized the subject matter' of whatever they played, with 'the kind of farcical violence that the mere materiality of the performing object seems always to invite'.[25] It seems however that the Cambridge restrictions were ineffectual, because in 1604 town and gown came together to require puppeteers to comply with a non-performance constraint for a five-mile radius around the city of Cambridge.[26] These restrictions were still in place in 1613 when William Selby, a money gatherer for a puppet theatre, was obligated to 'make noe more shews or puppet playes or shew any sightes in the fayer or v myles of the markett'.[27] What these few documents reveal, especially when set against the sheer volume of the REED manuscript collection, is the marginalized yet long-standing place the puppet theatre occupied throughout large portions of England.

This view holds true in Somerset as well. However, what the Somerset records divulge are layers of even more intense ambivalence, suspicion, and anxiety associated with puppet theatres, puppeteers, and even the puppets themselves. A deposition taken at the bishop's court in 1584 records pickpocket activity at a puppet theatre set up in an inn. The pickpocket, William Appowell, uses the puppets as diversions and puts his hand 'vnder the Coates of Certeine woman standenge vppon a benche ther and beholdinge also the puppittes then and ther playinge'.[28] Perhaps this is not unexpected; crowds are where pickpockets find their victims. In fact, a deposition taken in 1602 from a weaver states that he followed a woman who was suspicious *simply because* he had seen her 'accompanye certaine Poppet players'.[29] The weaver's assumption that someone is suspicious simply because he or she is in a crowd at a puppet theatre is persistent throughout the documents gathered in the REED volumes. Such distrust is also evident in the stock characters which make up the playlist of Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair:* Ursula, the 'pig woman' is also a 'punk, pinnace and bawd' (2.2.76); Edgeworth is 'a cut-purse', Knockem a 'ranger o' Turnball'(a horse-dealer in a red-light district),

Whit a 'bawd', and Alice a 'punk' ('The Persons of the Play'). In fact the Scrivener asserts in the induction, right before he lists the characters in the upcoming play, that no one should 'expect more than he knows or better ware than a fair will afford'; in other words, we all know what, and who, we will see at a fair (induction 113–14).

In addition to the pervasive association of puppets and puppet players with vagrancy, lawlessness, theft, and transgressive sexual behaviour, the puppet tradition also had strong ties to the Catholic Church.[30] Interestingly enough, the earliest named puppet play of any kind is the Resurrection Puppet Play performed at Witney, England, in 1500.[31] Puppets in the miracle plays presented basic bible stories and the lives of the saints. They also became known, however, for the performances of corrupted renditions of biblical stories, especially after the onset of the Reformation. By the time Jonson's fair puppets performed in 1614, the legitimate and corrupted stories are inextricably mixed. Moreover, it is a small step for the puppet theatre from the distorted biblical stories, with their already familiar religious forms, to blatant parody of the established church.[32] The subversive potential is far-reaching in the puppet, an inanimate object in the form of a caricatured human in debased stories using other iconographic hand-props. It follows then that the puppet is both an icon of transgressive behaviour *and* a transgressive icon used by church hierarchies to teach religious stories and model appropriate values and behaviour. As an iconic hand-prop, furthermore, it can handle and appropriate other props; for example, the swords in the *Romance of Alexander* illustrations, or the weapon with which Puppet Damon is urged to 'Pink [Leatherhead's] guts' (5.4.34). Of course, the church is not the only form of official culture at risk of parody in the puppet theatre; the law, guilds, chivalry, even the universities — all are potential targets.

Without a doubt, the interplay between early modern society and the puppet's use as a transgressive icon becomes even more complicated when the puppet is taken out of the puppet theatre and appropriated by the theatre of the street. One example is perhaps the most intriguing of the Somerset entries. A case is recorded in the Somerset Quarter Sessions Roll of 1653 in which John Day, a 'husbandman' of Ditcheat, Somerset, was paraded in a 'skimmington' around the village upon a 'Cowle staff'.[33] The early modern skimmington, or parade, is a shaming ritual usually aimed at cuckolded or hen-pecked husbands, although one could be paraded for a multitude of social infractions from brewing bad ale to scolding. The offender is put on a cowle staff (a long, stout staff) and paraded through the streets accompanied

by loud, mocking music. If the offender is the husband of an adulteress, then he has the added ignominy of wearing cuckold horns on his head. In this instance, Day, whose wife is accused of adultery, is forced to wear two large cuckold horns. The destination of the skimmington is Day's home; once there, the villagers plan to take Mistress Day and throw her into the nearby pond. They arrive at the Days' home with a 'great stir, hoopinge and hallowinge', carrying in front of them 'Buskes hodnes mawkins long staues'.[34] Mawkins, ragged puppets made of linen, are carried on poles in front of the skimmington; their use evokes effigy, like a Guy on Guy Fawkes Day. Significantly, both the puppets and Master Day are on poles. It is not clear from the record whether or not Mistress Day is on the cowle staff too, or is required to walk in the skimmington. Either way, her participation in her own degradation is forced. The puppets are carried on the same level as the person(s) on the cowle staff, visually equating their bodies through both costume and space. In this instance the villagers use crude puppets in an ominous meting out of societal judgment and control. They are no longer simple entertaining props; they are the visual manifestation of the man and woman's degradation. In a culture that regards puppeteers as little more than lawless vagrants or beggars, as perhaps is not unexpected, when villagers became players in a ritualized vigilante drama, they choose a prop already associated with a wide variety of cultural anxieties. In this case, the puppets' material likeness to both the guilty wife and the incompetent husband reinforce the understanding that neither their bodies nor their actions really belonged to them. These puppets are neither iconic children's toys to be purchased at the fair nor are they funny clowns mixing up well-known bible stories. The distortions of the puppets' bodies and their attendant associations with the bodies of the transgressive woman and the cuckolded man are not only indicated but also emphasized.

Unquestionably, the early modern audience's perception and reception of puppet theatres is deeply rooted in anxieties that range from fear of crime to subversion of authority. To these anxieties, we add one more: the early modern unease with the representation of the human body and the self. Sara Van Den Berg writes that, 'Throughout his career, Jonson celebrated and mocked the human body, a case that can and cannot be altered. That body became for him the necessary representation of the self'.[35] We can see this mockery in Jonson's 1609 *Epicene* when Otter, listed in the persons of the play as a 'land and sea captain', describes his wife as a series of 'parts' purchased in 'town':

> All her teeth were made i'the Blackfriars, both her eyebrows i'the Strand, and her hair in Silver Street … She takes herself asunder still when she goes to bed, into some twenty boxes, and about next day noon is put together again like a great German clock. (4.2.93–100)[36]

When Jonson utilizes the glove puppet as a hand prop to construct, manipulate, and finally confute the self in *Bartholomew Fair,* he magnifies the tension between the material site of a prop invested with the socially generated meanings that attach to the low puppet theatre and the boundaries surrounding the prevailing material models of selfhood. If we also keep in mind how the glove works as a 'corporal site of agency' on the early modern stage, then we can appreciate how complex the relationships become between actors and puppet, prop and self.[37] Because *Bartholomew Fair* addresses these complex and often contradictory relationships in the form of parody, the ensuing tricks, puns, and projections ironically allow the audience, like the players themselves, an opportunity to 'drown the memory of all enormity' in laughter (5.6.107–8).

As I pointed out before, Jonson's biting comedy begins with the Scrivener telling the audience that the puppets may be '*entreated* to come in' (induction 132). The first mention of the puppets, however, appears as 'Puppets' in the list of the persons of the play.[38] This notice reminds us that the puppets are obviously inanimate props requiring manipulation by an actual human — a puppeteer. Conversely, although within the play itself the puppets have specific names and are given lines exactly like the other players, their names are not listed along with the other players. Lantern Leatherhead, the interpreter for the puppets, is listed only as a hobbyhorse-seller; his function as a puppeteer is left unmentioned. These details are striking in that they reveal, at the very outset of the play, the tensions existent along the boundaries between material props and the humans who manipulate them. This first listing of the persons exposes the similarities of the two along what perhaps may be described as shared material borders. In the playlist, puppet bodies are constructed as persons who, through the use of size, deformity (the proportions of the human body are often exaggerated), projection, and the eventual naming of the puppets in the body of the play itself, conflate the material body of an actor and the materiality of a hand prop. These miniature bodies then augment the parody centred on the bodies of actors — and intensify the questions about the constructions of self that are crucial to *Bartholomew Fair.*

This equation of props with humans is to be expected as we consider props that can 'take on a life of their own'.[39] After all, humans have lives and props do not. Yet the converse, equating the human with the prop of the puppet, makes the boundary between thing and identity, representation and indwelling, permeable in both directions. In *Bartholomew Fair* not only are puppets conflated with players, but also characters are conflated with puppets. Quarlous describes Zeal-of-the-land Busy as practicing his faith as a 'seditious motion' (1.3.136). Because 'motion' is also another word commonly used for a puppet play, Quarlous is equating Busy to a puppet and his display of faith to the debased biblical stories traditionally associated with the Bartholomew Fair puppet theatre. Quarlous continues to set the stage for the later confrontation between Busy and the puppets by stating that Busy 'defies any other learning than inspiration' (1.3.143). Busy claims he is the recipient of divine inspiration, an inspiration with which he interprets the world, including Bartholomew Fair, for the puritan brethren. The Puppet Dionysius, also a self-proclaimed recipient of true inspiration, counters Busy by announcing that he also 'speak[s] by inspiration as well as [Busy]' and has 'as little to do with learning' as does Busy (5.5.107–10). Quarlous's charge against Busy also sets the puritan interpreter of the fair against Lantern Leatherhead as an interpreter of the puppet show. Busy is called on to interpret the fair and its meanings to Dame Purecraft, Win, and Littlewit in contrast to Leatherhead who interprets the puppet play for both of its audiences: the one onstage and the one offstage. After Littlewit discloses his authorship of a play for the 'motion man', Win describes Littlewit's puppet play as 'profane' (1.7.145). This brings together the connotations of the worldly, irreverent, and secular nature of Littlewit's profane motion (or play) with the description of Busy's 'seditious motion' (1.3.136). Even before the appearance of the puppets in 5.3.70, therefore, the audience sees two related and conflicting models of the construction of self. First, Busy's social construction of himself as one called by God to zealously preach against the sins of the fair conflicts with his gluttonous physical appetites and bad manners. Second, his equally conflicting material and spiritual inspirations equates him with the material and profane inspirations of the puppets. Consequently, and not surprisingly, when Winwife comments on Busy's impudence as Busy calls on 'his zeal to fill him against a puppet', Grace responds to Winwife's incredulity with 'I know no fitter match than a puppet to commit with an hypocrite' (5.5.46–9). The puritan and the puppet are interchangeable.

The audience's first glimpse of the puppets is a specific reminder of their hand-prop function because an actor carries them onstage. However, while they are being carried and handled by Leatherhead, he speaks of them as if they are sentient beings that 'live' in baskets and are in need of feasting, ale, tobacco, and money (5.3.64). Leatherhead says they are 'as good as any — none dispraised — for dumb shows', as he takes them out of the basket. The puppeteer equates them with the human actors who perform the dumb shows that traditionally open an early modern stage production (75–6) and their inability to talk equates with the silence of the dumb show actor. Once again, the puppets are presented to Cokes and to the audience as sentient beings. Conversely, the implication is that the dumb actor, a sentient being, functions as inanimate puppet. Here props, which 'take on a life of their own', are linked with actors who become as silent as the puppets.[40]

At the end of this scene Cokes states that he is 'in love with the actors already, and I'll be allied to them presently' (131). The problem with this desire (other than that these are *puppets*) is that Cokes is already engaged to Grace because Coke's brother-in-law Justice Overdo purchased Grace's wardship. In fact, he is to be married to her that very day (1.1.6–7). In spite of this prior transaction, Cokes declares that Puppet Hero will be his 'fairing' (5.3.132). Glossed as '*fair purchase*', 'fairing' conflates fair as in beautiful, fair as in a place, and fairing as a commodity that can be purchased.[41] As Grace coolly observes her intended bridegroom declare his intention to be allied with a puppet, Cokes reassures Littlewit that although he is 'handling' Hero, he 'will not hurt her' (5.4.7–8). He then defends his actions against the charge of being 'uncivil' (9) and reminds Littlewit that he is about to marry. All these factors point to the probability that both Cokes and the audience view Cokes's action of putting his hand in and out of the glove of the puppet as sexually charged. This exchange is the first of three instances (two overt and one implied — although possibly also visual, dependent upon the staging) in which a human hand in the 'skirt', so to speak, of the glove puppet is pointedly staged and remarked upon. All three instances are sexual and all three emphasize the materiality from which the characters cannot escape. In this first instance it equates the hand in the skirt of the puppet with a hand in the skirt of a woman and although this false equivalency is part of what the parody plays on — after all, the puppet's skirt is empty and (presumably) the woman's is not — the differences between the two (Hero and Grace) are also simultaneously collapsed. This collapse of the distance between prop

and human is part of what makes the parody effective; it is also what makes the puppets used in the Somerset skimmington menacing.

Indeed, although Grace may convince herself that she and Puppet Hero have nothing in common, in actuality she not only observes a silly young man play with puppets, but a satiric retelling of her own part in *Bartholomew Fair*. Joseph Swetnam in his *The Arraignment of Lewd, Idle, Forward, and Unconstant women* (1615) writes that women are degraded because they 'paint … themselves, their gaudies, like Puppets'.[42] This comparison moves in multiple directions. Not only do women paint themselves like puppets, but they are also commodities like the toys at the fair. Shershow writes that the cultural meanings of the puppet — stretching from the primary, the corporeal, and the 'natural' to the secondary, the mimetic, and the deceptive — resemble and correspond to the cultural image of woman as, similarly, both natural and artificial, associated with the body in its binary opposition to the spirit and also with dress, cosmetics, and social dissimulation.[43] The visual of Cokes's arm protruding from Hero's glove body, his hand under her skirt possessing her, is not so far from the reality of Grace's situation.

Grace, however, not only is bought by Justice Overdo and allied to a fool through circumstances seemingly out of her control, but also willingly participates in a similar exchange with Quarlous, Winwife, and Troubleall. Although she can rationally set out her predicament, arguing that she 'must have a husband [she] love[s]' (4.3.16) and that she couldn't possibly 'betray [her]self' (32) by judging hastily, her solution to this insufferable situation is to propose a 'motion' (42) of her own that mirrors the inescapable irrationality and materiality of the fair she purports to only observe. In her 'motion' the puppet lovers aren't debased characters from the golden age of literature, but humans from an age that debases thought and substance to the game of 'vapours' and the purchase of 'fairings'. In Grace's 'motion' debased men, Quarlous, Winwife, and Cokes, take the place of debased puppets, as they vie for her fortune and her body. Instead of the ghost of Dionysius dressed as a Scrivener to speak the words 'by inspiration' (5.5.8–9), Grace's motion boasts of a madman in a ragged robe who seeks to speak only through the flimsy authority of Judge Overdo's warrant. Grace's body is indeed like Hero's: a 'fairing'. The real irony is that while Grace seems to have come to grips with the prospect of a husband possessing her just as Cokes possesses Puppet Hero, she is deluded into thinking she can escape what Judge Overdo so aptly describes as 'enormity' through her own self-awareness.

The blurring of the boundaries between the animate and inanimate is then extended again. Not content with breaking the boundaries of human and puppet, Cokes declares that Hero, the puppet, will be his 'fiddle' (5.3.134). Hero's body no longer represents a human body, but is now the representation of a toy instrument. Jonson then emphasizes this movement from human to mock human prop to props that do not resemble humans at all with a long list of such transformations. Cokes proclaims Puppet Leander to be his 'fiddlestick', Puppet Damon his 'drum', and Puppet Pythias his 'pipe' (135). Finally, in the last act the Puppet Dionysius is no longer a puppet of an actor playing the ghost of a king, but a ghost 'in the habit of a scrivener' (92–3). Cokes then announces that Puppet Dionysius is now his 'hobbyhorse' (135–6). The representational and iconic prop of the puppet is renamed as another representational and iconic prop: a fiddlestick, drum, pipe, and hobbyhorse. At the same time the puppet fully retains its original uses and meanings: it remains a puppet, a prop counterfeiting the human form.

The second time the puppeteer's hand introduces itself under the puppet's skirt, albeit indirectly, occurs when Leatherhead relates to Cokes and the assembled audience how Puppet Cupid (disguised as Jonas the drawer) enflames Puppet Hero's passion:

> Yet was it not three pints of sherry could flaw her
> Till Cupid, distinguished like Jonas the drawer,
> From under his apron, where his lechery lurks,
> Put love in her sack. Now mark how it works. (5.4.257–60)

Of course, what is under Cupid's apron is the puppeteer's hand. In contrast to the first instance, which emphasized the supposed attendant female anatomy, this instance points to the male anatomy — which is also missing. The double entendre 'Put love in her sack' makes the next command, 'Now mark how it works', a real mind-bender when one imagines the possible staging. While human arms and hands are not specifically referred to in this passage, the presence of arms and hands under skirts is part of the parody. Lechery, arguably a purely human vice, in an inanimate puppet is of course absurd and so makes the incongruence of an empty skirt copulating with another empty skirt laughable. Yet behind the parody — to use Leatherhead's terminology — lurks the uncomfortable sense that the lechery, which cannot be under Puppet Cupid's apron because there is no sentience or soul in a wooden puppet for the sin of lechery to inhabit, is inexorably materialized by

the puppeteer's hand. To say it another way: the lechery is the puppet's; the hand is the man's.

As we remember, the 'material haunting' of a prop by a person not only represents a person, but also is in a sense, that person's hand, mouth, and reconstituted self. In *Bartholomew Fair,* this reconstitution of self not only moves from hand to glove as the actors' hands are moved in and out of the puppet bodies, but from puppet to mouth as Leatherhead becomes 'the mouth of 'em all' (5.3.77–8). Again, as Leatherhead's hand becomes the 'material haunting' of Puppet Cupid's lechery, so also the puppeteer becomes the 'material haunting' of Dionysius's painted mouth: the prop of a prop. When Leatherhead relinquishes his agency to Puppet Dionysius, the boundary between prop and person in *Bartholomew Fair* is crossed in both directions. The first time the boundary is crossed occurs when the puppets are listed as persons in 'The Persons of the Play'; puppets cross the boundary to persons. Now, as the dialogue builds toward the climax of the play, the movement goes both ways: Leatherhead's hand animates the Puppet Dionysius's body, the Puppet Dionysius animates Leatherhead's mouth:

> LEATHERHEAD Faith, sir, I am not well studied in the controversies between the Hypocrites and us. But here's one of my motion, Puppet Dionysius, shall undertake him, and I'll venture the cause on't.
>
> COKES Who? My hobbyhorse? Will he dispute with him?
>
> LEATHERHEAD Yes, sir, and make a hobby-ass of him, I hope.(5.5.34–9)

Notice that here again the movement is from human (Leatherhead) to puppet (Puppet Dionysius) to toy (Cokes's hobbyhorse) and also directly from human (Busy) to toy (hobby-ass).

This movement between prop and actor immediately precedes the third instance in which the arm or hand of the puppeteer is overtly conflated with the body and person of the puppet: the famous debate between Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy and Puppet Dionysius. While many facets of Busy's and Puppet Dionysius's confrontation deserve investigation, I wish to focus on the aspect of the action which, in light of the previous two examples, confounds the construction of gender by questioning two constructs on which gender can reside: the materiality of the body and the social display of 'apparell' (98). Busy begins his last attempt to debate Puppet Dionysius with the familiar puritan charge: 'Yes, and my main argument against you is that you are an abomination; for the male among you putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male' (95–8). Busy's argues that

foundation of the puppet's disgraceful sexual aberration is the act of cross-dressing; or to be more specific, that the social 'prop' of gender-specific clothes in the theatre of the world creates a 'material haunting' that is both real and pervasive. In Busy's view agency, or the self, is dictated by and through the constructs of cultural sexual identities relayed through gendered 'apparell'. Busy's inclusion of the 'female of the male' (98) is particularly interesting in the context of the early modern stage because supposedly there were no female actors in a public theatre. Puppet Dionysius's quick refutation of Busy's accusation is first verbal and then visual. First Puppet Dionysius rebuts Busy's comparison of actors with puppets: 'It is your old stale argument against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets' (101–2), thereby seemingly to re-establish the barrier between prop and player. This train of thought implies that, unlike Puppet Cupid's lechery, 'abomination' lays wholly within the purview of the human self. It follows then that if puppets, unlike actors, are material props and 'neither male nor female', then they can be neither religious hypocrites nor sexual horrors. Indeed, if Puppet Dionysius had ended his argument here the contested boundary between material and sentient may well have been persuasively redrawn. The 'material haunting' of sexuality and gender, which could have otherwise lingered in the puppet, would no longer imbue the prop with a 'life of its own'. Yet when Puppet Dionysius 'takes up his garment', presumably to reveal the asexuality of a puppet, what actually is exposed is the arm of a puppeteer, which intensifies the further fragmentation of both the social and material constructions of the self (104).

Fittingly, Jonson choose the puppet theatre to explore the many intersections between agency and materiality since it was a well-known site for satirical treatment of the institutions, religious, academic, economic, political, or familial, which claimed the right to regulate both behaviour and thought. What is more, as one can see from the use of the puppet in the punitive theatre of the skimmington, the imaginative step from the prop of puppet body to that of human body can be both volatile and relatively short. Furthermore, the puppet projects an illusion of rationality that safeguards the audience from any requirement to answer the paradox of the materiality of the self. After all, like Grace, the audience can look on the puppets as mere toys in the hands of transient and unsavoury fools. To take the questions posed by the raising of Puppet Dionysius's skirt seriously would be to admit to be 'confuted' and 'converted' just like Busy. Yet, because it is comic theatre and

the audience, like Judge Overdo, has 'discovered enough', Jonson allows it to go home laughing (125).

Unlike Stallybrass and Jones's 'material hauntings' of the glove and the handkerchief, the puppet appears to have retained its potency both on and offstage as a prop that 'possesses the possessor'.[44] Furthermore, although it also seems as if the use of puppets should provide an extra layer of control, of objectivity, nonetheless they retain a potential to lay open our disquiet about how we construct our bodies and ourselves. In contrast to other props, puppets do not require that initial step of personification in order for us to anthropomorphize them; because they look like us, we can give them our stories. Furthermore, they provide a medium through which we can be distanced enough from those stories to enable us to ask the troubling questions about our relationship to the material world. The puppet's nearness can still be unnerving and its significance as a prop in the definition and projection of self is still highly visible in many types of mimetic and dramatic expression. From the pictures of discarded dolls in disaster photographs to the use of demonic puppets in horror movies, the puppet's visual potency still pushes emotional and rational boundaries. Unquestionably, through the sameness/difference inherent in its relationship to the human self, the puppet creates a gap where the exploration of agency can become unregulated by the rational reliance on the otherness of the prop. Consequently, in the last scene of *Bartholomew Fair,* Quarlous reminds Justice Overdo that he is 'but Adam, flesh and blood' and in light of this 'frailty' should not take himself (or others) too seriously (5.6.105). We are, as Quarlous says, made up of the stuff of the earth. The last line of the play is Cokes's demand that they 'bring the actors along. We'll ha' the rest o'the play at home' (122–3). The actors to which Cokes refers are not just the flesh and blood humans walking about on the stage; they include the puppets as well. Cokes reminds us that we must bring the constructs of ourselves, both subjective and material, wherever we go. Yet if we bring the puppets 'home', and continue the 'play', who is to say when and if 'theatre' ever ends? Perhaps Jonson would answer: 'I would have none feare to go along, for my intents are *ad correctionem, non ad destructionem; ad aedficandum, non ad diruendum*' (120–1).

Notes

1 Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair*, David Bevington (ed.), *English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 2002), 969–1064.
2 Andrew Sofer, *The Stage Life of Props* (Ann Arbor, 2003), 20.
3 Ibid, 113.
4 Ibid.
5 PaulYachnin, 'Wonder-effects: Othello's Handkerchief', Jonathan Gil Harris and Natasha Korda (eds), *Staged Properties in Early Modern English Drama* (Cambridge, 2002), 316–34.
6 Ibid, 317.
7 William Shakespeare, *Othello,* Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (eds), *The Norton Shakespeare,* 2 vols (New York, 2008), 1.386–457.
8 Yachnin, 'Wonder-effects', 317.
9 Peter Stallybrass and Ann Rosalind Jones, 'Fetishizing the Glove in Renaissance Europe', *Critical Inquiry* 28.3 (2001), 114–32. DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.1086/449035.
10 Ibid, 116.
11 Ibid, 126.
12 Thomas Middleton and William Rowley, *The Changeling,* David Bevington (ed.), *English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 2002), 1600–56.
13 Stallybrass and Jones, 'Fetishizing the Glove', 127–8.
14 Ibid, 119.
15 George Speaight, *The History of the English Puppet Theatre,* 2nd edn (Carbondale, 1990), 54.
16 Ibid, 60–1.
17 James M. Gibson (ed.), *REED: Kent: Diocese of Canterbury* (Toronto, 2002), 1.lxxxvi. http://www.archive.org/details/kentcanterburyREED01gibsuoft
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19 Scott Cutler Shershow, *Puppets and 'Popular' Culture* (Ithaca, 1995), 45.
20 Ibid.
21 Henryk Jurkowski, and Penny Francis (eds), A *History of European Puppetry from its Origins to the End of the 19th Century* (Lewiston, 1996), 99.
22 Ben Jonson, *Volpone,* David Bevington (ed.) *English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 2002), 679–771.
23 Gibson, *REED: Kent: Diocese of Canterbury,* 499.

24 Alan H. Nelson (ed.), *REED: Cambridge* (Toronto, 1989), 2.1146–7. http://www.archive.org/details/cambridgeREED01nelsuoft
25 Shershow, *Puppets,* 46.
26 Nelson, *REED: Cambridge,* 1.399–400.
27 Ibid, 1.521.
28 Robert J. Alexander (ed.), *REED: Somerset,* 2 vols (Toronto, 1996), 1.130. http://www.archive.org/details/somersetREED01stokuoft
29 Alexander, *REED: Somerset,* 1.130.
30 Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (New York, 1978), 121.
31 Speaight, *History,* 53.
32 Burke, *Popular Culture,* 122.
33 Alexander, *REED: Somerset,* 2.638.
34 Ibid.
35 Sara Van Den Berg, 'True Relation: The Life and Career of Ben Jonson', Richard Harp and Stanley Stewart (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Ben Jonson* (Cambridge, 2000), 12.
36 Ben Jonson, *Epicene,* David Bevington (ed.), *English Renaissance Drama* (New York, 2002), 782–859.
37 Stallybrass and Jones, 'Fetishizing the Glove', 119.
38 Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair,* 969.
39 Sofer, *Stage Life,* 20.
40 Ibid.
41 '*fair purchase*' in Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fair,* glossed 1049.
42 Scott Cutler Shershow, '"The Mouth of 'hem All": Ben Jonson, Authorship, and the Performing Object', *Theatre Journal* 46.2 (May 1994), 196.
43 Ibid.
44 Yachnin, 'Wonder-effects', 316.