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**Moving Like a Ghost:**  
**Tarquin's Specter and Agentive Objects**  
**in *The Rape of Lucrece, Julius Caesar, and Macbeth***

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It was a dark and stormy night. A man in robes wandered along a drafty corridor, distracted by the bloody business at hand. He was planning to commit a grievous wrong against a friend and kinsman, but his heart and mind were at odds. The winds howled outside the walls. Sudden light illuminated his passage.

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This is a ghost story. And, like all ghost stories, it strikes us as immediately familiar. As Shakespeare's heirs, we know the story well, but from where? Is that Macbeth we see before us, his hand on Duncan's door? Or do we spy on Brutus, reading a cryptic message in his balmy Mediterranean orchard? 'Speak, strike, redress.' The lightning suddenly becomes a meteor shower raining down on Rome. Perhaps we still misread—we see not Macbeth, nor Brutus, but Tarquin, the last Roman prince, stealing into Collatine's room to rape his wife. The light dims to a candle flame—but only for a moment, until it falls prey to a cold tongue of midnight air.

The dark and stormy night rages in Scotland and in Rome; the robed figure is indeed Macbeth, but also Brutus. Tarquin is there, too, in all three places: at Inverness and in Brutus' orchard, in Collatine's house as an actor but also a specter, ghosted from history, earlier plays, and our memories. Tarquin's specter haunts Shakespearean tragedy, always accompanied by a series of objects acting in uncanny ways;<sup>1</sup> in a study of his appearances, the desire to glean information about the human actors from the supporting roles played by the (supposedly) inanimate world tugs insistently. In such a reading, the tempests raging out-of-doors provide the backdrop for Tarquin's (Brutus', Macbeth's) journeys. The storms without echo the storms within, the macrocosm mirrors the microcosm, and so on. Cultural theorist Julian Yates observes that, "the object [is] useful to us only insofar as it offers news of ourselves, news that we marshal to tell our own story" (5). For four centuries, we have read this way, dissecting Shakespeare's tragic protagonists backwards, opening first their souls, then their minds, and, finally, their

bodies to our critical gaze. For four centuries, we have fed this anthropocentric myth of history, rendered nature a mute witness to our achievements, our downfalls, our comedies, our tragedies. “We have lost the world,” sighs Michel Serres, “we’ve transformed things into fetishes or commodities, the stakes of our stratagems” (29). We have perpetuated the fiction of an environment, which, in Serres’ words, “assumes that we humans are at the center of a system of nature” (33). More recent scholarship implores us to rethink the reading and writing of history and explore alternative histories, especially the histories of nature, of objects, of things.

Unlike proponents of material culture studies who reverse the focus from humans to things, the sociologist Bruno Latour urges us to create a ‘Parliament of Things’ wherein we place objects and actors from the natural world at the center of discourse. From this vantage point, we “see things from the point of view of the *known*, not the knowing” (qtd. in Yates xviii). In other words, according to Yates, our aim could be “to retell our stories and reimagine our communities as collectives of human and nonhuman actors” (8). Here, I intend to take up Yates’ challenge and focus on the winds that blow during these blustery nights, to put the ‘dark and stormy’ on the dissection table and see how, when we move nature to the center and place us at the periphery, we can figure ‘collective agency’ in Shakespearean drama (Shohet 101).<sup>2</sup> Such an enterprise necessitates acknowledgment of the uncanny nature of agentive objects, for objects moving of their own accord pose a threat to the humans who work so diligently to master them. When told by a human subject, the story of the object, according to Yates, “makes for a melancholy tale—a ghost story perhaps, in which the object occasionally assumes the guise of a subject in order to wreak its own, invariably tragic, form of revenge” (7). In Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*, *Julius Caesar*, and *Macbeth*, nature presents such a compelling case for individuated attention that it cannot be ignored. In these texts, as nowhere else in Shakespeare’s work, nature actively resists the silence that has so long been imposed on it by humankind.<sup>3</sup> I wish here to examine the ways in which agentive objects attempt to speak to us, and for us, in *Lucrece*, *Caesar*, and *Macbeth*, and to listen to their messages as the tragic figures in each story fail to do.

*The Rape of Lucrece* tells the story of Tarquin, the son of Tarquinius Superbus, the last king of Rome. The prince hears his friend Collatine praising his wife Lucrece’s beauty and chastity, upon which he leaves his fellow soldiers and begs hospitality of the gracious Lucrece. That night, Tarquin makes his way to Lucrece’s bedchamber, pausing as he walks to reflect on the evil that he hopes to commit. After a brief struggle between his morals and his biology,

Tarquin decides that “desire [his] pilot is, beauty [his] prize” (279).<sup>4</sup> Although able to convince himself that his passions should direct his actions, Tarquin encounters a series of uncanny objects that prevent his passage through Lucrece’s darkened hallway. Things come to life in Lucrece’s house, clearly intending to prevent her rape. As Tarquin eases open the door to her chamber, the locks creak loudly [“But as they open they all rate his ill” (304)] and “the threshold grates the door to have him heard” (306). The weasels that patrol the castle in search of rodents “shriek to see [Tarquin] there” (307) and a breeze forces its way inside to put out Tarquin’s light: “Through little vents and crannies of the place / The wind wars with his torch to make him stay, / And blows the smoke of it into his face, / Extinguishing his conduct in this case” (310-13). The wind not only performs a deliberate action here but does so with a specific purpose: thwarting Tarquin’s entry into Lucrece’s room.

Thus, the natural world becomes not only agentive but also intentive. Immediately after the wind extinguishes Tarquin’s torch, Lucrece’s sewing glove proffers a new, more violent warning: “the needle his finger pricks” (319). The syntax privileges the needle as the sentence’s actor: Tarquin is not passively wounded by a needle; a *needle* pricks *Tarquin*.<sup>5</sup> Further, the needle’s agency joins not just intention but also vocal expression, as it reports: “This glove to wanton tricks / Is not inured. Return again in haste. / Thou seest our mistress’ ornaments are chaste” (320-22). A speaking needle presents us with an eerily animated object, one that chooses to communicate with the living. Natural and non-natural things might have their own language (locks creak, doors stick, weasels shriek), but this needle also boasts fluency in ours. Its message is clear enough, but Tarquin, given ample opportunity to heed the needle’s (locks’/weasels’/floor’s/wind’s) advice, misreads it. Instead, “he in the worst sense consters their denial. / The doors, the wind, the glove that did delay him / He takes for accidental things of trial” (424-26). Moreover, Tarquin decides, their ounce of prevention only increases his lust for Lucrece, “like little frosts that sometime threat the spring / To add a more rejoicing to the prime” (431-32). The tragedy stems from Tarquin’s inability to read the signs; like all humans who uphold Yates’ “fiction of phenomenologically distinct categories [which] enable our use of the world,” he silences by inattention the voice of nature, rendering it a mute witness to his crime.

Because of his inability to figure history collectively with nature, Tarquin thinks of himself and Lucrece in explicitly natural terms, as if to say that if nature refuses to be complicit in his crime, he will replace things with humans. By overlaying his actions on those of the

natural world, he sanctions them as somehow 'natural'. His "will backed with resolution" (352), Tarquin enters Lucrece's bedchamber and looks upon "the dove sleep[ing] fast that this night-owl will catch" (360). In the ensuing stanzas, Lucrece sustains comparisons to the sun, the moon, a host of different flowers, grass, and 'a new-killed bird' (457); Tarquin, on the other hand, acts like a 'grim lion' (421), a falcon, a cockatrice and a griffin. Predictably, Tarquin always emerges as a predator, with Lucrece posing alternately as his prey and as the landscape against which his carnivores roam.

In attempting to replace nature with himself and Lucrece, Tarquin perverts the natural order, rendering nature mute once again, and "transforms the world into an object of use" (Yates 2). The agentive objects do indeed become tragic figures, then, as Yates suggests, their intended vengeance thwarted and their agency disabled. The objects will have their day, however; they will seek their revenge in other gloomy hallways, on other dark and stormy nights. And they will employ the ghost of Tarquin, now long dead, for their spectral purposes. They will haunt the disjointed time and transform Tarquin into an object of use.

Tarquin-as-object makes his first appearance in *Titus Andronicus*, printed in 1594, the same year as *The Rape of Lucrece*. Here, Tarquin figures merely as a historical precedent, contributing to what Katharine Eisaman Maus in the *Norton Shakespeare* calls Shakespeare's "Rome effect" (372). Titus and Lucius invoke Tarquin specifically because of his Romanness, as a literary exemplar of abuses of power. *Titus* takes place in a crumbling empire, just before Rome falls to the Visigoths, so Shakespeare draws on a figure that represents a disintegrating Rome: Tarquin's rape of Lucrece precipitated his father's deposal and the establishment of the Republic. Tarquin the Proud was hated by his people and a notorious tyrant, and his name, not his son's, first appears in *Titus*. As Lucius prepares to leave Rome to gather forces against Saturninus, he channels his namesake, Lucius Junius Brutus, the man who led the rebel factions against the Tarquins. "If Lucius live," he vows, "he will requite your wrongs / And make proud Saturnine and his empress / Beg at the gates like Tarquin and his queen" (295-97).

Shortly thereafter, the violated Lavinia reports her rape to the Andronicii, but unlike her similarly mutilated precedent, Philomel, she cannot weave her sad tale into a tapestry.<sup>6</sup> Her father exhorts her to find a way to name her accuser: "[Say] what Roman lord it was durst do the deed. / Or slunk not Saturnine, as Tarquin erst, / That left the camp to sin in Lucrece' bed?" (61-63). Titus compares Saturninus to both Tarquins, father and son, implying that Saturninus has

sinned against Rome as both a tyrant and a rapist and that his actions will dismantle the Empire. The figures of Tarquin the Proud and Tarquin the prince thus collapse into a single emblematic figure in their transfer to Shakespeare's fictional emperor. Tarquin becomes in *Titus Andronicus* a thing, a metaphor, a specter to be invoked by future regicides.

Significantly, the Tarquin-thing that stands for both tyranny and sexual/ized violence visits Shakespeare's tragic heroes alongside the playwright's three most compelling examples of agentive objects.<sup>7</sup> First, *The Rape of Lucrece* involves Tarquin as a human actor and (because it is always already ghosted for a twenty-first century reader) invokes the conflated Tarquin-thing as symbol. Second, he surfaces in *Julius Caesar* when Brutus struggles with the decision to join the conspiracy against Caesar; and third, he turns up in *Macbeth*, when the thane slaughters Duncan on his way to claim the Scottish throne.

Two of the most striking images in *Julius Caesar* both contain agentive objects: the storm that menaces the conspirators and Caesar's assassination. In the first instance, things (comets, lions, winds) become active, *actors*; in the second, a person (Caesar) becomes a thing, a non-actor ('thou bleeding piece of earth'). Both moments script the complex interactions between humans and things and demonstrate a bi-directional flow of labor. Gail Kern Paster discusses the early modern body as a semi-permeable container, open to and interacting with the elements. She quotes Shigehisa Kuriyama as writing, "The history of the body is ultimately a history of ways of inhabiting the world" (Paster 116). From our seat at the table in the 'Parliament of Things', we might say rather that the history of the world is ultimately a history of ways of hosting the body. For Serres, this parasitism "follows the simple arrow of a flow moving in one direction but not the other, in the exclusive interest of the parasite" (36). While humans have certainly acted as parasites for most of our history, we have only constructed this history of uni-directional transfer. As Yates would have it, history is most honestly figured as a "complex division of labor among humans and nonhumans" (8), a recovery that calls for the establishment of an "ethics of reciprocation" (xviii).

Act 1, scene 3 of *Caesar* depicts a fearsome tempest afflicting Rome, when "all the sway of the earth / Shakes like a thing infirm" (3-4). Casca trembles under a sky 'dropping fire' and tells of a man whose hands were engulfed in flames but unharmed. During the day, Casca had seen owls ('the bird of night') in the market and lions walking through the Capitol. "Let not men say / 'These are their reasons,'" he says to Cicero, "'they are natural,' / For I believe they are

portentious things / Unto the climate that they point upon” (29-32). Cicero replies that Casca may be making too much of the events, however strange. He warns, “Men may construe things after their fashion, / Clean from the purpose of the things themselves” (34-35). Although Cicero tries to be skeptical, his pronouncement reveals nature’s prior intentions.<sup>8</sup>

Brutus notices the ‘strange impatience of the heavens’ as well; as he puzzles out the message sent by Cassius—‘Speak, strike, redress’—he acknowledges that the luminosity and frequency of the falling meteors make lamps unnecessary: “The exhalations whizzing in the air / Give so much light that I may read by them” (2.1.44-45). Notably, Brutus refers to the meteor shower as ‘exhalations,’ as though the sky breathes fire upon the earth. His description indicates the sky’s intent and attributes its actions to functions of the human body. Like Tarquin, however, Brutus dismisses this powerful portent, preferring to liken his observations to a fantasy: “Between the acting of a dreadful thing / And the first motion, all the interim is / Like a phantasma or a hideous dream” (63-65). Unfortunately for the insomniac Brutus, his life can neither be nor contain such dreams.

In Act 2, another bout of sleeplessness grips Brutus. He complains of the “watchful cares” that “interpose themselves / Betwixt my eyes and night” (2.1.98-99), which are his deliberations on the assassination of Caesar. Brutus feels disturbed by his own intentions because, as he admits, he “know[s] no personal cause to spurn at him” (2.1.11). He fears that Caesar will become ambitious, although he has exhibited no sign of tyranny: “And to speak truth of Caesar, / I have not known when his affections swayed / More than his reason” (2.1.19-21). Historical precedent and that old trickster, rumor, teach Brutus that men may change upon becoming great: “So Caesar may. / Then lest he may, prevent” (2.1.27-28). Brutus convinces himself of Caesar’s despotic potential while all evidence points to the contrary. “Therefore,” he says, “think him as a serpent’s egg, / Which, hatched, would as his kind grow mischievous, / And kill him in the shell” (2.1.32-34). Brutus deliberately misreads Caesar’s character and intentions, revealing his ambition and his own peculiar brand of tyranny—that he is willing to emphasize faults a man does not possess in order to rationalize his execution.

Just after this, Brutus’ servant Lucius turns over to him a letter that he discovered under the window of Brutus’ private chamber. He reads the note, sent by Cassius, in the meteor-light; it reads, “Brutus, thou sleep’st. Awake, and see thyself. / Shall Rome, et cetera? Speak, strike, redress” (46-47). Into this cryptic and abbreviated message, Brutus must insert his own meaning.

To do this, he ‘pieces out’ that all of Rome calls him to assassinate Caesar, thus formulating his private wishes as duties done in service to the Republic. “Shall Rome, et cetera?” becomes “Shall Rome stand under one man’s awe?” (2.1.52). Clearly, this reflects Brutus’ grievance, not Rome’s. “Am I entreated / To speak and strike? O Rome, I make thee promise, / If the redress will follow, thou receivest / Thy full petition at the hand of Brutus” (2.1.55-58). He imagines his personal complaint to be a national protest and his murderous desires to be an exhortation from the people. He has an inborn duty to rid Rome of tyrants, just as his “ancestors did from the streets of Rome / The Tarquin drive when he was called a king” (2.1.53-54).

Enter Tarquin, just at the moment of fatal misreading. In trying to convince himself of an imagined duty, Brutus calls upon Tarquin for assistance. No Roman could argue against the destruction of the Tarquin dynasty, no Roman could fault Brutus for bringing down the Caesar-turned-Tarquin. Thus, Brutus employs Tarquin as the emblem of tyranny and oppression, solidifying the need for Caesar’s assassination. It is in his blood to do this thing; it haunts him to the point of not sleeping; it has inspired in him “the nature of an insurrection” (2.1.69). Brutus cannot see what Tarquin actually represents here—Brutus’ cold premeditation, his baseless accusations, and his suspect reading skills. As Casca desperately tries to explain to Cassius, the world wars with the conspirators; the heavens are raining fire, owls are hooting at noon, and lions are whelping in the streets—all because of Brutus’ and Cassius’ unnatural plans. The storm should warn to them to cease their plotting and avoid perverting the natural order, but both Brutus and Cassius fail to heed the warning signs. Cassius bares his breast to the lightning and Brutus simply seems grateful for the extra light by which he (mis)reads. The comparison of Caesar to Tarquin rings so obviously false that we cannot help but understand it as Brutus’ inability to see the tragedy implicit in his plans.

The agentive and intensitive natural world attempts to rescue the conspirators from their destruction, but Brutus and Cassius turn their heads. Interestingly, just as Tarquin conscripts nature to silence and imposes his subjectivity onto the landscape, Brutus and Cassius immediately render Caesar an object. They must think of him as inanimate in order to rationalize the assassination, for if they were to admit to his subjectivity, they would have to recognize his humanity and goodness. Therefore, we hear Brutus describing Caesar as a piece of meat: “Let’s carve him as a dish fit for the gods, / Not hew him as a carcass fit for hounds” (2.1.473-74). Brutus’ ideal murder does not come to pass, as the conspirators stab Caesar many more times

than necessary and then paint their arms with his blood. There is no holy enterprise, but a beastly slaughter. Even Mark Antony cannot for long remember that the corpse on the Senate floor used to be Caesar; when he enters to address him, he says, “O mighty Caesar! Dost thou lie so low?” (2.1.149), but shortly afterwards can muster only, “thou bleeding piece of earth” (3.1.257). He sees the body as “the ruins of the noblest man / That ever lived in the tide of times” (3.1.259-60). Strangely, as Antony addresses Caesar’s corpse, unable to afford it subjectivity, he also imagines that the corpse addresses him. Caesar’s wounds, he says, “like dumb mouths do ope their ruby lips / To beg the voice and utterance of my tongue” (3.1.263-64). Caesar has become a thing, a “bleeding piece of earth,” but this thing-that-was-Caesar acquires its own agency and intent, however silent.<sup>9</sup> *Julius Caesar* enacts quite clearly the constant and multi-directional metamorphoses undergone by people and things and people-become-things in a history constructed by collective agency.

Shakespeare recycles the ‘dark and stormy night’ trope for *Macbeth*, where nature (and its opposite) remains a central metaphor. From the very first scene of the play, we know that nature and time are out of joint; the weird sisters tell us that “fair is foul and foul is fair” and describe the “foggy” and “filthy” air (1.1.10-11). Later, in Act II, Banquo indicates that the sky lacks visible stars: “There’s husbandry in heaven,” he says; “their candles are all out” (2.1.4-5). He wonders if the mysterious darkness holds greater portents, as he, like Brutus, suffers from troubled sleep. The night Macbeth kills Duncan, people notice great perturbations in nature. A conversation between an old man and Ross reveals the extent to which the natural order has been reversed. Night’s blackness obliterates the daylight, owls eat hawks, and Duncan’s horses turn on one another and become cannibals. Ross denotes these changes as “unnatural, / Even like the deed that’s done” (2.4.10-11). His words indicate that the macrocosm indeed reflects the microcosm, but Ross has not had a singular experience of the storm. Lennox, for example, narrates his contrasting observations to Macbeth:

The night has been unruly. Where we lay  
Our chimneys were blown down, and, as they say,  
Lamentings heard i’ th’ air, strange screams of death,  
And prophesying with accents terrible  
Of dire combustion and confused events  
New-hatched to th’ woeful time. The obscure bird

Clamoured the livelong night. Some say the earth  
Was feverous and did shake. (2.3.50-57)

Macbeth nonchalantly agrees: “‘Twas a rough night” (2.3.57). The unnatural events reported by Ross and the old man speak to disorder in the universe, certainly, but Lennox attributes agency to nature—voices in the air scream and make prophesies. Nature fights to regain its voice, to rebel against the silence imposed upon it by man, in the form of screeching winds and a Babel-like confusion of dialects.

As in *Lucrece* and *Caesar*, nature in *Macbeth* seems to choose as its moment for vengeance a major political upheaval. Perhaps in these times, nature more easily acquires agency because the world is in disarray, the time is out of joint. If this is so, then agentive objects may properly be termed specters, according to Derrida’s formulations.<sup>10</sup> They appear when the time is out of joint, they issue an injunction to set the time right, and they are often the impetus for or furtherance of a conspiracy.<sup>11</sup> The animals and inanimate actors in *Lucrece*, the meteor showers in *Caesar*, and the prophesying wind in *Macbeth* all seem bent on issuing not so much an injunction as a warning to the offending person. As specters, they necessarily remain silent, but appropriate the voice of a character who speaks in the dominant language of the court—in *Lucrece*, the narrator; in *Caesar*, Casca; and in *Macbeth*, Lennox.

An unnatural specter joins *Macbeth* as well, in addition to the ‘natural’ (though eerie) prescient winds and ‘supernatural’ weird sisters. In 2.1, Macbeth encounters a ghostly object in the passageway before Duncan’s bedchamber. “Is this a dagger which I see before me, / The handle toward my hand?” Macbeth asks rhetorically. “Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible / To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but / A dagger of the mind, a false creation / Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain?” (2.1.33-34; 36-39). He correctly assumes that the dagger represents a projection of his inner thoughts and intentions, but things go awry when the dagger refuses to disappear. “I see thee still,” he says, “And on thy blade and dudgeon gouts of blood, / Which was not so before” (45-47). Although Macbeth guesses the dagger’s internal origins, he misses its point. He assumes it intends to provide moral support: “Thou marshall’st me the way that I was going, / And such an instrument I was to use” (42-43). If his assumptions are correct and the dagger means to build up his courage, why does it douse itself in blood and gore? It seems more plausible that the dagger appears as a warning; it is, indeed, “the bloody business which informs / Thus to [Macbeth’s] eyes,” but it intends to prevent rather than instigate. Like Tarquin before

him, who chose to read the squeaky locks, screeching weasels, blustery winds, and pricking needles as bolsterers of passion, Macbeth chooses to read the dagger as confirmation of his plan, just when his courage was beginning to falter. Like Brutus, who filled in the blanks of a mysterious message with the encouragement he needed to find there, Macbeth reads the blood and gore on the knife blade as a portent of things to come, rather than as a scare tactic. His tragedy, then, replays Tarquin's and Brutus'.

If *Macbeth* is truly a tragedy of misreading, complete with agentive objects, we would expect to see Tarquin's name mentioned, to see his specter lurking behind the visor, always already watching us and waiting for his cue. We would not be disappointed. Macbeth invokes Tarquin, not simply as a historical precedent for tyrannicide, but also as an emblem of stealth and the successful commission of a hideous deed. He names himself 'withered murder' and creeps toward Duncan's room with a familiar name on his lips: "With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design / Moves like a ghost" (2.1.55-56). Macbeth finds, unfortunately, a kindred spirit in Tarquin. When Brutus invoked Tarquin, he did so to rationalize the deposal of a good ruler in the event that he might turn against the Roman people, even though he had no evidence that it would happen. Similarly, Macbeth knows too well Duncan's generosity and peacefulness: "This Duncan / Hath borne his faculties so meek, hath been / So clear in his great office, that his virtues / Will plead like angels, trumpet-tongued against / The deep damnation of his taking-off" (1.7.16-20). Like Tarquin, Macbeth acknowledges the consequences of his evil, but chooses to proceed regardless, using Tarquin as a role model rather than a cautionary tale.

Significantly, Macbeth is denied sleep after the murder of Duncan, for he believes he has murdered sleep itself—"innocent sleep, / Sleep that knits up the ravelled sleeve of care" (2.2.34-35). He claims that he heard a ghostly voice tell him that "Glamis hath murdered sleep, and therefore Cawdor / Shall sleep no more. Macbeth shall sleep no more" (40-41). Sleep, it seems, remains inextricably tied to spectrality, perhaps because good sleep indicates an untroubled soul, or a time that is not out of joint. Frustrated at Macbeth's refusal to frame the groomsman, Lady Macbeth chides him, saying, "The sleeping and the dead / Are but as pictures" (2.2.51-52), thus completing the transformation of Duncan from subject to object, from person to thing.

Macbeth's guilt again gets the better of him when he sees the ghost of Banquo at a feast. The ghost must exhort him to something, although if he speaks at all, his lines are not shared with the audience. Macbeth relates his message to his wife: "Blood will have blood. / Stones

have been known to move, and trees to speak, / Augurs and understood relations have / By maggot-pies and choughs and rooks brought forth / The secret'st man of blood" (3.5.121-25). Once again, specters appear to issue their injunction and accompany agentive objects—here, Macbeth's imagined talking stones. The ghost of Banquo warns Macbeth that he will exact revenge, and the weird sisters later warn him that he will die when "Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane Hill / Shall come against him" (4.1.108-09). Predictably, Macbeth refuses to heed nature's prophesy, and when he sees the trees of Birnam Wood advancing upon Dunsinane, he misreads the signs again. His tragedy ends here, when Macduff kills him and enters the stage with Macbeth's head on the tip of his sword. In becoming an object, a head, a proof, Macbeth completes the cycle of subject-object transformation that began with Tarquin.

Shakespearean tragedy repeatedly stages a complex interplay between subjects and objects, people and things, encounters which we may choose to read as threatening or productive. To accomplish the former, we read as we are accustomed to doing, from an anthropocentric perspective; to arrive at the latter, we must look to the interactions between human and nature, not simply for the ways in which one actor reflects or reveals truths about another, but for evidence of a multi-directional, osmotic flow of ideas, intents, and agency. We must not use objects as a bridge back to humanity, not see the dagger as it marshals us the way that we *were* going. Instead, we must look to the ligatures between the living and non-living worlds to reveal the silent histories. The trouble is, when we place the objects on the dissection table and open them up, more often than not, we end up revealing ourselves in them. "In the end," writes Yates, "history figures a human face, for it is the irreducible rhythms of our bodies that are its occasion" (207). The dagger did, after all, come out of Macbeth. Tarquin was a human being before he became a specter-thing. Latour's 'Parliament of Things' can never truly be a council of objects apart from human meaning, for humans invented the idea of parliament; for things to have their own parliament, they must behave like humans. But in allowing things and humans to create meaning together, we dispel the sinister implications of agentive objects and learn to reconfigure our own histories to include them.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In saying that Tarquin ‘haunts’ the tragedies, I refer to the double meaning of the word as elucidated by Ann Rosalind Jones and Peter Stallybrass in *Renaissance Clothing and the Materials of Memory*. The authors identify ‘haunting’ as both “an action that suggests familiarity and habit [and] an action that suggests profound disturbance and the shattering of habit” (260-62). Like Freud’s ‘*das Unheimliche*’, ‘haunting’ is both known and unknown, desire and terror, repetition and rift (Freud 347). Thus, Tarquin’s presence in the tragedies both resurrects a familiar (albeit unwelcome) figure from Roman history and testifies to the time’s disjointedness.

<sup>2</sup> In her examination of *Lycidas*, Lauren Shohet uses this term to describe Yates’ method of reading history.

<sup>3</sup> For a more complete discussion of the way humans have silenced nature, see Christopher Manes, “Nature and Silence” in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (London: U of Georgia P, 1996) 15-29.

<sup>4</sup> All quotes from Shakespeare’s texts are from the Norton edition, edited by Stephen Greenblatt (1997).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the ways in which Early Modern objects, perhaps agentively, distance themselves from their human creators, see Margreta de Grazia’s contribution to *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture*.

<sup>6</sup> *The Rape of Lucrece* also alludes to Philomel, who was raped by her brother-in-law, Tereus, who then imprisoned her and cut out her tongue to prevent her from revealing his crime. Instead, she wove a tapestry displaying her story and presented it to her sister, who murdered her son and fed him to Tereus. According to Ovid, all three figures metamorphosed into birds. Once, the narrator describes Lucrece as ‘lamenting Philomel’ and once she gives a bird this name.

<sup>7</sup> The equation of Tarquin with violence and rape is an important one, as all of the murders associated with Tarquin are highly sexualized: Brutus' stabbing of Caesar has obvious homoerotic overtones and Macbeth's murder of Duncan proves his virility to his wife.

<sup>8</sup> Cicero is alone in his attribution of agency and intent to the unnatural events; Casca meets up with Cassius shortly after leaving the skeptical orator. Cassius says of the storms, "Heaven hath infused them with these spirits / To make them instruments of fear and warning / Unto some monstrous state" (70-71). Cassius, however, elsewhere discredits belief in superstition, as when he famously declares to Brutus that the "fault" is not "in our stars, / But in ourselves" (I.ii.141-42). It seems likely that in the scene with Casca, Cassius employs the current weather situation in his campaign against Caesar, intending to persuade Casca to join the conspirators.

<sup>9</sup> When Antony addresses the Romans at Caesar's funeral, he discusses Caesar's wounds at great length for the crowd. In an interesting moment, he tells the story of Brutus' 'unkindest cut', when Caesar's blood followed Brutus' sword as it left his body "as rushing out of doors to be resolved / If Brutus so unkindly knocked or no" (III.ii.174). Caesar's blood, too, has its own intentions. This parallels Lucrece's suicide, when Marcus Brutus' ancestor pulls the knife from her body "and as it left the place / Her blood in poor revenge held it in chase" (*Lucrece* 1735-36).

<sup>10</sup> The idea of agentive objects as specters merits consideration; for more, see Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx*, trans. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Routledge, 1994).

<sup>11</sup> Philippa Berry gives an illuminating analysis of the links between the destruction of linear time and the usurpation of male authority in *Shakespeare's Feminine Endings* (London: Routledge, 1999) 102-134.

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