

# Shakespeare, in Folds

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When they meet in 1.5, the Ghost of Hamlet's Father offers his son two stories. 'Lend thy serious hearing | To what I shall unfold' (1.5.5-6),<sup>1</sup> he says, and then, a moment later, 'I could a tale unfold whose lightest word | Would harrow up thy soul' (1.5.15-16). The first story is the account of his murder by his brother Claudius, which he duly gives with all its circumstances and compelling details (1.5.59-80). The second is a description of his sufferings in purgatory, and *that* he cannot narrate:

But that I am forbid  
To tell the secrets of my prison-house  
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word  
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,  
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres,  
Thy knotted and combined locks to part  
And each particular hair to stand on end  
Like quills upon the fearful porpentine -  
But this eternal blazon must not be  
To ears of flesh and blood. (1.5.13-22)

I *could* tell you a terrifying story, the Ghost tells his already-terrified son, but I can't, I'm not allowed. The Ghost himself might be thought of as an unfolded (or at least an unwrapped) thing, having 'burst [his] cerements' (1.4.48), cast off his graveclothes, left them lying untidily in a corner of the tomb, in a blasphemous parody of the Gospel accounts of Christ's Resurrection.<sup>2</sup> But only one of the Ghost's stories is unfolded; the other remains unspoken and unheard, but not (thanks to

the Ghost's framing of it) unfelt. It remains folded into the play; it could still be unfolded, folded out.<sup>3</sup>

This essay thinks about folds as a way of imagining both intertextuality and dramatic (or narrative) construction in some of Shakespeare's plays and poems. The folds it thinks about and with are mostly material, especially textile. It is interested in the particular material affordances of the early modern textile fold, and how they might offer ways of thinking about literary texts and how they are made and experienced. Beginning with the folded tapestry, and ending with a coda on the ruff, this essay proceeds as a series of unfoldings, quieter and more diffident than revelations, and making fewer, smaller claims. It considers the temporary nature of folds, the way in which they are always transitional (a fold is that which can/will be unfolded), their relationship with time, matter, and making, and (on occasion) with violence.<sup>4</sup>

Thomas Cromwell (as imagined by Hilary Mantel) is particularly fond of a tapestry depicting the meeting of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba; the latter, 'smiling, light-footed',<sup>5</sup> reminds him of Anselma, the lover of his youth in Antwerp. It belongs first to Wolsey and then, as Wolsey falls, decorates a room at York Place (once the Cardinal's) now occupied by Anne Boleyn. As Thomas P. Campbell observes of the historical Wolsey, 'Many English nobles were enthusiastic tapestry patrons, but Wolsey's expenditure on tapestries was unparalleled - in the course of his life he acquired more than six hundred'.<sup>6</sup> Visiting Anne, Cromwell is pleased to see the

tapestry again: 'Sheba eddies towards him, rosy, round, and he acknowledges her: Anselma, lady made of wool, I thought I'd never see you again', and he notes that 'Sheba makes Anne look bad: sallow and sharp'.<sup>7</sup> The early modern term for such figurative or narrative content, often biblical or classical, as opposed to the more common 'verdures' or 'millefleurs' with designs of foliage and flowers, was 'story work'.<sup>8</sup> In between Cromwell's two encounters with the tapestry, Mantel also imagines its removal:

They take down the tapestries and leave the bare blank walls. They are rolled up, the woollen monarchs, Solomon and Sheba; as they are brought into coiled proximity, their eyes are filled by each other, and their tiny lungs breathe in the fibre of bellies and thighs.<sup>9</sup>

This tapestry's story, now rolled up for transport and storage, is evoked in a way that is at once erotic and oddly comforting, Solomon and Sheba in their coiled proximity, lively and present to each other even though they are now unseen, and also vividly, impossibly present to the reader.

In his *Parallel Lives of Greeks and Roman*, the first-century historian Plutarch has Themistocles, the fifth-century BCE Athenian general and politician, use the conceit of the folded tapestry as a way of evoking the limited, imprecise speech of someone not yet fluent in a foreign language. He tells the Persian king Artaxerxes that

mens wordes did properly resemble the stories and imagery in a pece of arras: for both in the one & in the other, the goodly images of either of them are seene, when they are vnfolded and layed open. Contrariwise they appeare not, but are lost, when they are shut vp, & close folded.<sup>10</sup>

This is Sir Thomas North's 1579 translation, via the French of Jacques Amyot: it is more expansive if a little less clear than the Loeb prose version,<sup>11</sup> but emphatically Renaissance in its specific evocation of 'stories and imagery' in the arras. Francis Bacon cites Themistocles' conceit twice. In his essay 'Of friendship', printed for the first time in 1612, he has Themistocles declare 'that speech was like Cloth of Arras, opened, and put abroad; Whereby the imagery doth appeare in Figure; whereas in Thoughts, they lie but as in Packs'.<sup>12</sup> The distinction between speech and thought is Bacon's own interpretation and amplification, because in Plutarch, Themistocles is merely asking Artaxerxes for more time in which to learn Persian, so that he can address him without an interpreter, fully and explicitly in his own words. Bacon's version is closer to Plutarch's original than North's, however, in that he does not quite imagine the 'imagery' as being lost, but rather as being inaccessible, bundled up too tightly for proper comprehension or appreciation, like a bale of cloth (for which 'pack' was the usual term).<sup>13</sup>

Far more Mantel-like than either, though, and far more interesting, is William Scott, writing on the figure of *amplificatio* in his treatise on poetry and poetics in the late 1590s:

Sometime we amplify by entering into particulars, breaking the whole into his parts, anatomizing every limb; and then speech (as Themistocles said to the King of Persia) resembles the imagery in a piece of arras, for in both the conceits and images are seen when they are unfolded and laid open, but *seem* lost when they are wrapt up and straitened, *though they contain all they did otherwise*.<sup>14</sup>



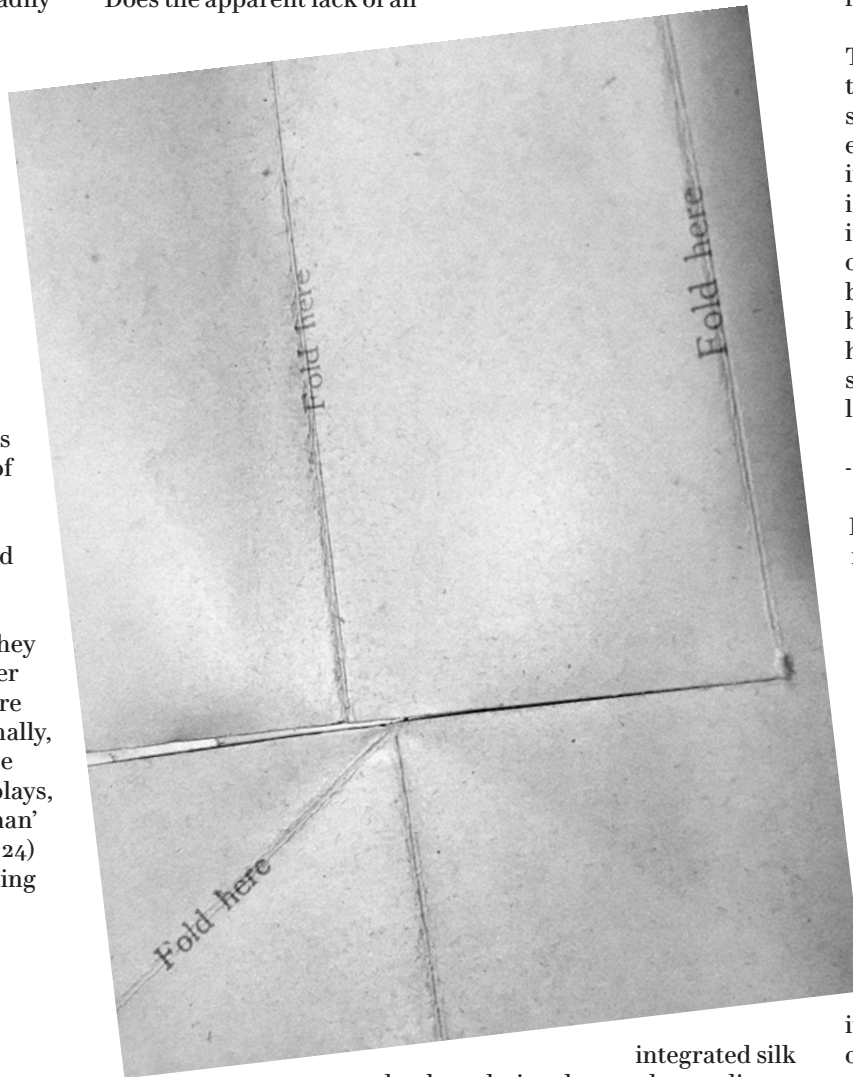
The change from *being* lost (as in North) to *seeming* lost is Scott's, as is the additional observation that such tapestries, although folded, '*contain all they did otherwise*'. This assumption of the continued presence and importance of the unseen, and its being conceived of in textile terms as something folded or bundled, wrapped up, rolled, or otherwise packed away, is suggestive. The etymology is a false one, but the fold, *le pli*, is itself folded into *amplificatio*, which Scott so vividly imagines as a figure of unfolding. The bundle, the pack, the roll may seem drab and unexciting, an undifferentiated mass, but it remains full of colour, wit, and story, the presence of which (Scott appears to suggest) is still in some ways palpable and immanent. It is known to be there – or, perhaps, *something* is known to be there – even if it cannot be seen. An early modern reader might think as readily of the uncut pages of a book, a stack of folded sheets to be taken to the binder, its inner leaves only able to be read if the sheet is unfolded, or when the book is bound, its edges trimmed and opened. It is assumed, at least in the Western tradition, that those inner leaves are not blank, although they cannot be read or seen.

Writing about the unseen in early modern drama and theatre more generally, Andrew Sofer borrows from astronomy the concept of 'dark matter', the existence of which is not observable, but which can be inferred from its gravitational effects. Theatrical dark matter, he suggests, might include 'offstage spaces and actions, absent characters, the narrated past, hallucination, blindness, obscenity, godhead, and so on [...] dark matter is woven into the fabric of theatrical representation'; 'most of the event we call theater depends on what might be called felt absences', he avers.<sup>15</sup> Rebecca Olson is less concerned with folds than with the double-sidedness of tapestries and hangings in particular, suggesting that 'for early modern audiences [...] an arras hanging in fiction becomes an opportunity to invent the other side – to "discover" what they feel remains unseen or left unsaid in the text itself', another version of Sofer's dark matter.<sup>16</sup> As Sofer points out, theatre in the postclassical, Western tradition operates synecdochally, whereby the part (actor, character, prop, set) stands for the whole. Examples of this are easy to find in Shakespeare's plays, the audience exhorted 'into a thousand parts divide one man' so as to make the armies at Agincourt (*Henry V*, Prologue 24) for instance, and also in the poems, as when Lucrece, looking at the Troy painting, notes that

much imaginary work was there:  
 Conceit deceitful, so compact, so kind,  
 That for ACHILLES' image stood his spear,  
 Gripped in an armed hand; himself behind  
 Was left unseen, save to the eye of mind:  
 A hand, a foot, a face, a leg, a head,  
 Stood for the whole to be imagined. (1422–8)

In the case of the folded tapestry and, this essay suggests, the fold itself, that which is left unseen but which retains an absent presence in the imagination of audience or reader can also sometimes remain unspecified or ill-defined, a very particular kind of dark matter; it is the fact and the palpability of absence or occlusion, the *something* which could still be revealed which matters, around which the action 'bends'.<sup>17</sup> The fold is thus a potent cue for *enargeia*<sup>18</sup> or even just the possibility of *enargeia* and, as William Gruber suggests of the offstage or imagined event, what is to be imagined is often sex or violence, or both.<sup>19</sup> Even without the precision of Mantel's intimately folded woollen monarchs, Scott's version of Themistocles's folded arras in particular pulsates with an unfixed potential, like the tale which the Ghost does not tell, an immanent pleat or pack of story, untold and unheard, but not unfelt.

Innogen has been reading late in bed. 'What hour is it?' she asks her waiting woman, Helen; 'Almost midnight, madam', Helen replies. Realising that she's been reading for nearly three hours, Innogen presumably hands her book to her attendant, giving her the instruction 'Fold down the leaf where I have left', and bids her goodnight (*Cymbeline*, 2.2.2–4).<sup>20</sup> There are no stage directions, but the implied action is clear; the book, closed, the corner of one of its pages folded down to mark the place, is left beside the bed, perhaps next to the taper which Innogen instructs Helen to leave burning, and Helen exits. Innogen says a prayer and settles down to sleep. (Bad habits: surely this British princess should use a book mark? Does the apparent lack of an



integrated silk  
 bookmark signal to an alert audience  
 that this is not a prayerbook?) A moment later – but there could be a long, suspense-building pause – a trunk (in the corner of the imagined room? beside the bed?) opens, the villainous Iachimo emerges, and this chilling, central, much-discussed scene proceeds.

It's near the end of the scene, some thirty-five lines later, that Innogen's bedtime reading is identified: 'she hath been reading late | The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turned down | Where Philomel gave up' (2.2.44–6). (This is a moment when the play's self-conscious, exuberant anachronism can obtrude: Innogen the British princess is reading – Ovid? Is it printed? Is it Arthur Golding's English translation of Ovid, first printed in 1567 and in its sixth edition by the date of Shakespeare's play? In performance, unless it's a forensically reconstructed early seventeenth century production, it doesn't matter. But it can't be a Kindle.) Again there are (of course) no stage directions, but Iachimo must pick up the book, open it, perhaps observe the title page because it won't be obvious from the cover and then open it at the folded-down corner. Or he might insert a finger at the fold itself, open the book in the middle in a single action. He notes that she's reading the tale of Tereus and then

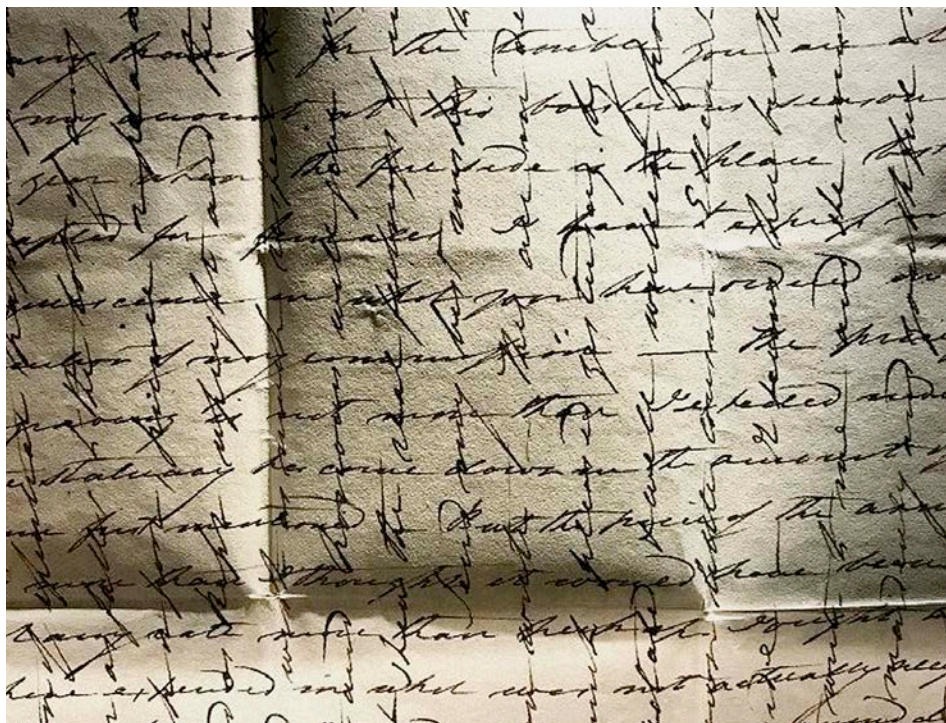
– where's she got up to? – ah, 'the leaf's turned down where Philomel gave up'. Does Iachimo unfold the folded corner of the page in order to make that precise observation, and then carefully refold it, before closing the book and returning it to its place beside the bed? Perhaps. In performance, the audience probably doesn't think much about the exact sequence of actions here, or about the materiality of the book; editors in their commentaries note the details of Philomel's story, perhaps pointing out, too, that Philomel does not, in fact, give up, but rather resists; she is raped and mutilated by Tereus but communicates her story to her sister Procne, Tereus's wife, and with her takes a terrible revenge. Editors do not, however, comment on the fold, and the particularities of the way in which it both enables and structures the dense intertextuality of this moment and this scene.

The central part of the scene is Iachimo's noting down of the details of Innogen's bedchamber and her body while she sleeps, details which he will eventually recount to Innogen's exiled husband Posthumus in order to 'prove' Innogen's infidelity and so win a wager. In 2.2, Iachimo's note-taking is framed by the folding, unfolding and refolding of the leaf; it acts as a material and gestural cue for a kind of *ekphrasis* or *amplificatio*.<sup>21</sup> The leaf is folded, and it also folds in; it can be unfolded, and it also, potentially, unfolds. It materialises both the implicit/explicit, and their interdependence. The fold here can be a figure of Sofer's 'dark matter', latency, potential, something which is occluded but which yet can be brought to light or brought to bear; an absent presence or felt absence.

In the first instance, therefore, what is folded into this scene in *Cymbeline* is the possibility of rape.<sup>22</sup> That barely remains implicit even before Innogen's reading is identified, in the scenario itself and in Iachimo's explicit comparison of himself to 'our Tarquin', who 'did softly press the rushes' as he creeps out of the trunk (2.2.12–13); Valerie Wayne notes that Iachimo's surveying of Innogen as she sleeps closely parallels Shakespeare's own *Lucrece* (386–427; Q5 had been published in 1607; 2.2.12n). This moment in *Cymbeline* might go either way: if the Lucretia story were to unfold at this point, then it would connect with Innogen's story not simply in its situation (the wager, the sleeping woman, her bed linen, the nocturnal intruder) and subject but in the device of the fold itself, which it shares with Shakespeare's *Lucrece*.

Shakespeare's *Lucrece* is emphatically textile in the way it depicts the rape of Lucretia by Tarquin, and the depiction of the rape of Lucretia in visual art is also heavily textile, often erotically so; Titian's great painting is only one of many examples.<sup>23</sup> Innogen is unfolded in language to the ears and the mind's eyes of the audience, a process of controlled revelation in which textiles play a crucial part, enabling and framing her blazon as it is unfolded by Iachimo. Shakespeare's *Lucrece* has one 'lily hand', implicitly whiter than the pillow which it 'cozen[s] [...] of a lawful kiss' (386–7) and her other hand is like 'an April daisy' against the green of the coverlet (394–5); she lies asleep 'like a virtuous monument' (391), as if her bedlinen were already transformed to the petrified draperies of the dead.<sup>24</sup> Innogen is a 'fresh lily, and whiter than the sheets' (2.2.15–16), and Iachimo describes her 'sense', her awareness as she lies unconscious 'as a monument | Thus in a chapel lying' (2.2.32–3). In the poem, the terrified woman 'o'er the white sheet peers her whiter chin' (472); the 'white sheet' here is also the page, allowing Lucrece's face, for a split-second, to be brought into shockingly close proximity to the Tarquin-like reader. Innogen's body, too, has the qualities of both page and sheet, in the linen/lily whiteness of her skin but also in that sense of gradual revelation in space and time by Iachimo, who reads and writes her like a book – who could also read and write her like the book that she is reading herself, its leaf turned down.





As Laura Gowing and others have explored, drawing on court records,

Talking about clothes instead of bodies was a recognised strategy for rape victims. But it was also a way of describing sex that made sense when the boundaries of the body were readily understood in terms of clothes.<sup>25</sup>

Those boundaries were constituted above all by body linen, shirts and smocks, and, on occasion, by sheets; these textile layers could be thought of as a second skin, but also as already creating the conditions whereby the body's borders and surfaces might be revealed, destabilised, or violated. Sometimes those sheets and other linen layers become pages, written on and folded (or unfolded) in turn, in another play of concealment and revelation. So Tarquin

sets his foot upon the light,  
For light and lust are deadly enemies:  
Shame folded up in blind concealing night,  
When most unseen, then most doth tyrannize.  
The wolf hath seized his prey, the poor lamb cries,  
Till with her own white fleece her voice controlled  
Entombs her outcry in her lips' sweet fold.

For with the nightly linen that she wears  
He pens her piteous clamours in her head,  
Cooling his hot face in the chastest tears  
That ever modest eyes with sorrow shed.  
O, that prone lust should stain so pure a bed!  
The spots whereof could weeping purify,  
Her tears should drop on them perpetually. (673–86)

The actual rape is doubly veiled, both by Lucrece's 'nightly linen', probably her smock, with which Tarquin stifles her cries, and also by the metaphor which describes that action, as Tarquin 'with her own white fleece her voice controlled' (678, 680). Both fleece/linen and metaphor are anticipated by the double appearance of folding in the previous stanza, where night becomes a kind of sheet, or concealing coverlet, like metaphor (or poetry) itself. It's not specified whether the shame is Tarquin's or Lucrece's, or both; both are temporarily equally muffled, equally unseen, folded up, folded in, blindfolded.

The whiteness of the linen in the second stanza of the two, via the metaphor of the fleece, is contrasted with the darkness of

night, which has the same concealing, muffling function when Tarquin extinguishes the light. But Lucrece's own lips are also a fold, imprisoning her cries and, as Rachel Eisendrath points out, 'the sexual implications of "her lips' sweet fold" conflates the rape with the act of silencing her'.<sup>26</sup> In the 1594 quarto at least, the reader turns the page (sig. Fi) at the end of the second stanza just quoted, perhaps more than ordinarily apprehensive about what she will read next, what will unfold, and how. As the image of the lamb suggests, folds in early modern usage often have two, readily related, valences: they can be pastoral, the sheep-fold, a place of safety and protection, especially at night, and they can be textile, paper or otherwise material, similarly suggesting concealment, containment, storing up, but with the possibility of subsequent revelation or release. Both kinds of fold are simultaneously temporal and material, the fold defined and constituted by the possibility, even

the necessity, of its future unfolding; the unfold 'is not the contrary of the fold, nor its effacement, but the continuation or the extension of its act, the condition of its manifestation'.<sup>27</sup> And the fold is always temporary, always transitional.

In the opening scene of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, very close in date to *Lucrece*,<sup>28</sup> the laboured exchange between Proteus and Speed links a very long joke about sheep to the carrying of a letter, in part via their shared concerns with folds. Speed has gone astray ('played the sheep', 1.1.73)<sup>29</sup> in becoming separated from his master Valentine as Valentine is about to depart Verona for Milan while delivering a letter to Proteus's beloved Julia. They pun on 'pound' (where such strays are shut up, or else an excessive fee for carrying such a letter) which then suggests 'pinfold' (the sheepfold), the contrast between the excessive pound and the minuscule pin (or pin's fee, a tiny amount of money), which must be multiplied, 'fold it over and over' (106), itself a false etymology, with its multi-plies – but even thus multiplied it will still be 'threefold too little for carrying a letter to your lover' (107). The folding of the letter itself, its status as a or even *the* folded thing can remain largely unspoken and understood here, axiomatic in an age before envelopes.

When Julia, after much to and fro, eventually gets the letter via her waiting woman Lucetta in the following scene, she tears it without reading it, throwing the pieces to the ground, but is immediately overcome with remorse ('O hateful hands, to tear such loving words', 1.2.105). She pieces together the fragments, rebuking herself as she kisses them:

Lo, here in one line is his name twice writ,  
*Poor forlorn Proteus, passionate Proteus,*  
*To the sweet Julia* – that I'll tear away;  
And yet I will not, sith so prettily  
He couples it to his complaining names.  
Thus will I fold them, one upon another;  
Now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will.  
(1.2.124–9)

Rather than tear away her own name in a fit of self-loathing and mortification, Julia folds her name with Proteus's, her gesture and words loaded with erotic suggestion: 'now kiss, embrace, contend, do what you will', as she imagines 'Julia' and 'Proteus' enfolded, implicitly, between the sheets. (The same joke is made of Beatrice in *Much Ado*, when, overheard

by Benedick, Claudio and Leonato recount how they have heard from Hero that Beatrice, up at night in her smock, writes endless letters to Benedick that she never sends: 'O, when she had writ it and was reading it over', Leonato says, 'She found "Benedick" and "Beatrice" between the sheet'.<sup>30</sup> Just as Proteus and Speed slip between the pinfold and the paper fold, the folded letter and the folded sheet are easily elided, by their shared textile origin, the sheet itself (paper, linen) and the fold, their capacity to be folded and unfolded, and to enfold; the punning itself has an erotic charge in its slipperiness, its teasing shifts and imagined revelations as names and the bodies for which they stand are brought to bear one on another, in paper folds and unfolded sheets.

In what seems a wholly different, comic mode these examples demonstrate the easy, allusive slippage between the pastoral and the textile, the letter and the sheet, that is characteristic of many instances of early modern folding; that slippage speaks also to the contingency of the fold, the way in which it is always in transition and in motion, like a metaphor or a pun. Yet *Two Gentlemen* is also a text in which the very real possibility of rape is suddenly unfolded; it's not so much neatly folded in at the play's conclusion as bundled untidily away, as another unfolding, that of the true identity of the faithful Julia, disguised as Sebastian, acts as diversion and distraction. The play has its hasty comic, romantic conclusion, is (anachronistically) 'wrapped up' – without Sylvia, the object of Proteus's thwarted sexual assault, saying another word.<sup>31</sup>

Lucrece's body is doubly unfolded in the poem, revealed by the drawing back of curtains ('The [bed] curtains being close, about [Tarquin] walks'; they are 'the cloud that hides the silver moon', 367, 371) and the disturbance or destruction of its concealing layers of linen and, even more, by Tarquin's blazon (386–420), which unfolds her in language: as Nancy Vickers noted in her seminal essay on *Lucrece* and the blazon, 'display' is 'from the Latin *displicare* (to scatter and, later, to unfold as in unfolding a banner to view)' and 'description [...] is a gesture of display'.<sup>32</sup> After the rape, however, it is Lucrece's own voice which is released, unfolded, from where it has been both penned, described and reinscribed, and pent, silenced by Tarquin. Lucrece writes to her husband Collatine asking him to return home, but not telling him anything of what has been done to her (1303–9). And then she makes the letter ready for carrying to Collatine in his camp:

Here folds she up the tenor of her woe,  
Her certain sorrow writ uncertainly.  
By this short schedule COLLATINE may know  
Her grief, but not her grief's true quality [...] (1310–13)<sup>33</sup>

But the rape is wrapped up in the obfuscations and evasions of language ('certain sorrow writ uncertainly') even before it is folded up as a letter, and the folding of the letter thus parallels Lucrece's own concealment of what has happened, simultaneously occluding and making entirely clear that something of great moment has occurred and will be revealed. She prepares for a revelation to her husband that she imagines as being as catastrophic as the rape; both events share the language of folding and unfolding, acts which are more than inseparable; they are mutually *implicated*.<sup>34</sup>

*Cymbeline* is a play of many letters. When Iachimo first arrives at the British court (1.6), he comes with letters for Innogen from Posthumus, at least one of which she reads in his presence, partly aloud; it introduces Iachimo as 'one of the noblest note' (1.6.22), but Innogen keeps the rest of the letter to herself: 'So far I read aloud, | But even the very middle of my heart | Is warmed by th'rest' (1.6.26–8). That is, she unfolds the letter and unfolds Iachimo from it, but keeps the rest of the



letter's content to herself, still folded in. Iachimo tells her that he must depart the next day, and therefore that 'if you please | To greet your lord with writing, do't tonight' (1.6.204-5). (She evidently does: dark matter, unstaged, unseen.) Back in Rome, Iachimo reports to Posthumus and gives him letters, this letter of Innogen's presumably among them, but it's not clear whether he reads it, although it can be inferred. What replaces any explicit reading of Innogen's presumed letter is Iachimo's confected account of his nocturnal visit to her bedchamber; it is that which he unfolds to Posthumus's horrified ear and gaze, and the audience's. Perhaps Iachimo produces his notebook or his tables, but what is most striking is the level of detail, largely absent from his notetaking in 2.2, and almost certainly describing aspects of the setting which were not originally imagined as being staged.

The bedchamber's most prominent feature, apparently, to which Iachimo devotes most of his description, is a tapestry

of silk and silver, the story  
Proud Cleopatra when she met her Roman,  
And Cydnus swelled above the banks, or for  
The press of boats or pride: a piece of work  
So bravely done, so rich, that it did strive  
In workmanship and value, which I wondered  
Could be so rarely and exactly wrought,  
Since the true life on't was—  
(2.4.69-76)<sup>35</sup>

It's an appropriately textile folding out of damning circumstantial details: it's story work, but it's also Shakespeare's story, folded in from his own *Antony and Cleopatra*, where (in Enobarbus's great speech, 2.2.201-228) it already has the quality of a work of art, as 'rarely and exactly wrought' as the tapestry which Iachimo now, in retrospect, describes. He describes the chimney-piece, 'Chaste Dian bathing' (2.4.82), the gilded ceiling, the fire-dogs; he produces the bracelet that he took from Innogen's arm: 'Maybe she plucked it off to send it me' suggests Posthumus, in desperation; 'She writes so to you, doth she?', responds Iachimo, focusing the audience's attention, and Posthumus's, once more on the letter in Posthumus's hand, as if that now-unfolded sheet has somehow unleashed this terrible blazon of apparently incontrovertible evidence. Iachimo's speech here also draws on the messenger tradition and, as Lorna Hutson points out, in his discussion of *enargeia*, Erasmus notes that the narratives of messengers in tragedies are 'especially rich in the power to make images appear before the mind's eye, because they present what is impossible to stage. The vivid description of these speeches, he notes, "consists in an explication of circumstances" (*circumstantialiarum*), especially those which bring the incident most before our eyes'. The task of the messenger is the unfolding, *explicatione*, of the unseen and the unstageable.<sup>36</sup>

The description of Innogen's mole (2.4.134-6) is the only part of Iachimo's account less detailed than his rehearsing of features in situ, as he takes his notes, and so it's left to the audience's memories to unfold that particular piece of evidence in their mind's eyes, turn back to something which they heard but did not, could not see, but rather imagined, the boy actor's impossible breast, cued by the lily-white folds of Innogen's bedlinen, her lily-white skin. The one thing missing from Iachimo's sly, devastating inventory of his nocturnal visit to Innogen's bedchamber, oddly, is the book, its leaf folded down at the tale of Tereus, but its dark matter is surely unfolded in this Roman scene, not just by Iachimo's Machiavellian tour de force of *enargeia*, but by the appalling, pornographic, misogynistic outburst of Posthumus's soliloquy in the scene immediately following, with its suggestions of bestiality and rape (2.5.15-19).

As she takes leave of her sisters following her banishment, another British princess speaks words which are at once consoling and defiant:

Time shall unfold what plighted cunning hides.  
Who covert faults at last with shame derides.  
(*King Lear*, 1.1.282-3)<sup>37</sup>

Cordelia invokes the device of Truth the Daughter of Time: Elizabeth I had been celebrated as *Veritas Temporis Filia*, Time's Daughter, Truth, a motto which she appropriated from her sister Mary.<sup>38</sup> In her figure of plighted or pleated cunning, which is itself a folding (or tangling) together of plight as danger and as pledge, the false protestations her sisters have made, Cordelia asserts that truth will eventually out, the truth of her sisters' malice and dissembling, and in time that she herself, her truth, and her virtue will be vindicated. Here the unfolding of time that Cordelia invokes has the folded tapestry quality of the single revelation, the big picture once more brought to light, the storied royal tapestry back where it belongs. But time itself can also be a pleated thing, as Jonathan Gil Harris proposes in relation to *Othello* and the handkerchief, drawing on the work of Michel Serres; for Serres, time 'can be schematized by a kind of crumpling, a multiple, foldable diversity', whereby past and present can suddenly be brought into 'sudden, unexpected topological conjunction', made to touch.<sup>39</sup>

Bruce R. Smith has refocused attention on the materiality of the 'cut' as an editorial term, and how it particularly speaks to the 'piece-work' of early modern play-texts, the creations of multiple hands, often over an extended period of time. Smith thinks about cutting as a process of shaping, reshaping and, perhaps, discarding. He is interested in the traces that such processes leave, but doesn't quite consider the possibility that temporary occlusion rather than permanent excision might be more akin to what he is describing.<sup>40</sup> The manuscript of an early modern play-text itself began life as a folded thing, the dramatist (like most writers) first folding the sheet of paper into a bifolium and then sometimes folding it again to create columns, narrow for speech prefixes on the left-hand side of the leaf and for exits on the right, and a wide central column for the text; such pleating was the particular custom of the scrivener Ralph Crane, who copied many manuscripts for the King's Men.<sup>41</sup> A play-text in manuscript might eventually have additions glued or pinned in, but a passage marked for deletion would only rarely be scored through: instead, a vertical line in the margin marked a 'cut', the text itself remaining entirely legible and present (in that state of the text at least) even as it was designated as being not for performance.<sup>42</sup> As James Marino has pointed out, any alterations to the main body of the play-text *after* its entry into a company's repertory have to be thought of in terms of the actors' parts: a monologue could be shortened relatively easily, whether intentionally or unintentionally, or lengthened through improvisation, but the crucial thing was that the cues remained intact, even as the distance between them might be extended or collapsed.<sup>43</sup> *King Lear*, even more than *Hamlet* or *Othello*, offers a reminder that a play-text itself can still have a pleated quality, its Quarto / Folio variants a series of ins and outs, folded, unfolded, refolded by editors rather than actors or playwrights. The lines spoken by Cordelia vividly demonstrate in miniature the way in which such choices are not necessarily cuts, but might rather be thought of as folds, where at the level of scene or speech or line or word, something is folded out and something else is folded in – but it's still there, whether or not the eye of the reader loops down to the collation, and on another occasion the choice might be reversed.

To think of a play-text as a folded thing in this way imagines it as being akin to that most recognisable Renaissance accessory, the ruff, which involved 'meticulously pleating up to nineteen

yards of gossamer-thin lawn into as many as six hundred pleats, which were then sometimes triply or quadruply layered'.<sup>44</sup> The final arrangement of its folds was made by configuring the starched, pressed ruff into 'sets' by pinning them and shaping them with a hot setting or poking stick made from iron or steel; depending on the fashion of the day, the whim of the wearer, and the skill of the laundress, such sets might be large or small, plain, or more elaborate shapes, such as figures-of-eight, and there could well be hundreds of them. The ruff existed *as a ruff* only in the 'fleeting and fragile fixity, illusory solidity' of this temporary form,<sup>45</sup> for without its pleats and sets, a ruff was merely a linen band, and every time it was laundered, or simply caught in a shower of rain, it would have to be starched and set again. A ruff was a beautiful thing, the product of intense, skilled labour, craft, and even creativity, which existed to be worn, to catch the play of light and shadow in motion, which lasted only a short time before being reconfigured and remade. The ruff depended on the endless, repetitive labour of the laundress, which Natasha Korda terms 'laundry time': 'she wrings, she folds, she pleits, she smoothes, she starches, | She stiffens, poakes, and sets and dries again, | And folds'.<sup>46</sup> Even in its apparent finitude and refinement, the ruff – or the play-text, that other temporarily folded thing – contained and manifested the possibility of other future versions of itself.

*King Lear* is an extreme example, but this same imagining of the text as a dynamic folded and foldable thing offers a way of thinking about how particular episodes might be selected for dramatisation from pre-existing material, or how a text might be reconfigured to fit changing circumstances: available personnel, political pressure, court performance. A printed play-text omitting material performed on at least some occasions could be thought of as folding it in: the Parliament scene in the first three quartos of *Richard II*.<sup>47</sup> A play-text, in print or manuscript, which included texts mutually incompatible in performance might be thought of as folding them out: the multiple epilogues at the end of *2 Henry IV*, for instance, or 'a scribal manuscript of Jonson's masque *The Gypsies Metamorphosed* [...] recording three different sets of performances before James I'.<sup>48</sup> In the anonymous predecessor of Shakespeare's play, *The true chronicle historie of King Leir and his three daughters*,<sup>49</sup> Leir and Cordella are victorious at the end and no one dies. Part of the agony of Shakespeare's version, however, whatever the configuration of its textual folds and pleats, is that it retains the palpable presence of its source, dark matter folded in, which it *could* unfold – but doesn't.

1. In Q1, the Ghost asks his son ‘to my unfolding | Lend thy listening ear’ (5.7); he says that he ‘would a tale unfold’ (10). All quotations from *Hamlet* are taken from the Arden Third Series texts, and unless otherwise specified, from Q2 *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2006).
2. John 20.5-7.
3. In *Hamlet: Fold on Fold* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016), Gabriel Josipovici offers an account of the play which, in its title at least, would seem to overlap considerably with my ideas here. In the main it doesn’t: Josipovici’s book is largely untouched by the material turn and his approach is in general ahistorical and quite conceptual. His starting point (pp.10–11) is Mallarmé and (paper, folding) fans; he does note that ‘the word “fold” has a physical quality to it, it is palpable, not abstract’ (p.12), and thinks about it mostly in temporal terms, as ‘a physical and gradual process’ (p.16). Josipovici’s book is divided not into chapters, but into sixteen ‘folds’.
4. My thinking here and elsewhere is much indebted to Jonathan Gil Harris: ‘Time in Shakespeare’s plays is sometimes a progressive line that follows the arc of the sun, but it is also counterintuitively a plane in which the future is behind and the past ahead, and a preposterously folded cloth in which before and after are coeval’ (*Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare* [Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009], pp.3–4, and *passim*).
5. Hilary Mantel, *Wolf Hall* (London: Fourth Estate, 2009), p.23. Lucy Arnold notes that ‘The language of the textile industry, the processes of weaving, dyeing, tailoring and adapting fabrics, saturates [*Wolf Hall*] as a way of talking about textuality, intertextuality and the signifying power of words’, *Reading Hilary Mantel: Haunted Decades* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), p.192. I pay further attention to Mantel’s textiles in *Textile Shakespeare* (in progress).
6. Thomas P. Campbell, ed., *Tapestry in the Renaissance: Art and Magnificence* (Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York) (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp.4, 264. At the time of his death, Henry VIII possessed more than 2700 items of tapestry.
7. Mantel, *Wolf Hall*, p.199.
8. Campbell, *Tapestry in the Renaissance*, p.24. On verdures and green interior décor more generally, see Bruce R. Smith, *The Key of Green: Passion and Perception in Renaissance Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), pp.44–6 and chapter 2, ‘Green Stuff’, *passim*.
9. Mantel, *Wolf Hall*, p.49.
10. *The lives of the noble Grecians and Romanes compared together by that graue learned philosopher and historiographer, Plutarke of Chæronea; translated out of Greeke into French by James Amyot....; and out of French into English, by Thomas North* (London, 1579), sig. M4.
11. ‘The speech of man was like embroidered tapestries, since like them this too had to be extended in order to display its patterns but when it was rolled up it concealed and distorted them (Plutarch, *Life of Themistocles* tr. Bernadotte Perrin [Loeb Classical Library] [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914], 29.126).
12. *The Oxford Francis Bacon, vol.15: The Essayes or Counsells, Civil and Morall*, ed. Michael Kiernan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p.84.
13. In his *Apothegmes* (1625), Bacon records that ‘Themistocles said of Speech; That it was like Arras, that spread abroad shewes faire Images, but contracted, is but like packs’ (*The Oxford Francis Bacon, vol.8: The Historie of the Raigne of King Henry the seventh: and other works of the 1620s*, ed. Michael Kiernan [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011], p.247). Rebecca Olson briefly discusses Plutarch (and Bacon’s version of it) in *Arras Hanging: The Textile that Determined Early Modern Literature and Drama* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2013), pp.22–3. Her work has informed my thinking here, and in the larger project on which this essay draws.
14. William Scott, *The Model of Poesy*, ed. Gavin Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), p.66, 214. Alexander notes that Scott is using North’s translation.
15. Andrew Sofer, *Dark Matter: Invisibility in Drama, Theater, and Performance* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), pp.3, 4. See also Lorna Hutson, ‘The Shakespearean Unscene: Sexual Phantasies in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, *Journal of the British Academy* 4 (2016), pp.169–95.
16. Olson, *Arras Hanging*, p.15. Olson focuses on what she terms ‘unekphrastic’ or blank arras hangings, whose ‘story’ is not described, ‘precisely because the “blank” arras hanging presents the tapestry qua tapestry, as a three-dimensional object. Because we do not know what is “on” it, the undescribed tapestry in fiction helps us to think about what the materiality of an arras hanging – independent of its figured surface – contributes to a narrative or dramatic scene [...] the arras hanging often functions as a “blank” or unfixed screen that invites readers and playgoers to project something highly idiosyncratic onto the text’ (p.3). She is interested in suggesting what might be on such an arras, and also in the space behind the hanging; I am less convinced by her specific suggestions about the possible content of hangings on stage, for example, that the arras hanging in Gertrude’s closet might depict Hercules or some version of the Kronborg tapestries at Elsinore, which depict the Danish succession (pp.103–4, 116–7).
17. Sofer gives examples from *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: ‘the *Dream* revolves around a mysterious object of desire, the Indian boy who never appears onstage but bends the action around him. Moreover, Athens’ fringes are haunted by unseen redoubts of female autonomy: the nunnery, Amazonia, and Lysander’s aunt’s house. Woven into the play’s fabric, these negative spaces are, along with the Indian boy, dark matter. Spectral reading attends

to such ghostly presences and asks what phenomenological work they do for the audience’ (*Dark Matter*, p.15).

18. *Enargeia* is vividness, a quality appealing to the senses, especially sight.
19. William Gruber, *Offstage Space, Narrative, and the Theatre of the Imagination* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), *passim*. As Gruber suggests, ‘in some cases a playwright might place sexual encounters offstage for reasons of practicality (the Renaissance stage on which the parts of women were played by adolescent boys would be an example) and yet still take advantage of that visual absence in order to bring about a cultivated sense of arousal’ (p.65). Michael Neill is just one of the critics who has written about the bed and its curtains in *Othello*, and their role in that play’s economy of the ‘obscene’: ‘what is displayed on the bed [at the play’s end] is something, in Othello’s own profoundly resonant phrase, “too hideous to be shown” (3.3.107). The wordplay here [...] amounts to a kind of desperate iteration: what is *hideous* is what should be kept *hidden*, out of sight. “Hideous” in this sense is virtually an Anglo-Saxon equivalent for the Latinate “obscene” – referring to that which is profoundly improper, not merely indecent but tainted (in the original sense) or unclean; and that which should also, according to Shakespeare’s own folk-etymology, be kept unseen, *off-stage*, hidden. The play begins with Iago’s evocation of just such an obscenity; it ends by seeking to return it to its proper darkness, closing the curtains that Iago first metaphorically plucked aside’ (‘Unproper Beds: Race, Adultery, and the Hideous in *Othello*’, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 [1989], pp.383–412 [pp.394–5]). See also Patricia Parker’s exploration of the relationships between rhetorical dilation and the ‘language of uncovering, dilating, and opening the “privy” place of woman, in the quasi-pornographic discourse of anatomy and early modern gynecology’ in ‘*Othello* and *Hamlet*: Dilation, Spying, and the “Secret Place” of Woman’, *Representations* 44 (1993), pp.60–95 (p.60).
20. All quotations are from *Cymbeline*, ed. Valerie Wayne (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2017).
21. *Ekphrasis*: the verbal description of a work of visual or plastic art; *amplificatio*: rhetorical enlargement or extension, to increase a statement’s impact and importance.
22. This is noted in passing by Emma Depledge, who describes it as ‘an intertextual reference designed to plant the threat of rape in the reader/ audience’s mind’ (‘Paper/Ink’, in *Shakespeare/Text: Contemporary Readings in Textual Studies, Editing and Performance*, ed. Claire L. Bourne (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2021), pp.383–401 (p.388)).
23. Tiziano Vecellio, *Tarquin and Lucretia* (c.1571), Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.
24. All quotations from *Lucrece* are from *Shakespeare’s Poems*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones and H. R. Woudhuysen (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2007).
25. Laura Gowing, *Common Bodies: Women, Touch and Power in Seventeenth-Century England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), p.106.
26. Rachel Eisendrath, “‘Lamentable Objects’”: Ekphrasis and Historical Materiality in Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*’, in David Kennedy and Richard Meek, eds., *Ekphrastic Encounters: New Interdisciplinary Essays on Literature and the Visual Arts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), pp.27–47 (p.42).
27. Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque*, trans. Tom Conley (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), p.35.
28. The *Catalogue of British Drama* gives a best-guess date of 1594, within a likely range of 1592–5. *Lucrece* was entered into the Stationers’ Register on 9 May 1594, and probably printed that summer.
29. ‘Sheep’ is first suggested by ‘shipped’ in the previous line; Shakespeare has Valentine travelling from Verona to Milan by sea. All quotations are taken from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, ed. William Carroll (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2004).
30. *Much Ado About Nothing*, ed. Claire McEachern (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2005), 2.3.136–8.
31. Sylvia’s last line is ‘O heaven!’ (5.4.59) as Proteus makes to assault her; she is silent for the remaining 110 lines of the play. There is an anticipation here of the way in which sexual violence is more subtly and systematically the ‘dark matter’ of *Midsummer Night’s Dream*: ‘No one, of course, is raped in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*’, as Lorna Hutson points out, but as she explores, the history of Theseus in particular as well as the situation of the lovers makes it an ever-present/absent threat in the play (‘The Shakespearean Unscene’, p.181 and *passim*).
32. Nancy Vickers, “‘The Blazon of Sweet Beauty’s Best’”: Shakespeare’s *Lucrece*’, in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Geoffrey H. Hartman and Patricia Parker (New York: Routledge, 1986), pp.95–115 (p.96). Vickers briefly discusses the *Cymbeline* connection.
33. Duncan-Jones and Woudhuysen note that ‘the Elizabethans folded and flattened their letters into oblong or square shapes’ (1310n) but suggest, on the basis of 1341 (the servant who is to carry the letter ‘receives the scroll’) that she then ‘coils or winds the letter up into a scroll’ (1310n). I don’t think that this is necessarily the case; scroll can be figurative, and the letter is certainly sealed and superscribed exactly as an Elizabethan reader would expect.
34. Literally twisted or tangled together, intertwined, from the Latin *plicāre*, to fold or twist.
35. Olson suggests that there is a real tapestry present in 2.2, that it doesn’t depict Cleopatra, and that it’s still there in 2.4; she doesn’t make a

connection to Shakespeare’s *Antony and Cleopatra* (*Arras hanging*, pp.139–40). This seems to me both overly literal and overly complicated.

36. Hutson, ‘The Shakespearean Unscene’, p.182, quoting Erasmus, *De copia, Collected Works of Erasmus* 24, ed. Craig Thompson (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), pp.578–9. Erasmus’s phrase is *constare circumstantiarum explicatione* (*D. Erasmi Roterodami de duplici copia verborum ac rerum commentarii duo* [London: Henry Middleton, 1573], sig. Q6).
37. There are variants and emendations here: Q’s ‘pleated’ is cognate with F’s ‘plighted’, and is more recognisable to a modern reader; ‘covert’ is a widely accepted editorial emendation for ‘couers’, in both Q and F, that which is concealed replacing the action of concealing. Q: ‘Time shal vnfold what pleated cūning hides, | Who couers faults, at last shame them derides’ (B4v); F: ‘Time shall vnfold what plighted cūning hides, | Who couers faults, at last with shame derides’ (1.1; Qq3). The quotation is from the Arden Third Series, ed. R.A. Foakes; in Cam2, Jay Halio takes F in its entirety.
38. She also echoes *Lucrece*: as Lucrece offers Tarquin honourable entertainment as her husband’s friend, he is ‘Hiding base sin in pleats of majesty’ (93), a connection noted by Woudhuysen and Duncan-Jones.
39. Harris, quoting Serres, *Conversations* 59 (p.173). Serres thinks with the handkerchief at length, but not in relation to *Othello*. As Harris points out, ‘inasmuch as the crumpling of the handkerchief serves as Serres’s metaphor for the forging of nonlinear connections between past and present, it foregrounds how the temporality of conjunction is generated by a creative act that couples critic and historical materials’ (*Untimely Matter*, p.174). Critics also crumple time.
40. Bruce R. Smith, *Shakespeare | Cut: Rethinking Cutwork in an Age of Distraction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp.7–8, 16, 30–31, 34–5, 46 and *passim*.
41. On such folding, and Crane in particular, see Grace Ioppolo, *Dramatists and their manuscripts in the age of Shakespeare, Jonson, Middleton and Heywood* (London: Routledge, 2006), pp.87–9.
42. See Grace Ioppolo, ‘The Transmission of an English Renaissance Play-Text’, in *A New Companion to Renaissance Drama*, ed. Arthur F. Kinney and Thomas Warren Hopper (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 2017), pp.545–559 (p.547).
43. ‘The only thing worse than not giving the cue is giving a cue no one else on stage can answer. Cutting a play had practical dangers, because a cut speech’s ghost might return and go unanswered. Adding speeches risked the actor requiring the prompter, cutting speeches risked more substantial confusion, with no safety net. Certainly, early modern playing companies took these risks. But they did not ignore them’, James J. Marino, ‘Parts and the Playscript: Seven Questions’, in Tiffany Stern, ed., *Rethinking Theatrical Documents in Shakespeare’s England* (London: The Arden Shakespeare, 2020), pp.52–67 (p.61).
44. Natasha Korda, ‘Accessorizing the Stage: Alien Women’s Work and the Fabric of Early Modern Material Culture’, in Bella Mirabella, ed., *Ornamentalism: the Art of Renaissance Accessories* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2011), pp.223–252 (p.224).
45. Natasha Korda, ‘Much Ado About Ruffs: Laundry Time in the Feminist Archive’, in Kristen Poole and Owen Williams, eds., *Early Modern Histories of Time: The Periodizations of Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), pp.124–142 (p.127).
46. John Taylor, ‘The Praise of Cleane Linnen’ (1624), quoted Korda, ‘Laundry Time’, p.128. As Korda observes, ‘the labor time congealed in starched ruffs extends from hours into days, weeks, and even months if we include the manufacture of the ruff itself’ (‘Accessorizing the Stage’, p.224); in these essays and in *Labor’s Lost: Women’s Work and the Early Modern English Stage* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), Korda writes persuasively about the role of women’s textile labour in the early modern theatrical economy.
47. The scene, depicting the deposition of King Richard II by Henry Bolingbroke, was not printed until 1608; the first quarto appeared in 1597, when the play was almost certainly still being performed. See Ioppolo, *Dramatists and their Manuscripts*, p.132.
48. Ioppolo, *Dramatists and their Manuscripts*, p.143.
49. It may have been written and first performed as early as 1589; it was printed for the first time in 1605, and so would have been available in print to the first audiences of Shakespeare’s *King Lear* well before Q1 *King Lear* (1608).

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