Numinous or Dead?
Real Presence, Iconoclasm, and
Pygmalion's Image in Shakespeare

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I am a philologist and very much like to believe in the Neo-Platonic conception of the universe as a vast symphony of correspondences between macrocosm and microcosm, not least when I have to deal with a cultural universe. This idea of the universe as a symphonic whole, I realize, might seem to go directly against the grain of today's conference, whose topic is "multilingualism in medieval and early modern England."[1] In fact, it does not. A philologist could not even begin to work if she did not believe that a single word could be a signifier of its own historicity and its own historical contexts, that a single word could contain within itself not just one monumental history but many histories. For a philologist, culture is always multilingual and thus multicultural. Culture is culture war. In what

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[1] This paper was presented, in a slightly different form, at the MEMESAK International Conference held in Seoul, South Korea, on 2 November 2013.

follows, I offer what I conceive to be a preliminary study to a fuller and longer discussion on early modern culture wars in Shakespeare's works that I have been preparing for a different occasion. In this study, I will talk about the question of whether matter can contain the real presence of divinity, a question around which particularly fierce culture wars were waged between Protestant reformers and the defenders of the Roman Catholic Church in the English Reformation and the periods following it. I will treat the question of Real Presence as a *topos*, as a cultural idiom, focusing my attention on Shakespeare's (re)formulation of it, especially on the ways in which he echoes, engages in, or disengages himself from the iconoclastic controversies over religious images and relics, and on the ways in which he transfers the *topos* from its religious contexts to secular and literary contexts.[2]

Perhaps, before I go any further in this paper, I may need to spell out why I am interested in exploring the question of Real Presence above all other sites where Shakespeare could have embroiled himself in the religious controversies of the English Reformation. I am less interested in identifying Shakespeare's confessional allegiance as such than in finding out what he made of his historical situations. The *topos* of Real Presence offers an excellent opportunity to do such work because iconoclasm is an issue of representation, first and foremost, and Shakespeare was a practitioner of literary representations.

Iconoclastic controversies in any historical period start with a question about the status of representation in relation to its original. Such a question is bound to arise in a religion that, like Christianity, has an ineffable and

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[2] In *England's Iconoclasts*, Margaret Aston notes, the term "image" primarily meant a "statue, a sculpted figure . . . human figures. Near the end of the century [i. e., the 16th century] . . . it was brass and metal sculpture . . . It was only in the course of our period, and as a secondary meaning, that the word image began to acquire the more general, wide-ranging meaning that it now has of portrayals, or representation at large, in different media" (17).

transcendent God who takes on human flesh. Those questions that troubled the Christian Church at intervals—such as whether the divine could be visually located, whether there was some practical identity between the image and the imaged, whether images were numinous or dead, whether pictures and statues of the saints and the Virgin were vivacious or inert, whether one could be in real contact with the saints through their representations, or whether the real presence of Christ was in the bread and wine of the Eucharist—all come down to that initial question about how to imagine the dialectic between immanence and transcendence. If images are but lumps of stone and if representations but dead copies of their originals, as radical iconoclasts suspect, then the Eucharist bread and wine are but cakes and ale, and the veneration of images, little different from idolatry and superstition.

As James Simpson notes, English iconoclasm in the sixteenth century was also a highly political affair.[3] In 1536, Henry VIII issued injunctions to bishops in which priests were prohibited from showing "any images, relics, or miracles." By 1538, all visible cult of the saints before their images was forbidden, and all images "abused with pilgrimages or offerings . . . for avoiding that most detestable sin of idolatry" were ordered forthwith to be taken down and destroyed. In 1551, a statute ordered that parsons were to "cause to be defaced and destroyed" any image of "stone, tymber,

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[3] "Reformation iconoclasm is a topic that needs no apology. Given its undoubted importance as a leading issue of debate in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the surprising thing is that neither on the Continent nor in England has it received its due." This is the opening salvo with which Aston introduces her monumental work, *England's Iconoclasts*, in 1988. Since then much has changed. James Simpson, as a most prominent example, has been offering a sustained rereading of the history of English literature from 1350 to date as a history of literary responses to various forms of iconoclasm. My debt to these two scholars in the following brief account of English iconoclasm in the sixteenth century should be obvious. For a major account of the hold that late medieval Catholicism had over the lay people's imagination, and its persistence in the Reformation era, see Eamon Duffy's *Stripping of Altars*.

allebaster or earthe, graven carved or paynted" (Simpson 384-85). In 1563, "An Homilie Against perill of Idolatrie" was published. These politically engineered iconoclastic movements, Aston writes, led to a "greater critical awareness of the problems surrounding religious art" (43). They led to a crisis of representation.

When Shakespeare entered the literary scene in the 1590s, it was into a scene where iconoclasm had left an indelible mark. Counting only those in England and Scotland, about 9,000 parish churches were affected by the iconoclastic movements. Images were defaced, destroyed, or white-washed. Stained glasses were smashed down. Crucifixes, wayside crosses, and holy trees were battered and demolished. A church was no longer a place where one could behold the face of the living God, but a place where people congregated to read the Bible and to hear sermons. Polemics for and against religious images were fed into discussions on the theatre and generated anti-theatrical tracts and defences of the stage, for example. As Aston observes, "idolatry became a household word in the sixteenth century, and the perils of this sin, so ingrained in everyone's consciousness, left marks in contemporary literature" (466).

One of those marks can be found in early modern English poetry of secular love. Secular love, both in its medieval guise of courtly love and its Renaissance version, Petrarchism, borrowed for its articulation the linguistic and mental structure of sacred love. Nothing shows better than the poetry of secular love written in this period that *latria* can easily slip into *dulia* into *idololatria*; that veneration of sacred images and idolatrous love for human objects are the two sides of the same coin; that both stem from the same mental and psychological structure fashioned in a culture where the status of representation in relation to its original, or the status of matter in relation to spirit, has always been in dispute. That is to say also that secular love, when it is constructed in such a culture, inevitably mirrors sacred love; that the poetry of secular love shares the same language with the

poetry of sacred love and is thereby rendered susceptible to charges of idolatry; and that a deep-seated anxiety about potential charges of idolatry is detectable both in the poetry of secular love and in the poetry of sacred love produced in this period, even when they are aniconic or iconoclastic.

In the rest of this paper, I will argue that issues surrounding idolatry and iconoclasm, especially those deriving from the unstable, ambiguous, and often fiercely contentious relationship between absence and presence, transcendence and immanence, soul and body, spirit and matter, in this period were incorporated into, and examined in, Shakespeare's studies of human desire, especially male desire.

(1) The Lover's Scopic Desire and the "Present Absent" Lady

The third to the last poem of Sir Philip Sidney's sonnet sequence, *Astrophil and Stella*, begins with this *cri de coeur*:[4]

> O absent presence, Stella is not here;
>   False flattering hope, that with so fair a face
>   Bare me in hand, that in this orphan place
> Stella, I say my Stella, should appear.
> What say'st thou now? Where is that dainty cheer
>   Thou told'st mine eyes should help their famished case?
>   But thou art gone, . . . (Sonnet 106. 1-7)

"Stella is not here," Astrophil laments of Stella's real absence, asserting at the same time that she is present. The lady, who refuses to show up in flesh and blood, remains a presence in his desire. This trope about the absent-present object of desire is the poetic scaffolding on which the Petrarchan lover builds his complaint. Shakespeare uses the same trope in

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[4] I cite Sidney's sonnet from Katherine Duncan-Jones's *Sir Philip Sidney*.

the *Sonnets*, especially in the so-called "absence" poems, but to a slightly different effect.[5] Let us first examine Sonnet 45, where the phrase "present absent" occurs:[6]

> The other two, slight air and purging fire,
> Are both with thee, wherever I abide:
> The first my thought, the other my desire,
> These, present absent, with swift motion slide;
> For when these quicker elements are gone
> In tender embassy of love to thee,
> My life being made of four, with two alone
> Sinks down to death, oppressed with melancholy,
> Until life's composition be recured
> By those swift messengers returned from thee
> Who even but now come back again assured
> Of thy fair health, recounting it to me.
>   This told, I joy; but then no longer glad,
>   I send them back again and straight grow sad.

"My thought" and "desire" are "present absent." They are absent because they have gone to "thee"; they are present because they have returned from "thee." Their coming and going are so swift that they are there with "thee" almost at the same time they are here with "me." The "quicker" (swifter and more vivacious) elements of "me" are almost always gone away to "thee," and "I" am almost always left to suffer the lack of those quickening (vivifying) elements. In this, as in Astrophil's complaint, the object of desire is present only in the lover's thought and desire, thereby highlighting its real absence. In this breathless place-shifting, thought and desire create out of the real absence of the beloved a new kind of presence, absent-presence;

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[5] I borrow the term "absence-poem" from Helen Vendler's reading of Sonnet 43 in her immensely helpful *The Art of* Shakespeare's Sonnets.

[6] I cite Shakespeare's sonnets from Duncan-Jones's Arden edition.

a new kind of "body," a virtual body, or a man-made body.

In Sonnet 43, another of the "absence" poems, Shakespeare further explores the tension between absence and presence in Petrarchan male desire. Let us have a look:

> When most I wink, then do mine eyes best see;
> For all the day they view things unrespected,
> But when I sleep, in dreams they look on thee,
> And darkly bright, are bright in dark directed.
> Then thou, whose shadow shadows doth make bright,
> How would thy shadow's form form happy show
> To the clear day with thy much clearer light,
> When to unseeing eyes thy shade shines so?
> How would (I say) mine eyes be blessed made
> By looking on thee in the living day,
> When in dead night thy fair imperfect shade
> Through heavy sleep on sightless eyes doth stay?
>   All days are nights to see till I see thee,
>   And nights bright days when dreams do show thee me.

Boundaries between the visible and the invisible, dream presence and real presence, days and nights, presence and absence, collapse in quick succession and all become indistinguishable. The words the lover employs in this sonnet to articulate the dynamics of erotic desire and profane devotion—those denoting seeing and light such as "darkly bright," "bright in dark"; the "sightless eyes" that, "unseeing," see the "shadow's form" of the beloved object; and the eyes that would be "blessed / Made" by looking on the real presence of the beloved object—place the sonnet in an immediate contiguity to a structure of another kind of devotion, that is, Christian mystical devotion.[7] If this poem seems to take on the

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[7] See, for example, *The Cloud of Unknowing*, the most popular manual for monastic meditational exercise from the late fourteenth-century.

characteristics of a *visio*, however, those "absence" poems surrounding it make it clear that it is a false vision originating in self-deception, in the lover's determination to "wink" at the real absence of his beloved object. Unlike Astrophil in Sidney's Sonnet 106 or the lover in Shakespeare's Sonnet 45 I have just discussed, the lover in this sonnet almost seems to welcome the absence of the beloved object, which allows him to see the beloved in the way he desires to. The lover likes to re-create the object of his desire in his own way and finds it easier when it is really absent.

The lover sets up a demarcation between real and dream presence, between what the mind's eye "sees" and what the bodily eye sees, only to erase it. The confusion between real presence and real absence, the mental state the lover seems deliberately to try to achieve, was the very issue that led people living in post-Reformation England to smash and burn the images. For those evangelical iconoclasts, this lover might have seemed doubly idolatrous — in worshipping his beloved object (conflating humanity and divinity) and in mistaking absence for presence (conflating corporeal body and its mental images). A question arises, then, as to what Shakespeare does in this sonnet. Does he engage with the iconoclastic debates on images and relics of the time? It is not easy to answer, especially when we know the language of courtly love and Petrarchism, for Shakespeare and his contemporaries, was always already encoded with the language of sacred love. I am inclined to read this sonnet as an example of Shakespeare's study of the ways in which inner idolatry works.

As I said earlier in this section, this poem reads like an exercise in mystical meditation. Mystical meditation differs from veneration of images (or idolatry) in that it does not require a corporeal or material mediator to gain an access to God. Built upon the belief that God is spiritual, invisible, and transcendent, it is a way to achieve a spiritual union with the spiritual God. To put it another way, the dividing line between idolatry and mystical devotion is in whether one believes stones and stocks are dead or

not, whether one believes graven images and carved or molten figures are really animate with divine presence or not. That line becomes very thin indeed in this poem, which appropriates the linguistic and psychological structure of mystical devotion to express the erotic longing for the corporeal presence of the human object of desire. This poem draws the reader's attention to the unstable and profoundly ambiguous division between secular and sacred love, I think, and in so doing not only exposes the idolatrous dimension of secular love but paradoxically shows how quickly mystical devotion is eroticized and how close it is to idolatry. To clarify what I mean by this, I would suggest we go to *The Winter's Tale*, which, to my mind, is an extended study of the dangers inherent in the sonneteer-lover's scopic desire, which, as we have seen, very quickly turns the desiring subject into an idolater and the object of desire into an idol. In this play, Shakespeare reimagines the Ovidian Pygmalion as a figure of scopic desire, transforming his story into a story of his image into a story of the sonneteer-lover's petrifying and idol-making desire for absolute possession and absolute presence.

(2) Hermione as Pygmalion's Image

Of course, the object of love in Sonnet 43 is the Young Man, but that does not deter his lover from turning him into a shade. In Petrarchan sonnets, the Medusa-like gaze that petrifies the viewer does not belong wholly to the lady despite all the claims to the contrary put forward by the male lover.[8] It also belongs to the male lover himself. The sonneteer-lover petrifies the lady of his love, or fixes her in his sonnet as a stony idol, almost at the same time that he claims the lady's icy beauty freezes, burns,

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[8] Medusa's alluring but killing head is, of course, Ovid's primal myth of the petrifying power of the female gaze.

and petrifies him. She is an idol that remains unmoved by, but still moves, his love and adoration. To put it another way, the lover's own petrification by the lady is a precondition to, and an excuse for, initiating the process of petrification, vivification, and re-creation of the lady into an idol with his art and in his imagination. It almost seems that the lover is able to achieve a union with the object of his desire only in the form of an image, an absent-presence or a present-absence. It almost seems that he wants to transform the living woman into a statue that looks like a real woman but is silent and inert, just like a stone. Her lips should be cold. It is no accident, then, that Pygmalion's image figures as a painted Laura, the archetypal ice-lady, in Petrarch:

> When Simon received the high idea which, for my sake, put his hand to his stylus, if he had given to his noble work voice and intellect along with form

> he would have lightened my breast of many sighs that make what others prize most vile to me. For in appearance she seems humble, and her expression promises peace;

> then, when I come to speak to her, she seems to listen most kindly: if she could only reply to my words!

> Pygmalion, how glad you should be of your statue, since you received a thousand times what I yearn to have just once! (*Rime* 78. 12-14).[9]

Pygmalion in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* starts out as a misogynist. Arthur Golding's translation, which Shakespeare loved, gives this description:[10]

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[9] I cite Petrarch's *Rime* from Robert M. Durling's *Petrarch's Lyric Poems*.
[10] I cite Golding's English translation of *Metamorphoses* from John Frederick Nims's edition.

> Whom[the Propets] forbycause Pygmalion saw to leade theyr lyfe in sin
> Offended with the vice whereof great store is packt within
> The nature of the womankynde, he led a single lyfe.
> And long it was ere he could fynd in hart to take a wyfe. (10.261-64)

The rest of the story is about how he won the wife after his heart. He carved an "image" in ivory and fell in love with it, precisely because it was man-made and better than any woman Nature begot:

> The look of it was ryght a Maydens looke,
> And such a one as that yee would beleeve had lyfe, and that
> Would moved bee, if womanhod and reverence letteth not:
> So artificiall was the work. He woondreth at his Art
> And of his counterfetted corse conceyveth love in hart. (10.268-72).

The ivory maid, although life-like, was absolutely immobile. But, in desiring it, he could not "perswade / Himself to think it Ivory, for oftentymes it kist / And thought it kissed him againe" (10.274-76). He kissed it, made it his "bedfellow" (10.291), and wished it to be warm and responsive to his burning desire. Venus granted him this wish, and, with his kisses, the ivory image began to warm up:

> In her body streyght a warmnesse seemed to spred.
> He put his mouth againe to hers, and on her brest did lay
> His hand. The ivory wexed soft: and putting quyght away
> All hardnesse, yeelded underneathe his fingars, as wee see
> A peece of wax made soft ageinst the Sunne, or drawen to bee
> In divers shapes by chaufing it betweene ones handes, and so
> To serve to uses. (10.306-312)

Is this a story about the power of representation to conjure the represented original into being? Or is it about the power of desire to conjure the object

of desire into presence? Or is it about the affective power that an idol has over the idolater? Even from reading these lines, one can see what a great deal of interpretive potential this story must have had when it was placed in the context of Petrarchan love poetry or of iconoclasm debates. Medieval renditions of the story (Jean de Meun's in the *Roman de la Rose*, for example) provided the early moderns with enough interpretive models to choose from: Pygmalion as an artist in love with his own creation, an illusion artist, a desiring lover, a besotted husband, or a superstitious idolater. And there were two more offered in the *Ovide moralisé*: Pygmalion as a rich lord who takes up a beautiful serving girl, educates, and marries her, and as God, who creates, vivifies, and marries humanity, His creation.[11]

Shakespeare inherited all of the above on the list of possible interpretations of Pygmalion's image.[12] In the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries, however, the image was most often associated with idolatry or with harlotry, i. e., prostitution and pornographic sex. It also was mentioned either to defend or to attack the stage in debates on the theatre. For example, John Marston combines the two interpretations of Pygmalion's image as idolatry and harlotry in *The Metamorphosis of Pigmalions Image*.[13] Marston's Pygmalion is a voyeur, and his love for the "faire image himselfe portraid" is entirely an affair of the eye. The poetic narrator calls his ceaseless seeing, viewing, and amorous dallying with his image popish:

> Looke how the peevish Papists crouch, and kneele

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[11] The first of these two readings was taken up by George Bernard Shaw in his hugely popular play *Pygmalion*.

[12] For a useful (but not exhaustive) discussion of versions of Pygmalion before and in the twentieth century, see Jane M. Miller, "Some Versions of Pygmalion." For a fascinating discussion of Pygmalion as an artist-creator, see E. H. Gombrich, "Pygmalion's Power." What Gombrich terms "Pygmalion's Power" receives an extended examination by Kenneth Gross. See his *The Dream of the Moving Statues.*

[13] I cite Marston's poem from Elizabeth Story Donno's anthology.

> To some dum Idoll with their offering,
> As if a senceles carved stone could feele
> The ardor of his bootless chattering,
>   So fond he was, and earnest in his sute
>   To his remorsles Image, dum and mute. (Stanza 14)

Voyeuristic desire, popery, and idolatry. Here in Marston, as in other discussions on popery and idolatry in the period, the link that binds these three is the viewer-lover's confusion between presence and absence, image and prototype.

Shakespeare directly mentions Pygmalion's image only once in *Measure for Measure*, and that to suggest a harlot. In *The Winter's Tale*, however, the story of Pygmalion and his image is a structural idea.[14] It is not limited to the last scene, as has so often been taken to be. In his sudden outburst of jealousy that sets the machinery of the tragic romance into motion, Leontes is a Pygmalion, the Narcissistic sonneteer-lover who petrifies the beloved lady in his quest for absolute possession and who needs to create an illusion of absence in his quest for absolute presence. Jealousy possesses Leontes as he looks at Hermione giving her hand to Polixenes: she is just "Too hot, too hot!" (1.2.108). Leontes works himself up to a fit of delirium in which he sees something in nothing, reality in fantasy:

> May't be
> Affection? −Thy intention stabs the centre,
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams−how can this be?−
> With what's unreal thou coactive art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'its very credent
> Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost,
> And that beyond commission, and I find it,

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[14] Throughout this paper, I cite *The Winter's Tale* from John Pitcher's Arden edition.

> And that to the infection of my brains
> And hard'ning of my brows. (1.2.137-46)

This fit of jealousy is not exactly sudden, however. It has been prepared by the misogynistic undercurrent of male desire evident in the narrative Polixenes gives about his "boy eternal" (1.2.65) days with Leontes. In that narrative, the two male friends are but two Adams seduced into "ill-doing" by two Eves. Looking at a woman is desiring her; desiring her is yielding to the devil's temptations and being expelled from the homosocial Edenic world where the two friends were "as twinned lambs, that did frisk i'th' sun / And bleat the one at th'other: what we changed / Was innocence for innocence" (1.2.67-69). Between Leontes and Polixenes, who disclaim the agency of their sexual desire, then, the warm, vivacious, and very pregnant Hermione does not have any chance to be herself. She must chill out and be an image of Pygmalion's "ivory wench."

In the final scene of the play, where the stone lady moves and finally breaks her stony silence of sixteen years, we are back in the world of Christianity. Carefully staged by Paulina in her chapel, the last scene is replete with language associated with Christian image worship and miracles. Given by Paulina's steward, the extraordinary detail concerning the identity of the maker of the statue, Giulio Romano, also makes the reference to image worship inevitable. A chief disciple of Raphael, as Giulio's letter tells us, Giulio got into trouble with the iconoclastic confraternity of Santa Maria della Steccata in Parma for having "painted God, the Father, Who is invisible."[15] Placed in this context, the vivification of Hermione's image looks very much like the Eucharistic adoration or the Eucharistic meditation of the Roman Catholic Church. Having been exposed by Paulina, and adored and gazed at by Leontes and Perdita, the

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[15] I use Gombrich's citation from Frederick Hartt, *Giulio Romano* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1958). See his *Symbolic Images,* 152.

stone changes into a true and proper flesh and blood of Hermione. We could say Leontes gets his perfect wife, if this is the last scene of his quest for absolute possession and real presence.

And that is a big "if," I think. In anxiously distinguishing lawful images from unlawful ones, magic from naturalism, and in never letting Leontes and Perdita forget the status of the image as a representation, still wet from painting, Paulina brings into the chapel scene the shadow of another image －Pygmalion's image－and, with it, associations of idolatry and iconoclasm. This scene could very well be the last stage of Leontes' project to tame Hermione into a submissive, chaste, and silent wife－that is, into a moving image.

Seen from the vantage point gained from the early modern culture wars surrounding the issues of Real Presence and iconoclasm I have discussed so far in this paper, this is either a holy scene of a Eucharistic miracle or a Faustian scene of black magic and idolatry. Whichever it is, one might insist, it is no matter. Hermione has returned from the dead, released from the stone "body" that imprisoned her vital spirit in a deathly inertia. But is it so? Has she really come back? Early modern iconoclasts might have found Hermione's return profoundly disturbing, if not exactly horrifying. Her resurrection is a pure illusion engendered by the scopic desire of Leontes, the Narcissistic sonneteer-lover; matured in his desire for absolute presence and absolute possession; and delivered through the midwifery of his idolatrous adoration of his own creation. What seems like Hermione's Incarnation could very well be her erasure, the final enactment of Leontes' idolatrous confusion between absence and presence. Or should we say Hermione still stands in this last scene of Leontes' play somewhere between real presence and real absence, matter and spirit, just like a ghost?

(3) Hamlet between the Ghost and the Dust

By way of conclusion, I want briefly to mention *Hamlet*. Many scholars have read in the play a strong sympathy for England's Catholic past, for its feudal past, or for the time when signs were wonders. This is an eminently tenable position, especially considering the anxiety about the function of memory and the fear of the future that haunt, like a ghost, every line uttered by Hamlet. I would like to suggest, however, the play is equally about the ambiguous status of matter in an iconoclastic world where representations and signs have become suspect. Iconoclasm insists on the materiality of images. Stones are stones, susceptible of destruction. Iconoclasm, however, means standing on perpetual vigil against the possibility that matter might be taken as Real Presence, as alive, or as animate with some spirit.[16] That is to say, in an iconoclastic world, matter cannot be quite dead. Hamlet is uneasy with the dust, the quintessential image of dead matter, that blows around his dark universe, as much as he is with the Ghost who returns to his earthly home, reluctant to throw off his bodily form, because, in both, he reads the unbearable heaviness of lived lives.

When matter became tamer, and iconoclasm mellowed into fetishism, automata and Frankensteins would haunt the literary scene. Pygmalion's image would be called Galatea or even Eliza Doolittle. But, for the early moderns, that time had yet to come. In the mean time, Hamlet's ghostly

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[16] Gross might be describing this aspect of iconoclasm when he mentions the "reemergence of the magical" in his encyclopedic *The Dream of the Moving Statue*: "The biblical discourse of iconoclasm does not see the image as something animated through its participation within a larger ritual praxis and mythology. . . . the biblical text seeks to lay bare the erring origins of a false belief . . . Yet there are places in the text where, despite this reduction, the suppressed enchantment returns. There are moments, that is, when the myth of idolatry allows the partial reemergence of the magical within the precincts of what purports to be a skeptical, disenchanted vision of false worship" (45).

father was stalking around Elsinore, and Leontes still had the power and even the guts to wake up his stone lady back to life.

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ABSTRACT

Numinous or Dead?
Real Presence, Iconoclasm, and Pygmalion's Image in Shakespeare

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Real Presence was a question at the heart of the iconoclastic debates and violence that erupted in the English Reformation and the periods following it. Those iconoclasts participating in the debates sought to prove the Roman Catholic belief in Real Presence false, and thereby to desacramentalize the relationship between matter and spirit, body and soul, presence and absence, or representation and original. I argue the terms of those debates are incorporated and explored in the poetry of love, secular and sacred, produced in the post-Reformation period. Shakespeare's "absence" sonnets, for example, reveal a deep-seated anxiety about idolatry, particularly through the figure of the sonneteer-lover who, driven by his scopic desire, creates an absent-present 'body' out of the absence of the beloved, and thereby serves to expose how easily *latria* can slip into *dulia* into *idololatria*. Shakespeare further explores, in *The Winter's Tale,* the dangers inherent in the sonneteer-lover's scopic desire, transforming the Ovidian myth of Pygmalion into a story of Pygmalion's image into a story of Leontes's petrifying and idol-making desire for absolute possession and absolute presence.