

Chapter 14
“The garments of Posthumus”:
Identifying the Non-Responsive
Body in *Cymbeline*

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As many critics have pointed out, *Cymbeline* is a play about the construction of identity, but it never seems to have a stable identity itself.¹ Simultaneously a history play and a romance, *Cymbeline* stages events from the reign of an early British king, using a mixture of pastoral, courtly rhetoric, Roman prophecy, and masque.² The result is an overdetermined generic landscape that allows for the free development of character identities, emphasizing flow over stasis until the final, identity-solidifying denouement.³ Within this state of free play, the bodies of sleeping and dead characters come to exemplify the process of social identity construction, acting as surfaces to be described, blazoned, and repeatedly reinscribed by the observations of the characters around them. Defined in this fluid way, against a shifting social and generic background, these bodies begin to prompt questions about the possibility of memorialization, and about the nature of acting itself. How can a sleeping or dead character retain a stable enough identity to be remembered in a lasting way, despite environmental fluctuations, and how can a history play present accurate but evolving simulacra of the dead? During its blazon and observation scenes, *Cymbeline* addresses these questions through the productive tensions between particularized and generalized descriptions of sleeping or dead characters, and between overlapping groups of observers with differing perceptions of a body's identity. Each of these gestures creates a space for multiplicity. A non-responsive body can be simultaneously generic and individual, for example, or misidentified on-stage but “recognized” by the audience. Between them, these multiple layers fashion the memorialization of a non-responsive character: they allow identity to evolve by means of social interaction, and they're flexible enough to accommodate new information or shifts in generic backdrop. Crucially, these multiple layers of observation operate most

¹ I'd like to thank Karen Britland, Heather Dubrow, Mary Trull, Sara Morrison, and Deborah Uman for their helpful feedback on drafts of this paper.

² Martin Butler, “Introduction,” William Shakespeare, *Cymbeline* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 29.

³ On the “magical restorations of romance” in *Cymbeline*, see Heather Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1999) 140.

often on the principle of good faith: observers tend to assume the best about the non-responsive person they're describing, emphasizing positive attributes and glossing over less attractive ones.⁴ By envisioning a memorialization process dependent on overlapping observers, multivalent descriptions, and a willingness to believe the best about non-responsive others, Shakespeare provides a system for remembering the non-responsive body on stage—one that tries to preserve, refine, and uphold character identities.

The struggle to define what counts as "identity" for a corpse or a sleeper, however, is an underlying concern of many characters in the play. While Belarius, an exiled courtier, claims that a dead man's status as a prince must be respected in his funeral ceremonies, his adopted son argues that "Thersites' body is as good as Ajax' / When neither are alive" (4.2.253–4).⁵ The tension between these two viewpoints highlights the thin line between essentialized and socially constructed identity for corpses in the period. Because the corpse can act as a cipher, equally capable of functioning as "Thersites" or "Ajax," Belarius' efforts to respect its social status almost reimpose that status upon an unsignifying artifact, instead of recognizing the corpse's innate, essential identity. This collapse of "essential" identity into social constructionism is possible in *Cymbeline* only in the absence of interiority. As Katharine Eisaman Maus points out, a living person in the Renaissance could possess "interiority" because of the difference between his personal thought processes and the persona he presented to the world.⁶ For a corpse (and, in this play, for a drugged sleeper), this interiority isn't possible, because the body, soul, and mind have been severed from one another and cannot overlap to produce an interior space. If a corpse or sleeper can have an identity, then it can't emerge from the idea of inwardness, and it also can't derive from a process of self-fashioning. Instead, the identities of non-responsive bodies have to emerge from the actions and words of the conscious characters nearby, whose efforts to relocate or blazon a non-responsive body allow that body to signify within a specific social context. Through actions and words, the identity of a sleeper or

⁴ Giacomo's observation of the sleeping Innogen is an exception to this general trend, and it is discussed in detail below. On the idea of "faith reposed in others" in *Cymbeline*, see Cynthia Lewis, "'With Simular Proof Enough': Modes of Misperception in *Cymbeline*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500–1900* 31 (1991): 360. On Roman and Christian good faith in the play, respectively, see Alison V. Scott, "Imogen's Fides: Secrets and 'Good Faith' in *Cymbeline*," *Rapt in Secret Studies: Emerging Shakespeares*, ed. Darryl Chalk and Laurie Johnson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010) 133–53 and Margaret Jones-Davies, "Cymbeline and the Sleep of Faith," *Theatre and Religion: Lancastrian Shakespeare*, ed. Richard Dutton, Alison Findlay, and Richard Wilson (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2003) 197–217.

⁵ Michael Neill, *Issues of Death* (Oxford: Clarendon P, 1997) 297–8. Quotes from *Cymbeline* will be cited parenthetically from *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 2008).

⁶ Katharine Eisaman Maus, *Inwardness and Theater in the English Renaissance* (Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1995) 12.

corpse is therapeutically re-membered for the satisfaction of the living: listed body parts, traits, or characteristics are re-forged into a signifying whole, creating an identity for the non-responsive character by re-endowing this body with meaning.⁷

At the same time, because *Cymbeline* is a staged play, the question of character identity becomes even more complicated. When actors portray characters on stage, their bodies take on some of the cipher-like quality of the non-responsive bodies described above: both "living" and "dead" characters on a stage, in other words, are ultimately identified by the social dialogue around them. This identification process first takes place when a gentleman describes the character of (the living) Posthumus. First, he frames Posthumus as "a creature such / as, to seek through the regions of the earth / for one his like, there would be something failing in him that should compare" (1.1.19–22). When asked for more details, the gentleman retells the story of Posthumus' youth, but can't explain his ancestry ("I cannot delve him to the root" 1.1.28), and ultimately links his worth to the agency of his royal wife: "his virtue / By her election may be truly read, what kind of man he is" (1.1.52–4). With this description, Posthumus' characterization is forged in a series of socially inflected stages.⁸ First, his virtue is established, because no living creature can compare to him, but that idea is ultimately too general to pinpoint Posthumus' identity, because the criteria of comparison and the ramifications of success or "failure" to compare have not been explained. Then, Posthumus' specific history is retold, situating him in relation to the history of his father, then the king, and finally his wife, but there's a "root" in the background, a genealogical/personal essence that external observers cannot access. To introduce the play, then, a living character has been described in a limited way, using specific, general, and socially inflected information, but missing details also create a gap in the descriptive process, opening the possibility for further character shaping to come.

In each of these areas, the description of the living Posthumus prefigures the descriptions of the sleeping or dead characters in the play. The tension between general and specific descriptors creates a basic characterization, while three levels of social discourse (the gentlemen's conversation, the audience's watching of the conversation, and the historical, retold actions of the other characters) establish Posthumus' identity for performance purposes. Notably, this opening characterization seeks to find the best in Posthumus, emphasizing his virtue while eliding his less exemplary qualities (like choler and misogyny). By performing this elision, the speaking gentleman is describing Posthumus' character in good faith: he emphasizes positive attributes, minimizes flaws, and even bends his syntax to describe Posthumus' paragon-like status. In addition to establishing good-faith discourse as a norm, however, this scene also performs a second function. Because the living, described character is named "Posthumus," the play immediately links

⁷ This idea challenges Nancy J. Vickers' argument that blazons tend to fragment the (female) body; see "Diana Described: Scattered Women and Scattered Rhyme," *Critical Inquiry* 8.2 (1981): 272.

⁸ Butler 28.

non-responsive, interred bodies (literally, those post-humus, or “after [having been put into] the ground”) with described identities and acted, “living” characters in a history play.⁹ By creating this link, *Cymbeline*’s opening scene hints that non-responsive character bodies are extreme test cases for the bodies of the actors themselves, which are inscribed with meaning in the play’s world by the same social processes that characterize the non-responsive.

If this is true, then the identification of non-responsive bodies within a play can foreground the interconnected processes of memorialization and acting, helping to explain their social roots and rhetorical strategies. In *Cymbeline*, sleeping or dead figures are identified at four key points: 1) Giacomo observes the sleeping Innogen; 2) a dirge commemorates the “dead” Innogen, disguised as Fidele; 3) Innogen identifies a corpse lying next to her; and 4) Jupiter and family ghosts discuss Posthumus’ affairs while he sleeps. Many of these key points involve the staging of a blazon; for example, an observer will gather information about a non-responsive body by dividing it into parts, reading those parts for general or specific data, and then formulating a conclusion. While that conclusion may seem to efface the identity of the non-responsive body—or at least misrepresent it temporarily—Shakespeare repeatedly shows that layers of overlapping social observation can stabilize and solidify the identity of a mis- or un-recognized character, leading to the possibility of memorialization in good faith. In my next four sections, I’ll highlight the ramifications of this process for concepts of identity and acting, addressing each moment listed above.

Giacomo Blazons the Sleeping Innogen

The most famous blazon in *Cymbeline* takes place at night. Seeking to discredit the princess Innogen’s reputation for chastity, particularly in the eyes of her exiled husband, Posthumus, Giacomo plants himself in a trunk in Innogen’s bedroom, emerging after she falls asleep. Then, he delivers a speech that describes Innogen’s lips, breathing, eyes, bedroom furnishings, mole, and reading material.¹⁰ During this process, Giacomo’s spoken descriptions of Innogen move from the stereotypically generalized to the specific: her lips are “rubies unparagoned” (2.2.17), her eyelids are “white and azure-laced” (22), but she has one mole on her left breast, “cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops / I’th’ bottom of a cowslip” (38–9). While the first two terms are standard motifs, characterizing Innogen in general Petrarchan terms, the latter description is idiosyncratic: Innogen is visibly different from other women, in a way that can be minutely described and recognized. While the general descriptors label her as a sexually desirable woman, then, the mole

⁹ Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss* 135.

¹⁰ For Patricia Parker, this moment “reifies Innogen’s body as part of the contents of an inventory”; see *Literary Fat Ladies: Rhetoric, Gender, Property* (New York: Methuen, 1987) 135. However, I will argue that this is not the only possible perspective: audience reactions can reinfect this reification of her body.

description pinpoints a more precise version of that identity—“woman who was desired by Giacomo, and who (putatively) gave in, showing him her mole.” By playing on the tension between generalized and specific descriptions of Innogen’s parts, Giacomo first invokes a stereotype and then repositions Innogen in relation to it, re-memorizing her body in a way that tampers with her social position as a chaste wife.¹¹

Crucially, Innogen’s non-responsiveness is stressed by Giacomo as the characteristic that enables him to complete this re-memorizing process. Approaching the bed, Giacomo makes a telling apostrophe: “O sleep, thou ape of death, lie dull upon her, / And be her sense but as a monument / Thus in a chapel lying” (2.2.31–3). By reiterating the common link between sleep and death, Giacomo claims a part in the Shakespearean villain-tradition that takes advantage of the non-responsive. Like Macbeth, Sebastian, and Antonio, Giacomo positions himself as a threat to a vulnerable royal sleeper. His power to threaten, like theirs, is rooted in the absence of his victim’s “sense,” or ability to perceive the world, during her sleep.¹² By taking advantage of a sleeper in this way, Giacomo emphasizes his lack of good faith: he fails to view a royal figure as unharmable, and he downplays the virtue of his victim. Because of this, Giacomo challenges the prevailing practices of non-responsive character identification within the play—and this challenge constitutes his major threat to the play’s moral landscape. For many critics, though, the nature of Giacomo’s threat is instead inflected by gender and voyeurism, and Innogen’s non-responsiveness becomes an afterthought: “Imogen is not so much a character who is asleep ... as her body is displayed for Jachimo’s consuming gaze.”¹³ In readings like this, the context provided by *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* is minimized, emphasizing Innogen’s gender-based vulnerability: because she is a woman, she is open for viewing, and therefore objectification and domination can ensue. I’d like to suggest an alternative idea: because Innogen is sleeping, the vulnerability that could be associated with femininity in the period is emphasized, but it’s ultimately her sleeping status, more than her gender, that enables her to be partitioned and socially reframed.

¹¹ In scene 2.4, to convince Posthumus of his wife’s unchastity, Giacomo recites a series of “particulars” (2.4.78) about his experience, culminating in the evidence of the mole as a decisive “corporal sign” (2.4.119).

¹² For sleep as “impotentia sensuum,” see Thomas Cogan, *Haven of Health* (London: Henrie Midleton, 1584) 236. This is available as a digital facsimile through *Early English Books Online*.

¹³ Evelyn Gajowski, “Sleeping Beauty, or ‘What’s the Matter?’: Female Sexual Autonomy, Voyeurism, and Misogyny in *Cymbeline*,” *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein*, ed. Evelyn Gajowski (Newark: U of Delaware P, 2004) 96. See also comments by Bettina Boecker, “You like to watch, don’t you? Violence in *Cymbeline*,” *Shakespeare-Gesellschaft Ausgabe* 4 (2006): n.p.; Parker, *Literary Fat Ladies* 136; Melissa Walter, “Dramatic Bodies and Novelistic Spaces in Jacobean Tragedy and Tragicomedy,” *Transnational Exchange in Early Modern Theater*, ed. Robert Henke and Eric Nicholson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008) 69–70.

By invoking the help of sleep to ensure that Innogen is like a "monument" in a tomb, Giacomo highlights the idea of non-responsiveness at the very center of his blazon, taking advantage of her sleep to redescribe her in bad faith.

As a result, Innogen's non-responsiveness simultaneously allows Giacomo's blazon and creates a problem for audience members. As active onlookers of either gender, are they automatically aligned with Giacomo? Or, as previous/future sleepers themselves, do they resent his intrusion on a universally vulnerable state?¹⁴ Clearly, it would be an oversimplification to posit a unified audience, thinking as one entity.¹⁵ At the same time, the audience does function as a collective unit of watchers, capable of remembering earlier information and holding a range of viewpoints that agree with and differ from Giacomo's.¹⁶ This tension between the audience's gazes/thoughts and Giacomo's gaze/thought provides the social context that allows the blazon of Innogen to signify on multiple levels. First, it becomes not only the description of an "unchaste" wife, but an example of Giacomo manipulating evidence, potentially implying more about Giacomo's moral character than Innogen's. Second, its particularized description of the birthmark could be read not as an indicator of Innogen's unchastity, but of her royal status. (This possibility becomes more apparent retrospectively, when Innogen's rediscovered brother displays a similar mark.)¹⁷ Finally, because the audience has witnessed Innogen's virtuous bedtime ritual (reading until late, yet requesting an early wake-up call), the blazon creates meaning within the context of Innogen's own actions, which provide a backdrop of restraint and self-discipline, making Giacomo's actions appear even less decorous. Though some audience members may enjoy the voyeurism, revel in Giacomo's rich language, or even be distracted by vendors, the possibility of watchers who are sympathetic to Innogen creates a rich field of potential meanings for the blazon, and the breadth of that field allows Innogen's chastity to be remembered, despite Giacomo's best intentions.

The Dirge Sung over the "Dead" Body of Fidele

The next moment of re-identification happens to a corpse, not a sleeper, but it still wrestles with the issue of good-faith memorialization. After Innogen runs away from the castle, she takes on a disguise. Dressed as the boy Fidele, and suffering from Posthumus' lack of faith in her virtue, she arrives at the rural household of Belarius. There, she bonds with the family before becoming sick, drinking a

¹⁴ Here, I build on Heather Dubrow's work with lyric address and multiple audiences. See *The Challenges of Orpheus* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 2008) 57.

¹⁵ For example, *Cymbeline* could have been performed at the Blackfriars, the Globe, or both, and the shift in setting could affect audience reactions. See Arthur Kirsch, "*Cymbeline* and Coterie Dramaturgy," *ELH* 34.3 (1967): 285.

¹⁶ Here, I disagree with Boecker's viewpoint that *Cymbeline* "deliberately turns its audience into onlookers of the non-empathetic kind."

¹⁷ Maurice Hunt, "Dismemberment, Corporal Reconstitution, and the Body Politic in 'Cymbeline,'" *Studies in Philology* 99.4 (2002): 427.

potion, and appearing to die. As her body lies onstage, Belarius' sons discuss the funeral rites: "Let us ... sing him to th' ground / As once our mother; use like note and words / Save that 'Euriphile' must be 'Fidele.'" (4.2.236–9). This passage inaugurates the idea of the interchangeability of the dead within the scene. If the name "Fidele" can simply be substituted for "Euriphile" in a dirge, despite the differences in age and family status between the two corpses, then death becomes a force that empties particularity from the deceased, making lifelessness their only remaining characteristic. According to Michael Neill, this idea of death as "a cancellation of personal identity" began to take strong hold within the early modern period, as one effect of the dialogue between religio-cultural shifts and the staging of tragedies.¹⁸ Within this framework, the brothers who sing the dirge are both reflecting and helping to craft a new perspective on death, seeing it as an equalizing force that elides specificity.

While the brothers uphold this idea of death, though, their father/abductor, Belarius, has a different viewpoint. In the uproar following Fidele's death, he points out, the boys have forgotten about the dead body of Cloten, the son of the queen, who was recently killed by Belarius' elder son for his rudeness. In his statement, Belarius acknowledges the equalizing power of death, but still demands attention to social rank:

Though mean and mighty rotting
Together have one dust, yet reverence,
That angel of the world, doth make distinction
Of place 'tween high and low. Our foe was princely,
And though you took his life as being our foe,
Yet bury him as a prince. (4.2.247–52)

Here, a movement from the general ("one dust") to the particular (a "princely" status) concedes ground to the sons' viewpoint, while making room for status-conscious memorialization practices. Although the bodies of the dead might be homogenized through the process of disintegration, the ideas of "reverence" and "distinction" can still function among the living, opening the way for processes of remembering that involve earthly respect—even for "foes." This respect, in turn, can re-impose status and particularity upon a corpse, re-entrenching Cloten's identity "as a prince." When Belarius moves in his speech from general identity loss to specific identity preservation, then, he acts in good faith, eliding the sins of his enemy and demanding his remembrance as a royal personage.

The tension between the father's conception of death and the sons' has to do not only with their backgrounds, but with the genres and influences that contextualize their memorialization practices.¹⁹ While the older Belarius was raised at court and operates as a wise scholar who retreated from an atmosphere of corruption, his sons are aligned with the pursuits and rhetoric of the wilderness,

¹⁸ Neill 5.

¹⁹ Dubrow, *Shakespeare and Domestic Loss* 136–7.

delivering pastoral flower catalogues or yearning to show their strength in combat. When these multiple generic and experience-based perspectives meet in dialogue, the result is a background against which the corpses of Fidele and Cloten can signify in multiple ways. From the brothers' perspective, for example, Cloten's body is dust; from their father's, it is the earthly remnant of a prince. Similarly, from one brother's perspective, Fidele's features are like the "primrose" and "harebell," but the other brother disdains this pastoral language, calling for a "serious" memorialization practice that isn't feminine. In light of these multiple perspectives, the identity of each corpse becomes inflected and re-inflected, because of the differences between old and young observers, courtly and pastoral languages, and practices of reverence and/or mourning.

This multilayering of perspectives is especially apparent when the brothers speak their dirge over Fidele's body:

Fear no more the heat o'th' sun

.....
Golden lads and girls all must,
As chimney-sweepers, come to dust

.....
Care no more to clothe and eat,
To thee the reed is as the oak

.....
Quiet consummation have,
And renowned be thy grave. (4.2.259, 263–4, 267–8, 281–2)

In this dirge—a statement of the brothers' philosophy about death—all careers and earthly statuses seem to be foreclosed for the corpse: both "golden lads" and "chimney-sweepers" disintegrate into dust, and even the possibility for self-fashioning through diet or clothing has fled. Curiously, though, just when the corpse's physical identity has vanished, the brothers hold out the possibility of "renown" for the grave, indicating, according to the *OED*, that it could be "known or talked about by many people." This sentiment shows that the brothers uphold an aspect of their father's philosophy: their goal for Fidele is an ongoing, socially inflected remembrance on earth, even as the material substance of his body loses its particularity. At the intersection of the brothers' and father's points of view, then, lies the possibility of social remembrance for the dead based on public "renown" for their memorials, thereby hinting at the potential endurance of a form of identity after death, through social means.

Identifying a Beheaded Corpse

At this juncture, Belarius returns with the beheaded body of Cloten. Clearly, as a material entity, Cloten's corpse participates in the trend toward disintegration described in the dirge—like the other bodies, it will "come to dust." At the same time, because Cloten's body arrives on stage after the dirge is finished, it misses

the blessing of "renown" that the brothers bestow on Fidele's grave. This missed blessing foreshadows two future "misidentifications" of the corpse. First, in the remainder of the scene, the drugged Fidele will wake up and diagnose the corpse as Posthumus' body. Afterward, though, she identifies him to a curious Roman officer as "Richard du Champ." What do these (mis)identifications say about the process of memorialization for the corpse, and what does the process say about the nature of acting?

Up until this point, the identities of non-responsive characters have not seemed to comment explicitly on actors or acting. Instead, they have shown how multiple, overlapping points of view can constitute a social network, within which corpses or sleepers can signify in more developed ways. Now, because of the possibility that the same actor could play both Posthumus and Cloten,²⁰ a new angle emerges to link ideas of identity, acting, and the cipher-like nature of the non-responsive body. This angle is emphasized by Innogen's blazon of the corpse, when she wakes up next to it in the tomb:

A headless man? The garments of Posthumus?
I know the shape of 's leg: this is his hand,
His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,
The brawns of Hercules; but his Jovial face—
Murder in heaven! How? 'Tis gone. (4.2.310–14)

This blazon, which leads to Innogen's identification of the corpse as Posthumus', is grounded in the absolute truth. A "headless man" really *is* wearing "the garments of Posthumus": Cloten appropriated them and put them on before he died.²¹ Beyond that, however, the garments are associated with a specific actor, and that actor's body is aligned with both Posthumus and Cloten. Under these circumstances, it follows that Cloten's leg, hand, foot, thigh, and "brawns" are, in fact, identical to Posthumus', not through any superficial resemblance, but because the shape of the same actor underlies both characters.²² Therefore, from a pedantic standpoint, Innogen's identification of the body is correct: it belongs to Posthumus as much as it belongs to Cloten, and the corpse is her husband as much as it is the prince.

The problem with this theory, however, is the headlessness of the corpse. Clearly, the actor playing Posthumus has not been beheaded in order to make a convincing dead man, and the "body" Innogen blazons has been substituted for the living body of the actor. In other words, a prop or a man with his head somehow hidden has been placed onto the stage to act as Cloten's corpse; a cipher has replaced the original actor, and Innogen's blazon endows that cipher with identity, even as she attempts to discern what signification it might carry. This process (a version

²⁰ Lewis 354.

²¹ Paula Colaiacomo, "Other from the Body: Sartorial Metatheatre in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*," *Identity, Otherness, and Empire in Shakespeare's Rome*, ed. Maria Del Sapio Garbero (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009) e.g. 70.

²² For more on the similarities between Posthumus and Cloten, see Hunt 416.

of the process used to characterize Posthumus in Act 1, scene 1) is the strategy by which actors take on an identity within the context of the play's social framework. Crucially, it's also the same process by which representations of historical figures can be seen and interpreted by playgoers, allowing memorialization to take place on the stage. In these ways, although they aren't equivalent, the cipher, the actor, and the historical figure of "an ancient prince" can be mapped onto each other and even substituted interchangeably, because the listing/blazoning/describing processes that socially constitute their identities work in the same way for all three.

As a process of memorialization, though, this blazon is thin and, in the opinion of many critics, unconvincing. For Bettina Boecker, the "classical allusions" seem to downplay Innogen's suffering; Paula Colaiacomo finds the scene "embarrassing," and Cynthia Lewis thinks that "Imogen is portrayed as a buffoon."²³ There are a number of reasons why this scene could lead to uneasy comedy, and two of them comment directly on earlier arguments. First, Innogen blazons the corpse on her own: she has no dialogue with other characters to expand the possibility of the corpse's signification. Because of this, when her characterizations of "Mercurial" feet and "Martial" thighs create a hodgepodge portrait of a godlike man, no other characters can reinfect these conclusions. Without the social dialogue that could generate greater specificity and detail, Innogen's one-sided description is grimly comic. Second, the dirge sung over Fidele's body has broached the possibility of a loss of identity in death, and Innogen's blazon provides an uneasy example of this idea. If terms like "Mercurial" are read as signifiers so vague as to be almost meaningless, then death cancels out the prospect of idiosyncrasies, making wives unable to recognize their husbands' bodies. Against this frightening possibility, grim humor stands as a potential recourse: rather than confront Innogen's ghastly mistake, an audience could choose to laugh, or, by the same token, to wonder if the bodies have been switched, mistrusting the evidence of their own eyes.²⁴ At stake during Innogen's identification of Cloten's corpse, then, is the potential for humans to recognize their own loved ones after death, and it might be easier to deflect the question than to contemplate its full meaning, particularly in a culture that believes in "the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting."

Family Ghosts and Jupiter Describe the Sleeping Posthumus

Later in the play, though, the idea of recognition across the boundary of death is directly confronted. In Act 5, scene 5, Posthumus' deceased family members arrive as ghosts, petitioning Jove to give their doomed relative another chance at life. As Posthumus sleeps in a chair on the stage, his body is physically surrounded by the figures of his brothers and parents. Posthumus' father, Sicilius, begins by

²³ Boecker; Colaiacomo 73; Lewis 353.

²⁴ On the Freudian reading of laughter as a reaction to death, see Robert Watson, *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1999) 12.

asking a crucial question: "Hath my poor boy done aught but well, / whose face I never saw?" (5.5.129–30). Sicilius, in other words, can't identify his son based on physical traits or characteristics, and his mother, who died in childbirth, is in a similar position. Still, they instantly begin to intercede on Posthumus' behalf, hinting that ghosts may have the ability to discern the innate identities of non-responsive living bodies in a way that mortals simply can't access or understand. This possibility gains strength when Posthumus' brothers' ghosts fail to comment on any aspect of his physical appearance, personality, or deeds—even though they may have known Posthumus when their parents did not. Instead, all four family ghosts bypass the moment of recognition, simply taking it on faith that the sleeping figure in the chair is their relative and that his character is holistically positive. In making this assumption, they fall back on generalizing language about his merits, echoing the language in the opening scene: "He deserved the praise o'th' world / as great Sicilius' heir" (5.5.144–5), for example, and, "Where was he / That could stand up his parallel ... in eye of Innogen, that best / Could deem his dignity?" (147–51). While they bypass physical description and identifying marks, then, the ghosts do praise Posthumus as a figure glorified by his social context: as a son and lover, he ought to be perceived with respect, in good faith, as a non-partitioned individual whose weaknesses have been elided by those who love him.

Even as the ghosts re-entrench the standard of good-faith memorialization, they also hold out the tantalizing possibility of a specific, idiosyncratic identity for the dead. As figures who are aware of their own past, who can allude to important events in their earthly lives, and who arrive to defend the interests of their living relative, the ghosts prove that particularized identities exist within the play's supernatural realm. While there may be an essentialized, spirit-based component to these metaphysical identities, there's almost certainly a socially-inscribed one as well: family relationships still inflect the ghosts' self-identifications, as well as the way that they characterize the non-responsive Posthumus. In this way, the ghosts' dialogue provides a supernatural counterpart to the earthly memorialization practices that the play has depicted. While sleepers and corpses have to be reinscribed with identity in a social manner by earthbound human beings, a new social context may be waiting for their spirits, and this context may create new identities for them—potentially, by reinstating family relationships that were never actualized in a mortal setting. Even though this supernatural realm can't be accessed by living, waking human beings, the masque holds out the possibility of a social recontextualization for the spirits of the non-responsive, offering hope that particularity after death may not be impossible.

Finally, Jupiter's arrival provides the last new perspective on Posthumus' life, forging a divine link between the ghosts' petition and the events on earth. With this final character entry, the range of observers in the play is complete: non-responsive bodies have been watched by other characters, ghost-characters, audience members, and divine characters, and each group creates a new layer of meaning for the body at issue. For Posthumus, Jupiter's perspective is particularly efficacious. After hearing the ghosts' petition, the deity reestablishes Posthumus'

earthly status: "Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift ... He shall be lord of Lady Innogen, / And happier much by his affliction made" (5.5.197–202). To consolidate this socially-reinscribed identity, the god gives the ghost family a tablet to pass along to their son, containing a prophecy about his own fortune (among other topics): "Posthumus [shall] end his miseries" (5.5.236). After reading the tablet, Posthumus calls its language nonsensical, but also embraces it: "Be what it is, / The action of my life is like it" (5.3.241–2). Through the overlapping observations of Jupiter and family ghosts, then, a rehabilitational description of Posthumus has filtered from the supernatural world into the "real" world of the staged play, linking the two perspectives and, crucially, reworking Posthumus' own perception of his life.

By embracing the cryptic identity reflected in the tablet, Posthumus does not necessarily enable the resolution of the plot, or even manage to identify Innogen properly when he sees her in disguise. Instead, he opens himself to a process of learning about identity through social dialogue. After dismissing Innogen as a page and striking her when she tries to speak, Posthumus hears a fruitful mixture of general and specific descriptors of her as she regains consciousness: her father identifies her "tune," or way of speaking, and other characters discuss specific events that she recently experienced. While these descriptions do not constitute a blazon, they act as a social dialogue that reframes her unconscious body, so that Posthumus can reconceptualize it. After doing so, Posthumus is finally able to embrace his wife, saying, "Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die" (5.4.263–4). By accepting the process of identity reinscription through social dialogue in this final scene, Posthumus refigures the way that he learns about other characters, and successfully repositions himself within the social network of Britain.

As a play about the construction of identity, then, *Cymbeline* uses social dialogue to promulgate a good-faith ideal of memorialization, which is imbricated with both the idea of acting and the idea of perspectival observation. For a non-responsive body—whether it belongs to Cloten, Innogen, Innogen-as-Fidele, or Posthumus—the socially inflected process of description underpins the possibility of a particularized identity, allowing "renown" and respect to characterize its remembrance in the world. While the process of identifying a non-responsive body can result in seeming miscategorizations, the imbrication of multiple gazes can actually beget a multifaceted portrait of a character, whose memorialization is stabilized within layers of socially inflected observation.

Chapter 15 Blazons of Desire and War in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

Cora Fox

... O, that her hand,
In whose comparison all whites are ink
Writing their own reproach ...
(*Troilus and Cressida*, 1.1.52–4)¹

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Shakespeare famously highlights the way the social economies of heroic war depend upon the traffic in women.² Deflating the heroic values inherited from classical literature and of which the *Iliad* is an exemplar, the romance tradition as epitomized by Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, and possibly contemporary productions of plays on this subject, *Troilus and Cressida* parodies the matter of Troy, the foundational story of Western literary culture. Its focus, in fact, on questions of both literary value and cultural systems of meaning has been brilliantly elucidated from various Marxist perspectives. The play exploits its literariness to demystify fundamental ideological and social systems, and as Hugh Grady argues, to witness the reification of normative social relationships.³ It has also been read by Paul Yachnin as a piece of Shakespeare's "populuxe" theater that trades in luxurious or high-brow cultural products for a popular audience.⁴

¹ William Shakespeare, *Troilus and Cressida*, *The Norton Shakespeare*, 2nd ed., gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 2008). All further references will be indicated parenthetically within the body of the essay.

² See, for example, Linda Charnes, "'So Unsecret to Ourselves': Notorious Identity and the Material Subject in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989): 413–30. Readings of the circulations of male homosocial desire in the play are based on Gayle Rubin's "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex," *Toward an Anthropology of Women*, ed. Rayna Reiter (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1975) 157–210, and the theoretical models of homosociality outlined by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick in *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia UP, 1995). On the circulations of masculine desire in the play, see also René Girard, "The Politics of Desire in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartmann (New York: Methuen, 1985) 188–209.

³ Hugh Grady, *Shakespeare's Universal Wolf: Studies in Early Modern Reification* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1996).

⁴ Paul Yachnin, "'The Perfection of Ten': Populuxe Art and Artisanal Value in *Troilus and Cressida*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 56 (2005): 306–27.