I want it all or nothing at all.
—Miisa, “All or Nothing” (1994), But I’m a Cheerleader film soundtrack (1999)

 Whereas the erotic go-between described in the previous chapter exceeds the sexual dyad, transforming it into a tightly bound network of use, love, and service, the fancies that populate what follows here are more free-floating, their aims more desultory. I turn now to the vagaries of bottomless desire: insatiable and indiscriminate appetites for too many objects at once. Unanchored and diffuse, this form of desire does not resolve in any specific erotic ends; instead, it is a boundless lack that is not satisfied, and that knows not what, if anything, would give satisfaction.

 This mode of promiscuous fancy shapes the affects of wanting and consuming in two very different comedies: the stylized, mercurial, courtly world of shifting shapes and symbols in William Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night (1601); and the earthy, sensual world of market pleasures and desiring mobs in Ben Jonson’s Bartholomew Fair (1614). This juxtaposition may seem strange; but both plays are structured by an underlying erotic economy in which excessively proliferating desire feeds on itself, generating more lack, more longing, and more unfulfilled hunger. Both plays’ protagonists—the perpetually dissatisfied Duke Orsino in Twelfth Night and the voracious, insatiable Bartholomew Cokes in Bartholomew Fair—are bottomless
vortices of lack. The moment they attain anything they desire, their interest instantly detaches from it and redirects to something else. Though satisfied by nothing, they persist in desiring everything—everything, that is, except for what each claims, in their respective comic plots, to want: marriage to a woman. Insatiable desire governs other plots in these two plays as well: it is evident in Twelfth Night in Malvolio’s deluded wish for cross-gartered stockings as an instrument of erotic gratification; and in the range of problematic appetites staged among Jonson’s fairgoers vis-à-vis the products and pleasures of the Fair—particularly Bartholomew Cokes’s negative foil, the abstemious Puritan Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, whose eroticized disavowal and annihilation of the Fair is no less a form of bottomless hunger than Cokes’s.

“The Food of Love”

Twelfth Night (subtitled What You Will) both begins and ends by obliquely referring to the strange shapes and capacities of Orsino’s desire. It begins with a soliloquy on the prodigious swiftness with which he loses interest, again and again:

If music be the food of love, play on.
Give me excess of it that, surfeiting,
The appetite may sicken and so die.
That strain again—it had a dying fall;
Oh, it came o’er my ear like the sweet sound
That breathes upon a bank of violets
Stealing and giving odor. Enough, no more!
’Tis not so sweet now as it was before.

Desire is figured here as an absurdly accelerated cycle of excess, surfeit, and aversion: if music is the “food” of love, it is not the victual that satiates appetite but rather the fuel that inflames it. By inflaming his appetite, Orsino hopes to kill it, to move through a sickening point to aversion, a state without the hunger of desire. The sensuous pleasure of the music he solicits—labor performed onstage, by musicians of his household, who work for him—is abruptly reversed when
it begins “stealing and giving odor,” making desire distasteful. These opening lines betray the chronically unfixed, even non-alloerotic (non-partner-oriented) quality of Orsino’s desire. The conceit of the comedic plot is that he desires Olivia; but the erotic cathexis figured in this opening speech has nothing to do with her, or with any beloved at all.

This is only the first of many moments in Twelfth Night where erotic desire appears to autoerotically—or autophagically—feed on itself, rather than proceeding forward and outward toward fulfillment in external objects. Orsino’s desire has been understood as confused and un-self-aware in other criticism on Twelfth Night. René Girard makes many of the same observations in A Theatre of Envy: that the play’s heterosexual pairings are conflicted and at odds, fraught with humiliation and ulterior motives; and that Orsino’s renunciatory lovesickness signals some pathological appetite (“since all objects that can be possessed prove valueless, I will renounce them once and for all in favor of those objects that cannot be possessed”). Girard couches his reading in languages of intemperance, secret gluttony, sinful nature, secret guilt, sophistry and self-abuse, anxious misogyny, and performative renunciation—that is, he describes Orsino in every way as a queer figure, without using the word. A closer look, at this soliloquy and at Twelfth Night next to Bartholomew Fair, offers up myriad reasons to use the word, ways to understand these affects as the hallmarks of a queer mode of expression, a queer erotic bent:

O spirit of love, how quick and fresh art thou,  
That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
Receiveth as the sea, naught enters there  
Of what validity and pitch so’er,  
But falls into abatement and low price  
Even in a minute. So full of shapes is fancy  
That it alone is high fantastical. (1.1.9–15)

The “spirit of love” Orsino hails is not bound toward any ultimate climax; rather, it is ceaselessly motile in producing and reproducing itself. Its “quickness” and “freshness” give it a prodigious “capacity” for new objects of desire. It takes them in as indiscriminately as the
sea—and negates their value and specificity just as quickly, moving on “even in a minute” to receive the next object, in an endless succession of canceled loves. What strikes me as queer about the structure of this desire—besides how falling out of love appears to be its repetition compulsion—is how it behaves like an impressively capacious, promiscuously receptive organ. Its receptivity is not entirely passive either: it undoes the world’s allocation of more “validity and pitch” to some objects than others. In its prodigious receptivity, all things—and people—end up at the same “low price” once love is done with them. But at the passage’s ending, notice that the love objects that fall in and out of favor so fast do not disappear completely. Rather, they pile on one another in what Orsino calls the “fancy,” packing it “full of shapes.” These lines figure fancy—the capacity for desiring—in spatial, even bodily, terms: as a densely populated internal reservoir of past, present, and future love objects coexisting in a jumble that defies any heteronormative model of supersession or progress: out of love, but still part of the “high fantastical.” It is this mechanism for the production and reproduction of desire, through surfeit and lack, that is my object of analysis in this chapter.

Such a capacious fancy might almost contain the volume of existing scholarship addressing desire, particularly same-sex desire, in Twelfth Night (while Bartholomew Fair lies at the opposite pole, with little critical attention to its erotic structure). But I propose here, in full knowledge and enjoyment of its additive, even superfluous, quality, another queer reading of Twelfth Night: one that locates the play’s queerness in its articulation of an unmoored, unsatisfiable appetite that feeds on its own lack. Other readings have offered varying verdicts on the reinscription of normative gender and heterosexuality in the play’s resolution.3 Or they have focused on specific relational bonds, like the homosocial friendship between Sebastian and Antonio, or the homoerotic flirtation between Olivia and Cesario/Viola.4 Currents of queer attraction run every which way throughout the cast of characters: Orsino to himself; Orsino to Cesario/Viola; Olivia to Cesario/Viola; Malvolio to Olivia; Olivia to her dead brother; Viola to Sebastian; Sebastian to Viola; and Antonio to Sebastian. In my view, however, the queerness of Twelfth Night permeates beyond its cross-dressing intrigues or even its same-sex interactions, to a more
pervasive structural queerness at the level of the play’s underlying symbolic and erotic economy—the mechanism by which desires, and their objects, are generated. In what follows, I argue that “fancy” in the play amounts to a polymorphously queer model of erotic generativity. I understand the mode of desiring proffered through Orsino in connection with contemporary notions of fancy, a shifting conception of imagination that functions as a queer, asexual double of heterosexual reproduction, generating not offspring but fantastical, artificial, and aesthetic objects of desire. I connect this model to an emergent hierarchy of value that construes the desire for fancy things as a marker of sexually suspect and unproductive masculinity. In this reading, what is queer about Orsino is not the gendering of the intimacy he shares with his manservant Viola/Cesario, but his account of how desiring happens and how it feels—an account that, by virtue of its protagonistic centrality, stands as the play’s model of eros itself.

“So Full of Shapes”

As the title of this book suggests, the idea of fancy serves as a link between the play of queer affect in literary forms and the history of “sexuality” as it is commonly understood. The desires on display in this chapter have aesthetic, economic, and sexual consequences—namely, the gradual shift in meaning of the term “fancy” over the ensuing three centuries, to characterize a taste for pleasurable and beautiful things as a degraded, promiscuous, queer desire for improper, unproductive love objects. Fancy pertains to the negative of sexual reproduction: to material products—from high art to a monstrous baby—fashioned by appetites distinctly other than those resolving in so-called natural or legitimate procreative sex. Over the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, “fancy” develops from an older definition synonymous with “fantasy” or “phantasy” into a complex explanatory ideology for how images formed in the mind are bodied forth in material forms. The term originally describes “the process, and the faculty, of forming mental representations of things not present to the senses.” It is, in this early use, “chiefly applied to the so-called creative or productive imagination, which frames images of objects, events, or conditions that have not occurred in actual
experience.”7 Yet around the same time, an erotic definition develops in which “fancy” can mean desire itself, “amorous inclination, love,”8 or, when used as a verb, the cathexis linking desire to the conjured object of libidinal fantasy: “to be or fall in love with.”9 This is the definition we all know. But from its inception, erotic fancy has not been a necessarily pleasant state.

Elsewhere in Shakespeare, negative uses of “fancy” refer to the pain of unsatisfied desire, glancing at the queer economy of “fancy” outlined here. In A Midsummer Night’s Dream in 1590, “fancy-sick” describes love’s physical toll on an enamored Helena—her blood, the vital material of nutrition and generation, is wasting away from her: “All fancy-sick she is and pale of cheer/With sighs of love that costs the fresh blood dear” (3.2.96–97). In this case, “fancy” connotes a love that physically consumes itself, expending its potential for self-perpetuation in pathological desire. Helena is harshly disciplined for her unnatural, enchanted cathexis onto Demetrius. Her sickness prefigures the sickness of pregnancy, which “costs the fresh blood dear” (3.2.97) in gestation and birth. This is fancy functioning as a trace of reproduction; its figurations mimetically inscribe an asexual semblance of sexual generativity onto an unnaturally desiring, nonreproductive body. Though Helena’s fancy is turned violently inward, rather than free-floating in a sea of shapes, it is no less capricious than Orsino’s desire. In both instances, “fancy” is a negatively charged synonym for love, connoting aspects of desire that occur outside of alloerotic or reproductive couplings. Because this reading of the word has the potential to reveal the vexed, fickle, and unsatisfying dynamics underlying most (if not all) desire, it would be easy to simply take the discourse of fancy in Twelfth Night as giving voice to an early modern register of tormented, illicit love that goes under the name of Petrarchanism. “Fancy’s” emergent seventeenth-century connotation of imaginative facility with aesthetic and poetic production places the term close at hand for English translations of Italian verse and English Petrarchan poetry; translations of Petrarch’s sonnets used “fancy” for so many terms that it came to signify everything and nothing.10 Indeed, the proximity of the erotic and poetic vocabularies puts Twelfth Night’s language of fancy at risk of being read instrumentally, as a kind of missing link in a grand
Petrarchan narrative of desire. Melissa Sanchez has illuminated the inherent perversity—even the inherent queerness—of Petrarchan language, pointing out how its erotic power dynamics of abjection and masochism constitute early modern England’s rhetorics of both love and politics. What I see in the erotic economy of Twelfth Night, though, is not quite the same as the Petrarchan sort of perversity. Orsino’s speech does not voice Petrarchanism’s fixated, avowedly sadomasochistic orientation toward a singular beloved, despite its strangely truncated Petrarchan language figuring love as appetite; its perversity is of a more free-floating, structural kind. The play gives its desiring characters some of the same objects figured by Petrarchan love (hunger and food, music, and sweet scent in Orsino’s first speech; elsewhere, plays on painting, the blazon, and Virgilian allusions). But this language contains a comment about itself and the desire it represents. It is an already anachronistic reference, for an audience in 1602, to a literary tradition that is marked as quaint and artificial, a register that signifies not only linguistic art in talking about erotic desire but also its inverse: the constitution of desire through the artifice of language. Fancy thus not only conjures a trace of reproduction, but reverses it, taking up the bodily consequences of sexual desire and implicating them with the production of art.

By attending to the denaturalizing effects of Petrarchan language in Twelfth Night, we can relearn some basic lessons of psychoanalytic literary criticism: that desire is always produced and mediated by language, taking shape within the structures of language that give it its vocabulary for narrating itself; and that desire’s constitution through language endows it with more, not less, disruptive, queering potential. Fancy in the first scene of Twelfth Night posits at the outset that none of the loves represented in the play are anything that could be called natural. On the contrary, its image of love does not appear to be object oriented at all. “If music be the food of love,” then the putative beloved is, necessarily, not. Orsino does not want her to materialize; this form of longing does not end in the disillusionment of comparing embodied presence to idealized absence, or even in the inevitable repulsion that is delayed by, and follows from, sexual consummation. The only desire voiced in a sustained way here is the craving for his appetite to self-annihilate without satisfaction.
At the same time as “fancy” acquires its valences of love and eros, it begins to differentiate from “imagination,” into a definition emphasizing aesthetic prowess—“aptitude for the invention of illustrative or decorative imagery”—that is, the ability to fashion images for purposes of pleasure. The word’s simultaneous connotations of spectral illusion, hallucinatory delusion, original invention, and artistic improvisation are all subtly contiguous with these mental processes. When considered under this cluster of emergent meanings, the closing lines of Orsino’s speech carry a new implication: that fancy can make and desire any object it wants. In fact, the soliloquy appears in this light to be far more an autoerotic valorization of Orsino’s own capacity for imaginative fantasy than to have anything to do with Olivia, or any other extant love object. If fancy is the faculty of forming mental images “of things not present to the senses,” then it must include the ability to imagine an erotic object that could exist, but doesn’t (yet). In this sense, fancy is an eroticism founded in absence, which feeds on desire. It can take the impression of a lack and reproduce it as a fantasy, shaped by the mind’s own, not necessarily virtuous predilections. The range of possible fantasy objects, then, is by no means limited to real, natural, heteroerotic, or socially acceptable object choices.

Alongside its self-negating, abortive attitude toward external love objects, the fancy Orsino describes possesses hints of a queer generativity as well; if it can be “full of shapes,” it may be imagined not only as a receptive orifice but a generative matrix, a psychic womb that conceives and makes mental forms inside itself. Early modern figurations of fancy are used to account for all kinds of generative processes that exhibit some uncanny spark: poetry, art, science—and human reproduction, when it goes awry. Even an artificial object, such as a picture of a “blacke-a-more,” had the potential to become unnaturally naturalized in the body of a child by the telekinetic force of a woman’s transgressive imagination or fancy. The well-known early modern theory of the “mother’s fancy” is not only about racial anxiety and the disobedient female imagination; when subjected to a queer analysis, it also introduces imagination into the mechanism of reproduction. It allows fantasy and fiction to become part of how sex, birth, and descent work. It also notes the unpredictable physicality
with which unruly erotic drives can work on the body, and the power of uncontained imagination to bear disruptive, surprising shapes into the world. By engaging it here, want to move fancy away from a primary association with female sexuality gone wrong and to draw out the other, promiscuous forms of generativity embedded in its mechanism. In fact, the transgressive mother’s fancy is perhaps the one kind of wayward desire that does not seriously threaten in *Twelfth Night* or *Bartholomew Fair*. Decoupled from heterosexual reproduction, fancy does more varied and interesting work in these two plays as a shaping force that shadows or queers generation, emphasizing its artifice, and diverting erotic energy away from attainment, to longing and lack.

The erotic sense of fancy carries over into a whole range of colloquial meanings indicating loose or uncontained sexualities: someone who is “fancy-free” or “fancy-loose” is untethered by heterosexual marriage. In *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, the term illustrates a well-known image of queer virginity in a passage about a vestal votaress immune to Cupid’s hailing arrows of love: “And the imperial votress passèd on/In maiden meditation, fancy-free” (2.1.163–64). This vestal virgin’s queer imperviousness, however, is shadowed, immediately preceded in the scene, by Tatiana’s evocation in memory of her pregnant friend the Indian votaress, whose body swells with imaginative pleasures that are not contained by heterosexual models of reproduction. In her artful imitation of ships at sail in the harbor, it is she who seems to “grow big-bellied with the wanton wind” (2.1.129).

As Alicia Andrzejewski explicates, the Indian votaress’s pregnancy is neither produced by, nor productive of, heterosexual erotic desires or social bonds; instead it generates a queer kinship between women that reaches beyond death. The pair of votaresses here are both implicated in a model of desire figured as fancy, through which we are reminded that heterosexual generation is not the only kind—and that desire may not resolve in, or even be necessary for, generation at all.

Orsino’s fancy is figured as replete with forms; its fullness of shapes resonates strongly with Freud’s term for the wide-ranging capacities of infantile desire, polymorphous perversity. “Polymorphous” literally means many shapes—“full of shapes.” In asserting that human desire is primally, originally “polymorphously perverse,”
Freud contends that sexual norms—including, crucially, the taboos “against members of one’s own sex” and against “the transferring of the part played by the genitals to other organs and areas of the body”—must be taught and enforced by disciplining children into (hetero)normative human sexual subjects. Thus the heterosexual telos of the marriage plot depends on more originary auto- and homoerotic energies to make even its performance possible. Imagining desire in *Twelfth Night* as polymorphously perverse—that is, as encyclopedically flexible, infantile, and unable to differentiate among proper and improper objects—reveals an erotics of nonfulfillment cycling through the play, only incompletely resutured to heterosexual objects even in the comic resolution. I would name what Orsino describes as “fancy” in *Twelfth Night* as an affective mode of polymorphous perversity. The opening speech does away with any language of a developmental trajectory or timeline for love; it also confounds clear-cut distinctions between natural and unnatural processes of desiring. It traces the expected sequence of object oriented desire in the negative, as an absent presence full of artifice and caprice—not to say deviance—and shadows nonreproductive homo- and autoerotic interactions with hints of generation.

Though the last phrase of Orsino’s opening speech might appear to be a tautology (if “fancy” corresponds to “fantastical”), I think it is instead a suggestive pun that plays with the multiple valences of the term “fancy” to gesture toward the queer stakes of the desire it is figuring. In my reading, the phrase, “so full of shapes is fancy/That it alone is high fantastical” links the “high fantastical” virtuosity of the fancy in generating novel images to the indiscriminate erotic “appetite” that causes the fancy to be “so full of shapes.” There is a suggestion here that art and poetry, the material forms by which creativity enters the world, are attributable in some sense to the promiscuous, unappeasable force called fancy. Unsatisfied, wandering lust, proliferating in a crowded pile of fantasmatic “shapes” filling one’s “fancy,” may be where aesthetic production comes from. Of course, the figuration of desire in the rest of the play expands far beyond this single speech. But the groundwork is laid for the play’s subsequent explorations of loss, obstruction, and doubt: sexual difference will be erased, confused, or insignificant; available love
objects will be substituted for inaccessible ones; prosthetic garments will become the objects of disproportionate investment, speculation, and thwarted hope; and desire will fail to follow any of the predictable paths.

Fancy reveals that heterosexual reproductivity is not a prior or inevitable condition; rather, it is inescapably supplanted by, and utterly dependent on, auto- and homoerotic energies to animate it and make it possible. For the doubly twinned foursome of Olivia, Viola, Sebastian, and Orsino, fancy works tacitly as well as explicitly to demonstrate that the primary bonds of love and desire in the play are not the superficially normalized matches eventually instated at the resolution, but the web of homoerotic and incestuous affinities that precede them. These bonds are based on the likeness that Aubrey, looking back nostalgically at Beaumont and Fletcher’s symbiotic collaboration, called “a wonderfull consimility of phansey.”

When Sebastian appears in Illyria and sees Olivia, his ultimate heterosexual object choice, for the first time, he implores “fancy” to keep his sister Viola’s image before his eyes instead—“Let fancy still my sense in Lethe steep./If it be thus to dream, still let me sleep” (4.1.57–58)—because he believes he is seeing Viola in a dream.

Viola cries out to her own fancy after she unknowingly impersonates Sebastian and fights with Antonio, who loves Sebastian and cannot understand why Viola does not know him. Viola begs to be “taken” for one so close to her that he is almost indistinguishable from herself: “Prove true, imagination, oh, prove true,/That I, dear brother, be now ta’en for you” (3.4.342–43).

Act 1, scene 2 juxtaposes the images of Olivia and Viola mourning their brothers, whose shapes in these two sisters’ fancies do more than just take precedence over possible romantic couplings; they turn the women from heteroerotic attractions. Orsino’s man, Valentine, describes Olivia’s practice of memory:

But, like a cloistress, she will veiled walk
And water once a day her chamber round
With eye-offending brine. All this to season
A brother’s dead love, which she would keep fresh
And lasting in her sad remembrance. (1.1.27–31)
This language leaves an open question as to whether Olivia’s mourning is more akin to summoning a spirit by means of the fantastical arts, cultivating a plant, or pickling a vegetable. Though her brother has passed into the realm of fantastical shapes, Olivia wants to preserve him in her fancy, where she can continue to interact with him, with the “brine” of her tears. The language of pickling here (“brine,” “season,” “keep fresh”) gives the process a salient materiality, by which the dead brother’s fancy image in Olivia’s memory (that is, in her imagination) must be manufactured and preserved with the brine of her tears. Olivia’s fancy also forecloses her participation in heterosexual reproduction; her eroticism is directed toward a dead man. In refusing a heterosexual love object, she has, in Freud’s language of narcissism, “substituted for real objects imaginary ones from [her] memory.”25 She has withdrawn from people and things in the external world and replaced them in her fantasy life. Moreover, the dead brother’s impression alters Olivia’s performance of sexual identity, to that of a celibate nun who has spectacularly “abjured the sight/And company of men” (1.2.39–40).

Viola’s desire for her absent brother is also stoked by an image that her fancy constructs from language, a narrative she receives from the Captain. The Captain describes in florid detail how Sebastian, in the shipwreck, bound himself to a floating mast and rode the waves:

I saw your brother,
Most provident in peril, bind himself
(Courage and hope both teaching him the practice)
To a strong mast that lived upon the sea.
Where, like Arion on the dolphin’s back,
I saw him hold acquaintance with the waves,
So long as I could see. (1.2.11–17)

Viola’s imagination shapes these words into a verbal effigy in the form of her brother’s body. She pays the Captain for his words: “For saying so, there’s gold” (1.2.17). The purchase of this verbal conjuration marks the breakdown between nature and artifice: if the story of Sebastian on the mast were a purely fictional tale, made in the crucible of the Captain’s imagination, it would still have an affec-
tive and market value to Viola, whose fancy manufactures it into a valuable substitute love object. What fancy is doing here resonates with Derrida’s critique of the “natural” through the idea of the “dangerous supplement,” in his reading of Jean-Jacques Rousseau. As in Derrida, absence is functioning for Olivia and Viola as the primary condition for desire. The (absent) brothers are conjured with words, ritual, tears—all supplements that are actually the point, the enactment of the desire itself. This echoes Derrida’s reversal of Rousseau, in which he recasts the absence-based “supplements” (masturbation and writing) as primary attractions and defenses, rather than secondary to the pleasures of presence (partner sex and speech): “The supplement has not only the power of procuring an absent presence through its image; procuring it for us through the proxy [procuration] of the sign, it holds it at a distance and masters it.”26 The mental images conjured by fancy in Twelfth Night are this kind of active, procuring supplement: mediating, autoerotic, queer objects of desire in their own right. Tracing the persistence of fancy reveals the truth of Derrida’s point that when we interact with another, present body, we, like Olivia and Viola, are always already interacting with the image of the absent body—and our construction of said image—in our fancy. The Captain’s narrative actually has something to offer Viola that Sebastian in the flesh would not; it is pure form, absent of subjectivity. It can be used to Viola’s fancy.

If fancy induces Viola to autoerotic substitution, it spurs Olivia’s desire to swerve and attach to “Cesario,” Viola’s purpose-made masculine persona. The homoerotic tension between the two women has been influentially glossed, by Traub and others, as lesbian desire.27 About this relationship, which hardly appears to need queering, I would point out that, like the polymorphously perverse Orsino, Olivia can also conjure (auto)erotic objects through the power of her fancy. We know that her fancy hosts the form of an ideal Cesario/Viola; we do not know whether that ideal form is anatomically male. It is an open question whether Olivia starts to suspect that Viola is a woman in their exchange in act 3, scene 1:

Viola: Then you think right. I am not what I am.
Olivia: I would you were as I would have you be. (132–33)
If Olivia does start to suspect, it is not at all clear whether perhaps Viola as a female is “as [Olivia] would have [her] be.” To be specific, we are not at all sure whether or not the ideal Cesario/Viola in Olivia’s fancy possesses that “little thing” that “would make” the Viola “tell them how much [she] lack[s] of a man”—that is, a penis (3.4.271–72). If no, Olivia’s attraction is homoerotic. If yes, then Olivia’s desire “swerves” toward the heteroerotic, but there is nothing “natural” about the body onto which it cathects. Olivia’s fancy-image of Cesario/Viola is then supplemented by the presence of a prosthetic phallus, added not by nature but by the artifice of imagination—a fancied apparitional counterpart to the young transmasculine weaver from Vitry-le-François, discussed in chapter 1, whose sartorial and sexual “inventions” were discovered and punished in Montaigne. Either possibility decouples natural from heteroerotic, and unnatural from homoerotic, desire. With or without the “little thing,” Cesario/Viola’s imagined body cannot fit into any category of the natural or heteronormative; Olivia’s construction is inevitably the product (and object) of a queered desire.

I am trying to highlight that Olivia is doing to Cesario/Viola what the audience is also doing to the boy actor playing Viola: speculating about what he looks like under his clothes. The audience enjoys the erotic frisson of imagining a prosthetic female body that we know is not physically there between the boy actor’s body and Cesario’s clothes (which are really Sebastian’s clothes). The actor playing Cesario/Viola is tasked with communicating a gorgeously awkward, ambiguous negotiation between performing a girl and performing a girl in disguise as a boy. Yet though the cross-dressed boy-heroeine received a great deal of critical and theatrical attention in the late twentieth century, audiences of our current historical moment have been given a chance to wonder in a newly defamiliarized way about Olivia’s imagination and desire. The early twenty-first century has seen a spate of highly acclaimed productions of *Twelfth Night* with casts made up entirely of male-bodied actors, notably including Declan Donnellan’s long-lived Cheek By Jowl production (which has had its most recent life as a Russian-language production dating from 2003), and the celebrated Shakespeare’s Globe productions of 2002 and 2013 starring Mark Rylance as Olivia. These productions
tend to center Olivia as the avatar of gender art and gender fancy in the play, pointing up the contrast between male actor playing “real” woman (Olivia) and male actor playing woman playing boy (Cesario/Viola). Critical responses to these performances often emphasize the character’s femininity and the success of the male actor in seamlessly embodying an ideal image of feminine beauty (Ben Brantley on Rylance’s Olivia: “reserved but emotionally ripe,” “woven out of starlight,” “seemed to float across the stage”). However, even in productions where a male-bodied Olivia is staged as the consummate woman, the dramatic indeterminacy around the shape of her desire remains. Feminine gender does not entail any necessary directionality of desire, any more than it requires a female body. We still cannot know her fancy.

“It Should Be One of My Complexion”

In stark contrast to Orsino’s love rhapsody with himself, Malvolio’s spectacular amorous failure, and the failure of his yellow cross-gartered stockings to fulfill their hoped-for erotic function, exemplify a manifestation of fancy that seems at first glance to be object oriented, or even heterosexual. However, the affair of the stockings ultimately ends up contributing to the overarching structure of polymorphously perverse desire in the play. Pondering a prank letter which implants in his fancy a delusion that Olivia is in love with him, Malvolio muses, “‘Tis but fortune; all is fortune. Maria once told me she did affect me, and I have heard herself come thus near, that, should she fancy, it should be one of my complexion” (2.5.20–23). Malvolio’s infatuation with Olivia may be the most straightforwardly heteroerotic cathexis in the play, and even it can only be articulated in negative terms. It is founded on a lie and can only be phrased as a not very near, hypothetical, future subjunctive affection. Any possibility of dyadic erotic congress in this play—heteroerotic or homoerotic, cross-dressed or merely ridiculously costumed—can only be spoken as disavowal, hearsay, and equivocation. Malvolio’s dancing, indirect expressions of investment in Olivia come to a bad end. The play subtly disallows goal-oriented, possessive erotic agendas; all proactive efforts to attain a partner are met with some form of
humiliation (see Olivia’s gifts and entreaties to Cesario/Viola)—but none more than Malvolio’s.

What does become a perverse erotic object are the yellow cross-gartered stockings, which he fancies might offer him access to Olivia’s fancy. In a cruel etymological irony, the ornaments hanging from stockings, “the ornamental tags, appended to the ribbons by which the hose were secured to the doublet,” are called “fancy.” False thinking it is at Olivia’s behest, he pays specific, ritualistic attention to making a cross with the stockings’ fancy as he dresses. It doesn’t work; the stockings fail to engender, in Olivia, who “de-tests” the fashion (2.5.175), any specific sensation of lack for Malvolio. They are so unpleasant to wear that Malvolio’s only pleasure in them is in the masochistic pain of wearing them for her pleasure: “This does make some obstruction in the blood, this cross-gartering. But what of that? If it please the eye of one, it is with me as the very true sonnet is: ‘Please one, and please all’” (3.4.19–22). Unlike the erotic objects in Orsino’s polymorphous sea, Malvolio’s low social pitch remains constant. His attempt to use a prosthetic adornment to raise it backfires, plummeting both him and his fancy stockings “into abatement and low price,/Even in a minute” (1.1.13–14).

Widening the frame to consider the afterlife of this word makes visible the ramifications of fancy in the material, commercial, and aesthetic realms—and, sooner than one might think, in the history of sexuality. Following Eve Sedgwick’s suggestion that nonce taxonomies can hone and transmit “skills for making, testing, and using unration­alized and provisional hypotheses,” I posit a “nonce etymology” of fancy: an unfalsifiable queer genealogy of the concept’s associations with artistic production, commodity desire, and various forms of gender and sexual transgression through the centuries between Twelfth Night and today. I do this not to retroactively relabel fancy as a form of queerness in the period, but to point out how the mechanisms of fancy allow queerness to enter the imaginative world of a play. The richly proliferating definitions of imaginative fancy at the beginning of the seventeenth century congeal over the next three centuries into a long list of connotations pointing away from heteronomativity and a patriarchal social order. Fancy as desire becomes an adverbial that can work on someone (fancy-baffled, fancy-caught,
fancy-framed, fancy-struck) in the early to mid-seventeenth century, giving it a slightly more threatening erotic efficacy. By the early to mid-nineteenth century, the early definition of “amorous inclination” becomes an adjective (used in compounds like “fancy-man”), which derives its literal meaning from love (“a person who is fancied”), but which is actually used to mean “a kept mistress” (“fancy-girl” or “fancy-piece”), one who lives outside the bonds of patriarchal domesticity, improperly diverting and consuming resources from heterosexuality. “Fancy-man,” however, refers by 1811 to “a man kept by a lady for secret services,” or (though the Oxford English Dictionary presents these as though they are the same thing) “a man who lives upon the earnings of a prostitute.” What starts out as an economic slur and a sex-work pejorative then narrows, by the twentieth century, to index effeminate or homosexual masculinity: the word passes through “fancy Dan,” “a dandy, a showy buy ineffective worker or sportsman,” and thus into the lineage of “dandyism,” a key subcultural term in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries’ incipient discourses of homosexuality.

But this process is part of a larger reordering of meaning around the word “fancy” taking place in areas that “intersect with, touch, or list in the direction of sex” to varying degrees. The assorted dirty uses of “fancy” cluster around early fragmentary and informal suspicions about nonnormative erotic inclinations, what the people who have them are like, and what they do in the world. By tracing the word across its sexual, nonsexual, and quasi-sexual meanings, the outlines emerge of a qualitative queerness: it refers to desires that are excessive in a free-floating and superfluous way. Along with its older connotations of illusion and delusion, the word describes caprice and irrational or fantastical whims as far back as the mid-sixteenth, and into the late fifteenth, centuries. In the mid-eighteenth century, it begins to describe objects of intricate or ornamental appearance; “fancy” as the skill of the mental imagination comes to refer instead to the variation in an original design. Then, later in the eighteenth century, it becomes a common adjective delineating a category of things that are fancy—which of course includes many of the decorative objects associated with women’s economic consumption (baskets, cakes, trimmings, dresses, needlework). It is
this category that appears to draw together the earlier connotations of resource-consuming sexuality ("fancy-woman," "fancy-man") with a new denigration of ornamental goods as frivolous, excessive, and non-useful. In this descriptor (the one still in use today), we can see the same dual suspicions of insatiable consumption and capricious desire that I unpack in Twelfth Night and Bartholomew Fair, combined with overlaid anxieties about people who have too much sex, do too little work, or do work that is too ornamental—by which many women and men are cast under suspicion of being either prostitutes or freeloaders by virtue of their tastes and pastimes. I would even take this nonce etymology one step further and ask what later queer terms or affiliations can be linked back with their possible connections to "fancy." For example, in an "obsolete" meaning from 1712 with intriguing never-to-be-recovered associations, "fancy" is defined as "an alleged name for the pansy." The fancy" also serves as a somewhat cryptic in-group shorthand for the collectivity of devotees ("fanciers") of some subcultural pursuit, especially boxing, and a term for the breeding of animals or plants with specific aesthetic features, especially varied colors, for ornamental purposes. These are all gay resonances; "fancy" as the art of breeding is quite literally the queer, aestheticizing, artificial double of natural sexual reproduction. Situating Malvolio’s thwarted love plot within the space marked out by these associations—where erotic imagination and social categories collide, and where manufacture and style operate on sexual desire—drives home how "fancy" queers heterosexuality by decoratively breeding, embroidering, or painting it into something else.

One place where the “history that will be” is written around and about men’s erotic uses of stockings is in Freudian discourses of fetishism. Clearly Malvolio’s stockings have something in common with Freud’s notion of the fetish: an intimate garment that becomes an erotic repository in its own right, even as it signals the denial of heterosexual sex. For as much as the psychic motions of the imaginative fancy described in these early philosophical definitions are echoed in Freud’s model of the ego’s libidinal cathexis, the risks of fancy and fetish are slightly different. A thing of consuming fancy does not become the ultimate object, the idol, of a fixed desire as
a fetish object does. In fancying, the thing of fancy instead carries the shaping impressions of all the fantasies that produced it. The risk that fancy and the fetish share, however, which is consonant with early capitalist anxieties about consumer desire, is that material things, and not human love objects, are driving the process. As Malvolio’s failed fetishistic fancy cuts him off from any ability to effect a causal relationship between word and action, Orsino’s desire reverses and redirects itself, floating, disconnected from the heteronormative hierarchy of object choices. The fancier surrenders to being shaped by these made things (which can be thing-embodied people—in _Twelfth Night_, the creation called Cesario—and inanimate materials—in _Bartholomew Fair_, roast pig, gingerbread children, puppets, and dolls). The incipient global circuits of commodity desire and consumption operating in the period have a host of material effects on ideologies of gender, religion, colonialism, and race. The next section of this chapter will unpack how some of these circuits map specifically onto desire, figuring consuming fancy as at once promiscuous and abject—the affectively overwrought longing for, and excessive consumption of, the wrong things.

“Pray Thee Long”

The capacious, capricious appetite that goes by the name of fancy in _Twelfth Night_ appears in a different form in Jonson’s teeming, odiferous London setting. Desire in _Bartholomew Fair_ is a promiscuous force that can, and does, animate many different body parts and objects apart from and other than the genitals. The play dramatizes the carnivalesque urban space of the notorious two-week market festival beginning on St. Bartholomew’s Day (August 24) in the Smithfield environs of the Priory Church of St. Bartholomew the Great, an annual tradition of almost five hundred years’ standing in 1614, when the play was staged. Like most city comedies, the play is centrally concerned with the circulations of sex: where desire goes awry, what it threatens, and how it is (and isn’t) recontained. The structure of the play, with its peripatetic shifts from stall to stall and subplot to subplot inside the Fair, enacts a sprawling, disjointed array of dramatic investments. However, _Bartholomew Fair_ is not an eclectic
accretion of brief unrelated incidents. Instead, its scenes of desiring are knitted together by an underlying through line of promiscuous fancy, transmuted into a frenetic carnival longing that circulates everywhere and is never sated.

The overlapping comic plots of the play all insistently foreground marriage, sex, and reproduction: married couples, pregnancy cravings, competing suitors, the threat of prostitution, and, most absurdly, the gargantuan, infantile protagonist, Bartholomew Cokes, who is contracted to marry a young gentlewoman on the very day of the Fair (though he never makes it). But for me, the central joke of the play is that the libidinal energies of its interlocking comic plots take every conceivable twist and turn other than their ostensible aims of heterosexual congress or marriage. Not only do this play’s permutations of desire refuse and decenter the heterosexual dyad to an even greater degree than most city comedies; the characters’ appetites are not even reliably fixed on single objects, resulting in a pervasive economy of roving, insatiable carnival longing. Existing scholarship on *Bartholomew Fair* has largely unpacked the ideological and historical valences of specific content, such as Jonson’s satirical godly Puritan, Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. Because of its voluminous and seemingly chaotic scope, critics have not been inclined to synthesize an account of how erotic desire works in the play as a whole. Indeed, without this holistic structural reframing, making visible the polymorphously perverse and unsated mechanism of desire that I find governs the Fair, most critics do not seem to have seen anything specifically queer about the play.51

*Bartholomew Fair* is fundamentally a play about wanting. The Fair is a space where desires of all valences are excited, the fairgoers enticed from every direction and by every kind of object. They seek and find the pleasures of roast pig, beer, toys and trinkets, pastries, musical ballads, purses, and puppet shows. However, these moments of consumption do not provide ends or resolution for the roaming, autoerotically fueled want that ranges through the play, taking on a dramatic life of its own. In scene 6 of act 1, for example, the Littlewit family is preparing to go to the Fair. John Littlewit, a proctor, has the license for Bartholomew Cokes’s abortive marriage, but he also has
his own “affair i’ the Fair,” “a puppet-play of mine own making,” which he is producing in collaboration with Lantern Leatherhead, the hobbyhorse maker. With him travel his wife, Win; her passionate and loopy mother, Dame Purecraft; and one of the mother’s two suitors, the hot Puritan named Zeal-of-the-Land Busy. The Littlewit husband and wife long to go to the Fair, he to preside over his puppet play and she to watch it, but Win’s mother will not consent to such a “profane motion” (1.5.132). To get them to the Fair, John Littlewit proposes “a device, a dainty one.” He instructs his wife to long:

Win, long to eat of a pig, sweet Win, in the Fair; do you see? in the heart of the Fair. . . . Your mother will do anything, Win, to satisfy your longing, you know; pray thee long, presently, and be sick on the sudden, good Win. (1.5.135–40)

The reason her performative longing can have such an effect is that Win Littlewit is pregnant—or at least possibly pregnant. In criticism and stagings of the play, Win is commonly assumed to be far enough along in her pregnancy that her condition is publicly apparent. However, there is nothing in the text to contravene the reading that her pregnancy is still in the early stages of invisibility, or even potentiality. Win’s “longing” sounds a more fantastical note if she is not visibly pregnant. As a young married woman who has not yet borne children, Win’s reproductive status is an object of sustained projection, desire, and anxiety from her mother and relatives. If she is regarded as only “a little bit pregnant,” or even “prepregnant,” in a state of pregnancy watch, then her cravings—like a sudden, all-consuming “longing” to eat of a pig in the Fair—are social signs telegraphing the possibility of a bodily state that, in an age before pregnancy tests, remains for quite some time more of a fictive, social wish than a palpable fact. That Win’s is the inaugural longing in a play laden with longings typifies the queer admixture of real and imaginary, natural and deviant urges involved in the production and reproduction—fantasmatic and material—of desires and their objects in this play.
“What Do You Lack?”

The play cuts rapidly back and forth between the dithering Little-wit party and the accidental title character, Bartholomew Cokes. The reluctant groom is nineteen years old, a giant, spoiled man-child of unbridled and obscene appetites. Bartholomew Cokes’s defining orientation is toward indiscriminately consuming as much of every pleasure and commodity as possible, though he is never satiated. In his first appearance, he pleads wheedlingly to his man, Wasp (whom he calls by the overly familiar pet name Numps), to be allowed to see his own marriage license—“Is this the license, Numps? For love’s sake, let me see’t. I never saw a license” (1.5.29–30). His infantile position of unrestrained indulgence, from his first appearance, completely overshadows the plot point of his supposed impending marriage to Mistress Grace Welborn (who is none too pleased about it) scheduled for later the same day. The Fair is the first, last, and central end for Cokes, far surpassing his wedding: “I am resolute Bartholomew, in this; I’ll make no suit on’t to you; ’twas all the end of my journey, indeed, to show Mistress Grace my Fair” (1.5.52–57). Cokes’s relation to the Fair is one of autoerotic identification and incorporation. He calls it “my Fair, because of Bartholomew; you know my name is Bartholomew, and Bartholomew Fair” (1.5.58-59). Wasp describes his charge as embodying the Fair’s superfluous trinkets and objects within himself:

Would the Fair and all the drums and rattles in’t were i’ your belly for me; they are already i’ your brain. He that had the means to travel your head, now, should meet finer sights than any are i’ the Fair, and make a finer voyage on’t to see it all hung with cockleshells, pebbles, fine wheat-straws, and here and there a chicken’s feather and a cobweb. (1.5.81–86)

These fancy objects are generated in Cokes’s fancy: the inner space of his psyche is “all hung with” the excess, worthless materials—shells, pebbles, straw, feathers, cobwebs—that make up the festival
landscape. Bartholomew Cokes is a walking empty Fair, a Fair-space that, like a hungry gorge, attempts to suck all of the commodities of the Fair into himself. Wasp complains:

If he go to the Fair, he will buy of everything to a baby there; and household-stuff for that too. If a leg or an arm on him did not grow on, he would lose it i’ the press. Pray heaven I bring him off with one stone! And then he is such a ravener after fruit! You will not believe what a coil I had t’other day to compound a business between a Catherine-pear woman and him about snatching! ’Tis intolerable, gentlemen. (1.5.100–107)

Cokes’s body is figured as dis-assemblable and exchangeable with the Fair. Though he can be counted on to leave the Fair with a prodigious haul of goods, he would lose his legs or arms (or potentially a more crucial body part, the ambiguous “stone” of Wasp’s lament) if they were not attached. Cokes’s ravenousness knows no limits. By act 3, he is driving Wasp ahead of him through the Fair, laden with goods but at every instant hailed into fancying more by the vendors’ crying:

Leatherhead: What do you lack, gentlemen? Fine purses, pouches, pin-cases, pipes? What is’t you lack? A pair o’smiths to wake you i’ the morning? Or a fine whistling bird?

Cokes: Numps, here be finer things than any we ha’ bought, by odds! And more delicate horses, a great deal! (3.4.15–19)

The hobbyhorse maker’s cry—the incantatory question cried by all the Fair’s vendors, “What do you lack?”—encapsulates the mechanism of desire at work in Bartholomew Fair. The marketgoers’ fancy, which proceeds from the incitement of lack, feeds on that lack to generate new lacks and more desires for an endless cascade of new objects, so that eventually the consumer is consumed with a surfeit of want and longing. This cycle has often been articulated in Marxist
or materialist terms, as the way in which capitalism manufactures commodity desires in order to consume its own surplus and fuel its expansion. As many other early modern plays, including Marlowe’s *The Jew of Malta* (1592), Chapman, Jonson, and Marston’s *Eastward Ho!* (1605), and Jonson’s *The Alchemist* (1610)—as well as Marx’s *Capital* (1867)—make clear, uncanny generativity and suspect desires are integral to the idea of capitalist accumulation at its inception.

In particular, *The Alchemist*, another Jonson comedy that problematizes the wanting and getting of material goods, is animated by a force that is related to, but not exactly synonymous with, promiscuous fancy: the generative logic of alchemy, thematized in the play as a vehicle—in both the literal and metaphorical senses—for the desire to acquire wealth without labor. *The Alchemist* shares *Bartholomew Fair*’s concern with the transactions of desire through physical substances (and *Twelfth Night*’s concern with the workings of material objects on desire). Whereas the economies of *Twelfth Night* and *Bartholomew Fair* are powered by sensory and aesthetic appetites, the cheat of alchemy seeks an outside or exception to the natural laws governing materiality and then shades into a flirtation with magical overreaching or necromancy. For the con artists Subtle, Face, and Doll, alchemy is a show, a performative supplement to their swindling. It is a means of getting goods without labor by playing on their parade of customers’ desires. *The Alchemist*’s chiefest desiring consumer, Sir Epicure Mammon, can be read alongside Bartholomew Cokes and Orsino, for what he wants is the object that offers a bottomless sea of other objects of desire: the philosophers’ stone, which can transmute worthless substances into gold. Mammon voices the tensions between the ancient fantasies around alchemy and the new role of the consumer in a capitalist economy in his rhapsodies of future economic conquest, not through ingenuity or virtue, or by making anything, but through sheer purchasing power:

SURLY: And do you think to have the stone with this?  
MAMMON: No, I do think t’ have all this with the stone.  
SURLY: Why, I have heard he must be homo frugi,
A pious, holy, and religious man,
One free from mortal sin, a very virgin.
MAMMON: That makes it, sir; he is so: but I buy it;
My venture brings it me. (2.2.95–101)

This capitalist consumer and self-styled “venturer” expresses a bottomless notion of his own desert. To have every possible object of desire, tangible and intangible, he need only have a near-infinite amount of money. By Mammon’s logic, money is desert: to be able to buy something is to desire it, and to desire it is to deserve it. This kind of tautological justification echoes the one heard in our current moment of postmodern finance capital, in the argument that the agents of financial institutions, whose venturing caused the catastrophic destruction of wealth in the global financial crisis of 2008, deserve astronomical salaries and bonus payments (underwritten by the public in the form of state bailouts) in reward for their pursuit of the unfettered generation of money. But there is also a Trumpian nihilism to Mammon’s position. The money is but the necessary condition for the over-the-top fantasy of promiscuous domination he narrates, which includes hiring the most “sublimed pure” wives of the most upstanding citizens to be his whores, the “purest and gravest divines” to be his flatterers, and the lustiest ladies’ men to be his eunuchs, “to fan me with ten estrich tails/A-piece, made in a plume to gather wind” (2.2.55–70). The more he can consume, destroy, and debase by his expenditure, the more it proves his power.

The lust for the philosophers’ stone is a flexible, mercenary version of desire that feeds on itself, not fixed on any specific object, or even limited to a finite number of objects. In Jonson’s extended political metaphor, alchemy—and capitalism—desire to transform what has been a scarce resource used in goal-directed transactions—gold—into a magically self-propagating currency that can fulfill an endless series of wants, including (as we shall also see in Bartholomew Fair) the antisocial desire to consume and destroy other people. The Alchemist’s model of insatiate desire is mediated through money—gold, currency, property, investment shares. However, reading it here, alongside these other scenes of desiring, allows us to notice
how the erotic structure of capitalism is connected to polymorphous fancy, alchemy, magic, fetishism, eating, swindling, and sexual perversion, as overarching mechanisms of bottomless desire.

This kind of erotic analysis of Jonson’s city comedies has the potential to expand the scope of what a materialist critical lens can do. By transporting the substances and forces that are commonly the objects of materialist analysis into the realm of desire, it troubles a strict distinction between material and affective or erotic economies. Following on Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of “desiring-production,” which conceives of both desires and their objects as machines within a larger complex of machines generating social affects and relations, I read the market processes staged in Bartholomew Fair as a model dramatizing the production and reproduction of desire itself. As Wasp, exasperated, reminds Bartholomew Cokes, all of his desiring is productive of nothing but more desiring. There is no proper, socially reproductive place in Cokes’s aristocratic household for all of these objects to go: “Why the measles should you stand here with your train, cheaping of dogs, birds, and babies? You ha’ no children to bestow ’em on, ha’ you?” (3.4.25–27). Whereas Win Littlewit’s potential reproductivity could serve as a semirespectable pretext for her longing to eat Bartholomew pig, Bartholomew Cokes’s appetite for the fancy goods of the Fair makes him a defective and unaccountable sort of man. Wasp likens him to a colonialist trope attributing a form of fancy desire to Native Americans: “a kind o’ civil savages that will part with their children for rattles, pipes, and knives. You were best buy a hatchet or two, and truck with ’em” (3.4.30–32). What Cokes buys instead is a prodigious load of trinkets to add to the bundle Wasp already carries, which must already be huge and sprawling enough to be played for laughs. Cokes’s satisfaction at any of these purchases, however, is negligible; each one recedes instantly into craving for the next object to catch his fancy. He remarks, without a hint of self-awareness, “I do want such a number o’ things” (3.4.81–82).

Like Orsino’s ceaselessly ebbing, abating fancy in Twelfth Night, Bartholomew Cokes’s desire echoes a Freudian notion of polymorphous perversity, in which libidinal energies are not focused on an external love object, or even on a genital drive. Instead, like Or-
sino’s fancy, Cokes’s longing is directed everywhere except toward a socially appropriate heterosexual marriage, and it is newly redirected by each new object that enters his sphere of vision. Though Cokes’s insatiable, polymorphously perverse brand of object-relations is predicated on the utter opposite of refusal, it is still, like Orsino’s fancy, a form of negative desire—desire based on lack—because it is never abated or lessened by any object he obtains. Lack is everywhere in it, the undiminished by-product of each act of consumption.

If promiscuous fancy is a mechanism of desire driven by lack, it manifests particularly acutely in the plots of *Bartholomew Fair* where lacking becomes an object of desire in its own right. These scenes are powered by eroticized investments in not seeing, not consuming, not enjoying things. This form of negative anti-fancy based in refusal is centrally staged through Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, the Puritan suitor, who has been understood as a caricature of the passionate asceticism found in certain forms of social-control Protestantism. Busy’s investment in pleasures not consumed provides the affective inverse to Cokes’s gargantuan hunger. Zeal-of-the-Land Busy marches his party into the Bartholomew Fair in act 3, calling out to the others to “walk on in the middle way, fore-right; turn neither to the right hand nor to the left. Let not your eyes be drawn aside with vanity, nor your ear with noises” (3.2.27–29). Win’s artificed longing for roast pig at the Fair has been transmitted, as a palpable, salivating hunger, to everyone else, in a contagion of appetite that overpowers religious prohibition. But this craving is sustained by the negative energies mixed in with it: Busy and Dame Purecraft’s masochistic pleasure in condemnation, their pleasure in yielding to the lure of the roast pig and their disavowal of that pleasure, their denunciations of the Fair, and their denials that pleasure is their motive at all.

The toymaker and puppeteer, Leatherhead, attempts to hail Win into looking—and by looking into wanting:

What do you lack? What do you buy, pretty mistress? A fine hobby-horse, to make your son a tilter? A drum to make him a soldier? A fiddle, to make him a reveller? What is’t you lack? Little dogs for your daughters! Or babies, male, or female?
The objects on offer here make visible how fancy based on “lack” functions as a ghost or shade of sexual reproduction. Win’s potential, incipient reproductivity is the public subject for the vendor’s spiel, as it was for her campaign to go to the Fair in the first place. However, neither the reproductive kind of desire—the kind that would put one in the family way—nor the natural human baby that it would generate is on offer at the Fair. Instead, the “babies, male, or female” conjured as objects of desire here are fictive and imaginary—the baby dolls that Leatherhead suggests Win lacks, but also the son or daughter whose ghostly potentiality makes it a particularly defined lack. In the economy of the Fair, these artificial ornaments and knickknacks—toys, simulacra, miniatures, musical instruments, imitation weapons, small pets, and uncanny artificial babies—are the material things through which consumers’ longings are stoked and solicited. Like the erotically instrumental go-betweens discussed in the previous chapter, they are the generators, transmitters, and objects of desire.

The toys’ fetishistic allure is precisely why such fine distinctions must be policed between acceptable and unacceptable gazes and affects toward them. Busy characterizes these suspiciously icon-like items as diabolical for the way in which they work on fairgoers’ desires:

The wares are the wares of devils. And the whole Fair is the shop of Satan! They are hooks, and baits, very baits, that are hung out on every side, to catch you, and to hold you as it were, by the gills; and by the nostrils, as the fisher doth: therefore, you must not look, nor turn toward them. (3.2.35–43)

The “hobby-horses and trinkets” are both the “baits” that solicit the senses and the “hooks” that “catch” and “hold” the fairgoer in a seductive cycle of lacking, longing, and wanting. His anxiety makes reference not only to the contemporary Puritan idea that Satan offers bait to appeal to sinners’ existing weaknesses (in Thomas Adams’s famous formulation, “Satan like the Fisher baits his hooke according to the appetite of the fish”57), but also to contemporary understandings of the role of the mental fancy in erotic love, in which desire is
thought to enter the body chiefly through the eyes. The peril of fascination, theorized in the Neoplatonist writings of Marsilio Ficino, is conceived as a pathological state of bodily depletion caused by gazing on the love object, in which the lover is infected by rays emanating from the object that have their own materiality, entering through the eyes and penetrating into the organs of the body.58

To look at the fancy things of the Fair is a dangerous desire, but—and this is crucial to understanding the queer valence of Busy’s Puritan disavowal—if one looks, it had better not be indifferent or unmoved looking. “Aye child,” Dame Purecraft interjects to Win, “so you hate ’em, as our brother Zeal does, you may look on ’em” (3.6.58–61). Under Dame Purecraft and Busy’s rules, fervently prurient, passionate looking, attended by affects so inflamed as to be barely controllable, is totally permissible—as long as it’s negative affect, inflected with denunciation and hate. As long, in other words, as the locus of erotic investment in looking is the disavowal of desire. “If,” as Juliet says to her parents in Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet, “looking liking move” (1.3.99), the godly Protestant position replaces that “liking” with loathing. If looking loathing move, then look all you like.

Bartholomew Pig

The force of fancy in the Fair is even more polymorphously insidious than fascination, in that it works on all of the senses. When Dame Purecraft scolds John Littlewit for looking at the sign signifying roast pig (“Son, were you not warn’d of the vanity of the eye?” [3.2.65–66]), Littlewit points out the absurdity of this pursuit of pig that disavows it is a pursuit: “Good mother, how shall we find a pig, if we do not look about for’t? Will it run off o’ the spit into our mouths, think you? As in Lubberland? And cry, wee, wee?” (3.2.67–69). Busy, in response, makes the theological case that while looking for the pig is a sin, smelling for it is absolutely fine:

No, but your mother, religiously wise, conceiveth it may offer itself, by other means to the sense, as by way of steam, which I think it doth, here in this place.
Busy scents after it like a hound.]

Huh, huh—yes, it doth. And it were a sin of obstinacy, great obstinacy, high and horrible obstinacy, to decline, or resist the good titillation of the famelic sense, which is the smell. Therefore be bold—huh, huh, huh—follow the scent. Enter the tents of the unclean, for once, and satisfy your wife’s frailty. (3.2.70–79)

These comical justifications actually say a great deal about the queered pathways of sense and reason through which carnival longing works in the play. Busy argues that by finding the pig by smell, the more passive sensory pleasure, he is not seeking the pig; the pig is “may offer itself” to him, even as he “scents after it like a hound.” As Joseph Litvak explains, smell and smelling play an overdetermined role in histories of detecting dangerous bodies and predilections, and occupy a central place in phobic/erotic investment—not least because of the passivity with which the smeller is penetrated by smell.59 Pointing out the queerness of the McCarthyite rhetoric of bodily “sniffing out” Jews and homosexuals, Litvak quotes Adorno and Horkheimer: “Anyone who sniffs out ‘bad’ smells in order to extirpate them may imitate to his heart’s content the snuffling which takes its unrationalized pleasure in the smell itself. Disinfected by the civilized sniffer’s absolute identification with the prohibiting agency, the forbidden impulse eludes the prohibition. If it crosses the threshold, the response is laughter. That is the schema of the anti-Semitic reaction.”60 This is also the schema of the Puritan (a cultural identity heavily associated with a phobic/erotic Hebraism) who, when called “Rabbi Busy,” proclaims that he will go and “eat exceedingly” of swine’s flesh in public “to profess our hate, and loathing of Judaism” (1.6.85–86). “Disinfected” by his “absolute identification with the prohibiting agency,” Busy sniffs out pig in order to disapprove of it (but in order to eat it).61 Litvak goes on to trace the queer cycle of imitation, ressentiment, and desire by which a phobic investment in Jewish bodies is connected to a homophobic investment in markers of gay and otherwise non-heteronormative eroticism—a dynamic that, read into this scene, reveals Busy’s “unrationalized pleasure” in scenting after the pig “like
a hound” to be explicitly part of a homophobic/homoerotic schema of passionate investment in threatening, potentially self-implicating, bodily appetites.

Busy’s case for passive smelling amounts to an apology for yielding to those urges that feel too all-consuming to block out. The sense of smell indicates—and incites—cravings that feel more like righteous needs (like the “good titillation of the famelic sense,” or hunger), than more suspect wants (discretionary things, picked out and seized upon by sight). And, crucially, cravings for things smelled are desires for which the smeller can deny any agency. Busy’s protestation that his passive role makes it permissible for him to partake—that the object of his disavowed desire “may offer itself, by other means to the sense”—resonates with later discourses of closeted or identity-disavowing homoeroticism that also deny seeking.62 His role in the Fair’s libidinal economy is fueled simultaneously by pleasure and revulsion at being solicited by the vendors’ “What do you lack?”

Busy’s resort to the pleasures of “the famelic sense” also hails the early modern audience into a scene of pleasure. Jonson’s foregrounding of smells both pleasant and offensive throughout the play makes it at least thinkable that real roast pork could have been used as a kind of olfactory prop or scenic feature at the Hope. As the “Induction on the Stage” before the play makes explicit, the Hope is “as dirty as Smithfield, and as stinking in every whit” (142).63 The smell would then have effectively penetrated the audience’s bodies—and their mental fancies—inciting an involuntary reaction of desire. Even if the smell of roast pig is not phenomenally present in the theater, the scented-after pig onstage would raise the spectral sense-memory of that craving: a desire predicated on a specific lack, a specific absence. The conflation of the Fair and the play, in name and in odor, heightens the audience’s perverse enjoyment of watching Busy trying (and failing) not to enjoy it (even as some audience members would have identified with Busy’s stance of anxious trepidation toward the Fair).

The roast Bartholomew pig embodies the confluence of longing and hate that a godly Puritan fairgoer feels toward the Fair. A powerful, potentially corruptive pleasure is transmitted through the sensory experience of yielding to the craving and eating it. Like gold in The
Alchemist, roast pig functions as the currency of desire itself—a mystical substance that is at once the ubiquitous object of desire and the fuel or stimulus to more and more consuming appetites. The pig’s fantastical erotic properties are condensed and embodied in the figure of Ursula the pig-woman, who metonymically stands in for the Fair’s extreme, copious carnality. Her physical body is figured as consubstantial with the entire cycle of consumption and excess at the Fair—the roast pig and ale the fairgoers take in, and the sweat and urine they excrete. “I am all fire and fat,” she announces at her first entrance; “I do water the ground in knots as I go, like a great garden-pot; you may follow me by the S’s I make” (2.2.49–52). The gamesters around her stall call her “Body o’ the Fair,” “Mother o’ the bawds,” and “Mother o’ the pigs,” imagining her body as an originary matrix giving birth to the Fair and everything in it: “Art thou alive yet, with thy litter of pigs, to grunt out another Bartholomew Fair?” (2.3.1–2). The gendered qualities of Ursula’s prodigious body have been much explicated, but I see it as possessing a queerer generative function.64 In my reading, Ursula’s body exceeds sexual difference. The men hanging around her market stall compare her sex to a bog and a quagmire, an unknown quicksand, where “he that would venture for’t, I assure him, might sink into her and be drowned a week ere any friend he had could find where he were.” Sex with Ursula would be “like falling into a whole shire of butter,” and a man would need “a team of Dutchmen should draw him out” (2.5.85–90). While this is a common enough misogynistic jibe, born from a fear of the vagina as an uncanny abyss in which a man could get lost, this line takes the image to a hyperbolic level. It is no longer a human body part, but a bizarre fairy-tale image of mythic scale and fantastical danger. There is no language of phallic penetration in the figuration of a vagina as a “shire of butter.” The body’s excess is not possessed or mastered in these images. It swallows men whole so that they can be rescued in homosocial fantasy feats of heroism by their loyal friends, or a brawny team of Dutchmen. In fact, these jokes reach forward in time to resonate with the fetish of macrophilia, a kink in which men fantasize about sexual contact with giantesses, which heavily features images of full-body insertion into the giantess’s enormous vagina.65

The mechanism by which Ursula’s giant body gives birth to the
Fair is not sexual reproduction at all, but something else: a generative material dissemination or diffusion. Her flesh is construed as a universal lubricant greasing the moving parts of the whole world; it is the grease used by “the coach-makers here in Smithfield to anoint wheels and axle-trees with” (2.5.73–74), and the grease that bastes and roasts the pigs. In a self-perpetuating system of desire, Ursula feeds (literally, she makes a profit) on her customers’ cravings; her food and drink in turn engender in them more, and more various, cravings for other bodily pleasures. Her economy factors lack into its calculations. She tells her tapster to short her pints of beer, intentionally keeping her customers just short of satiated, so that they buy more beer, become more intoxicated, and eat more pig. The consumers then linger and keep coming back to her stall, their endlessly regenerating appetites regenerating her. Ursula’s material substance sustains the Fair by being endlessly converted from energy to matter and back again, both the fuel and the product of the Fair’s energies of lacking and longing.

“That a Man Should Have Such a Desire to a Thing, and Want It!”

If the group consumption of Ursula’s pig that Busy orchestrates serves as foreplay, then the loathing into which he is moved by looking intensifies as he moves, full of pig, through the stalls, building to an orgiastic climax of destruction that satirizes the florid carnality of iconoclastic language. Denouncing the hobbyhorse stall as “a shop of relics!” (3.6.84–87) and the gingerbread stand as a “basket of popery,” he condemns the ornamental status of the toys and sweets not just as fancy commodities but as heretical talismans or fetish objects. He becomes more and more agitated over the fancies of “this wicked and most foul Fair, and fitter may it be called a foul than a Fair” (3.6.78–79). The audience might connect this repetition to the witches’ incantation in Macbeth that “fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.11). Busy’s paranoid assertion that fair and foul often go together (and can look a lot like one another) signals that the language of witchcraft—which, as the next chapter will explain, marshals the slippage between pleasure and disgust to generate phantasms of
socially transgressive, corrupting desire—is also at home in the space of the Fair and in Busy’s annihilating mode of consumption.

Overcome in his frenzy, Busy attacks the Fair, wreaking his desire on the bodies of the gingerbread men:

**Busy**: And this idolatrous grove of images, this flasket of idols, which I will pull down—

*Overthrows the gingerbread.*

**Trash**: O my ware, my ware, God bless it!

**Busy**: In my zeal, and glory, to be thus exercised.

(3.6.89–92)

The joke is that the Puritan’s iconophobia has run away with itself. In fancying the painted dolls and gingerbread men to be spiritually threatening, he is participating in the same economy of imaginative desires bodied forth in material forms that drives the Fair, fetishism, and iconistic religious belief. Afterward, he is exhilarated by his affective expenditure: it was his “glory” to be so “exercised,” to enact the destruction he desired. As the officers show up, he claims to be ready for more masochistic surrender to the destructive affects consuming him, to be ready to “thrust myself into the stocks, upon the pikes of the land” (3.6.100).

Bartholomew Cokes and Zeal-of-the-Land Busy are not as different as they at first appear. Cokes’s appetites also contain a strong undercurrent of annihilation, albeit of a consuming kind. While Busy would cancel the whole Fair, Cokes finds it equally hard to bear that the things that draw his eye remain available to others. Like Busy, Cokes seeks to destroy the Fair, but by different means: by attempting to buy it up whole for himself. Leaving behind any pretense of discriminating among—or even really wanting—any specific items, Cokes buys up the toymaker Leatherhead’s entire shop, and then buys the man himself, to come to his house and realize his sudden notion to stage a wedding masque. In purchasing a human being not merely for his labor but for his artistic prowess, Cokes rhapsodizes about the “fine motions” and “inventions” Leatherhead will create:
What a masque shall I furnish out for forty shillings (twenty pounds Scotch)! And a banquet of gingerbread! There’s a stately thing! Numps! Sister! And my wedding gloves too! (That I never thought on afore). All my wedding gloves, gingerbread! O me! What a device will there be to make ‘em eat their fingers’ ends! And delicate brooches for the bride-men and all! And then I’ll ha’ this posy put to ’em: For the best grace, meaning Mistress Grace, my wedding posy. (3.4.138–45)

Cokes sounds here strikingly like a bourgeois-capitalist bride, excited for the fabulous desserts, accessories, gimmicky favors, entertainments, flowers, and witty, poetic toasts at her wedding—all of which the self-employed artisan she has just hired will be expected to provide. Here is where Cokes’s signature appetite of infantile polymorphous perversity shades into a more material, historical form of queerness, thereby connecting the play’s economy of market desire to the social history of gender and sexuality. Cokes’s wedding commodity fetishism regenders him as a stereotypically acquisitive woman in an economy of luxury consumption. Cokes’s Jacobean counterpart in excessive bridal consumption, the upstart Gertrude in Chapman, Jonson, and Marston’s Eastward Ho!, embodies the connection between an emergent form of fantasmatic wedding commodity desire and the problem of capitalism. As a middle-class goldsmith’s daughter who disastrously marries a practically artificial, “new-made knight,” her fantasy of an aristocratic fairy-tale wedding highlights the unmooring of material consumption from subjects’ social status by birth. Gertrude’s aspirational gentility, constituted through the desire for lavish material objects, fabrics, and fashions, results in loss and degradation.69 Cokes’s wedding fantasy likewise includes an entire meal consisting only of sweets, and a bizarrely autoerotic, autophagic game: edible gloves with which his guests will mime eating their own fingers as part of the entertainment. His ecstasy over all the ornamental touches—his wedding gloves (“that I never thought on afore”); the “delicate brooches for the bride-men” (he notably says nothing of the bride)—completely eclipses the marriage itself. “Mistress Grace” in this vision is not Cokes’s wife but his “wedding
posy”—an empty name that furnishes the occasion of a poem to dazzle his friends. There is nothing of heterosexual desire here. Cokes’s wedding fancy—in the old sense of an imaginative vision—is implicated, through his excessive investment in luxury objects, with the emergent definition of “fancy” as a descriptor for a noneconomically productive man, and then, for a man suspiciously effeminized by his appetites: from “a man who lives off the earnings of a prostitute” to “a dandy, a showy but ineffective worker or sportsman.”

Leatherhead is also implicated in this incipient confluence of economic and sexual pejoratives. When Cokes buys Leatherhead, he pays him only for his goods and stall rental fee (rounded slightly upward), with no additional compensation for being bought on retainer. Though Leatherhead is employed on the margins of the theater industry and as a toymaker who runs his own shop, he is apparently expected to mount the wedding masque gratis. His artistic labor will be counted as the kind of economically unproductive activity done by a fancy man. The purchase flouts the conventional structure of relations and transactions between fairgoers and artisans, even trafficking—like The Alchemist’s Sir Epicure Mammon in his fantasies of wealth—in the purchasing of people. Cokes’s servant’s horror at the transaction alludes to the next degrees of transgressive human exchange, the looming specters of slavery, prostitution, even cannibalism: “Cry you mercy! You’d be sold too, would you? What’s the price on you? Jerkin and all, as you stand? Ha’ you any qualities?” (3.4.97–98). Leatherhead's economic and aesthetic activity places him in a character genealogy with the stock type of the gay wedding planner from modern romantic comedy—here, an undercompensated one whose labor and taste are exploited at the pleasure of the capitalist bride. This dynamic also resonates with later forms of capitalism, making visible how thoroughly consumers are empowered over producers in a fancy-based economy. The promiscuous fancy of the Fair takes the shape of a materially deracinated form of capitalist desire, akin to the erotics underpinning the postmodern capitalist trade in service and affective labor. The comic trope of a gargantuan, childlike squire buying up artisans and singers from the Bartholomew Fair in order to assemble an ostentatious wedding masque also glances at
sexually laden political satire. Cokes’s masque is shaping up to be a grotesque, low-comic imitation of one Jonson’s court masques, but his indiscriminate taste transforms his pretensions into camp tragedy-comedy. The voracious purchasing of both artistic commodities and the artists themselves may well be a pointed comment on James’s court theatricals—on the problem of an aristocrat (who is none too discriminating, and none too heterosexually interested) with a craving to incorporate the creative products of a public, carnivalesque artistic marketplace (here, the Fair; for James, the commercial theater) into his private household. Jonson makes clear that this incorporation enacts a certain consuming violence on the public theatrical sphere. Who will remain to sing the ballads or mount the puppet plays in the space of the Fair (or the theater) if the ballad singer and puppet maker are taken into a private retinue?

There is something almost literally masturbatory about Bartholomew Cokes’s consumption at the Fair. He falls into a perverse and homoerotic obsession with cutpurses, in which his desire to see one is symmetrically mirrored by their desire to target him as a mark. They bait him with a ballad, “A Caveat against cutpurses,” which he of course tries to buy, along with the ballad singer, to “be poet to my masque” (3.5.92). The performance stokes him into a state of childlike, narcissistic abandon. Like Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, he becomes more and more excited. He is seized with desires to touch himself and his purse, in anticipation of being touched by the cutpurse “youth.” As the ballad singer sings and the cutpurse closes in, Cokes moves from clutching his purse inside his clothes to taking it out and dangling it in front of him to attract the cutpurse; the connection between his purse and his genitals is easy to envision. His interjections of longing become more intense with each chorus: “That was a fine fellow! I would have him now” (3.5.124); and finally, summing up Cokes’s entire position vis-à-vis desire, “A pox on ’em, that they will not come! That a man should have such a desire to a thing, and want it” (3.5.130–31). The cutpurse, upon him, “tickles him in the ear with a straw twice to draw his hand out of his pocket” (3.5.152). At the crucial instant, his utter inability not to satisfy a physical urge to touch himself—to rub his tickled ear—gets his purse stolen. The
one thing he theoretically does not want at the Fair—getting purse-cut, which would foreclose his consumption—is the thing he compulsively solicits.

Bartholomew Cokes’s and Zeal-of-the-Land Busy’s erotic orientations toward the Fair are part of the same system, even though one explicitly seeks pleasure and the other explicitly disavows it. Both are founded in a negative structure of desire. The repulsive can be attractive if accessed obliquely, by a circuitous route (smelling for the pig, or singing a ballad about how you hope no cutpurses are near). Stated agendas remain unfulfilled, while repulsions can be resolved by getting and consuming—and submitting to—the repellent thing (pig eating, purse-cutting), thereby feeding the tacit attraction underneath. Cravings for specific objects can move from attraction to repulsion and back again, always circulating back through the state of lack in which fancy originates. Attraction can become repulsion as soon as it is acted on or a new object presents itself; or repulsion can spontaneously convert into attraction once the want of the object becomes acute enough.

“I Shall Not Know Which to Love Best Else”

The play’s resolution brings all of its subplots together in an orgy of polymorphous queer artistic generativity at Leatherhead and Littlewit’s puppet play. The puppets in this scene—a liminal category of object combining aspects of human bodies and made things—materialize the play’s multifarious instantiations of fancy and lack into one aesthetic system. In operating by turns as commodities, characters in the play within a play, and love objects, the puppets demonstrate that the erotic economy of *Bartholomew Fair* is a monistic one, in which humans and nonhuman things are the same order of substance. Both can be animate, active transmitters of affect; both can be love objects; both can engage in social relations. But both can also be bought, sold, eaten, transformed, dislocated, and annihilated. Justice Overdo, whose antitheatrical lather crosses over into madness, compares the puppets to the “boys o’ the Fair,” whose erotic services are the occasion of lascivious suspicion. Bartholomew Cokes is consumed with liking for the array of little bodies in a basket and
wants to fit them all in his mouth. Cokes predictably takes the pup-
pets’ theatrical status as surrogate thing-humans to its most erotically
deviant extreme. “Handling” them in their basket, he swears, “I am
in love with the actors already” (5.3.116). If the men in Ursula’s stall
voice a fantasy of being wholly subsumed into the gigantic sex of a
supernaturally huge woman, Cokes’s fussing over the puppets recalls
its opposite, an erotic fetish for miniature human forms. He enjoys
them narcissistically, as part-objects that can be incorporated into or
accessorized with his other purchases. Believing them to be animate
and to exist for his sole pleasure, he talks to them onstage as though
addressing his own appendage: “My fiddle-stick does fiddle in and
out too much” (5.3.180–81). Differentiating among objects of desire
is so far outside of his erotic bent that he becomes agitated at the mer-
est possibility of choosing a favorite. Cokes’s joke that the puppets
make better actors because one doesn’t have to feed them is a nod to
the material input requirements of the Fair’s erotic-artistic produc-
tion machine. But it can also be read as a metatheatrical comment
on the play’s model of subject/object relations. If a play’s economy
of desire does away with actors as a category—removing any role for
individual motivation and leaving only a sea of consuming bodies—it
solves the problem of differentiating between subjects and objects
of desire by making everyone a potential object in a field of objects,
afloat in a network of their own and others’ roving appetites. If ev-
eryone and everything is powered by the same cycle of lack, there
is always the possibility of being consumed—by one’s own looking
and longing, or by some organ of the Fair that hungers for bodies to
buy and sell. When Leatherhead and the other vendors lament that
the Fair is “pestilence dead,” they mean that it lacks the bodies that
bring its queer generativity to life (2.2.1).72 Only with enough bodies
can the Fair sustain the constant transmutation of longing into con-
sumption and back to longing again—and that calculus depends on
the eventuality that some consuming bodies will become objects of
consumption. At the puppet play, that risk of becoming consumable
is borne out, with comic flair, for the women fairgoers (including Win
Littlewit), who are taken into prostitution in the act of going to the
bathroom while drunk. They attend the play in disguise, dressed up
as prospective objects for sale on the sexual market, their agency
undone from the inside by their own incontinent bodies. The women’s flirtation with commodification, like Cokes’s attempt to buy up artisans and puppets, highlights that human bodies are the base material of the Fair’s erotic economy.

The climax of the puppet show—which is also the climax of the play—dramatizes the fantastical output of this libidinal economy. There is puppet kissing, puppet violence, puppet battery, a puppet-ghost—and an angry revenant of flesh and blood in the person of Zeal-of-the-Land Busy, who stands up and denounces the theatrical enterprise. He engages the puppet-ghost (who takes the form of the dead Greek king Dionysius of Syracuse, roused from his grave by Damon and Pythias squabbling and assaulting Hero and Leander) in a debate over the morality of the theater. But what Busy thinks is his patriarchal, iconoclastic trump card—the stock antitheatrical outcry that “you are an abomination; for the male of you putteth on the apparel of the female, and the female of the male” (5.5.86–88)—is turned back by the puppet-ghost into a lesson about just how far this theatrical economy of desire is unmoored from sexual difference or identity. Volleying back that “It is your old stale argument against the players, but it will not hold against the puppets, for we have neither male nor female amongst us. And that thou may’st see, if thou wilt, like a malicious purblind zeal as thou art!” the puppet-ghost “takes up his garment” and flashes the absence of his genitals to Busy and the audience in order to prove that there is nothing there (5.5.91–94).

A flashing by a puppet—by a puppet-ghost no less—could not be a purer theatrical manifestation of the queerly generative fancy bodied forth in the opening speech of Twelfth Night, or a more logical conclusion to Bartholomew Fair’s profusion of appetites proffered in response to the call, “What’d ye lack?”

This puppet-ghost flashing (a contender for my favorite moment in early modern drama) so perfectly encapsulates the mechanisms of fancy discussed in this chapter that it bears further unpacking. The idea of an absent-genital flashing by a puppet-ghost is an idiosyncratic artifact. It began life as a mental image (in Jonson’s head, or in the head of someone else in the culture, who may have materially realized it to enter Jonson’s eye). It is first realized in the textual form that I have reproduced here. As a theatrical performance, it has had
many iterations in four hundred years, and in each of them, it has been multiply removed, at too many levels to list, from any fixed historical conditions. Just to start, there is no “real ghost of” the Greek king, and in any case the puppet is arguably costumed as the wrong Dionysius. In this it resembles, to me, much of the rest of the representational universe of early modern drama. It is at once so fantastically removed, by transpositions of place and time and material order, from topical referents that it is much more about itself as form than about anything else. At the same time, in that fantastical guise, it vocalizes the ideological conflicts of the moment (or of a just-passed moment, the “old stale argument against the players”). As a material form, the puppet-ghost of Dionysius is also at several levels of remove from any natural or human, let alone conventionally sexual, object of desire, which is why it is so hyperbolically funny that Cokes and Busy are so obsessed with it. It is the ultimate in queer theatrical artifice.

As a dramatic event, the puppet’s flashing of nothing, of not-genitals, aims literally to show that which the spectator’s busy, unruly fancy is free to imagine: a “thing not present to the senses.” The puppet-ghost’s genitals are a thing that Busy is caught out as having imagined, because they don’t exist anywhere but inside his own prurient fancy. What he imagines to be a (puppet’s?) sexed body is revealed to be instead a “thing not present,” a wholly unnatural, aesthetic thing, a manifestation of pure form with no natural body beneath. Whatever Busy sees under the puppet-ghost’s garment, the sight of it—the sight of nothing, or, even more hilariously, the sight of the puppeteer’s human hand or face—is prodigious enough to perform a miracle: it converts Zeal-of-the-Land Busy to a lover of the theater. He says only, “I am confuted, the cause hath failed me” (5.5.101). The puppet and Leatherhead both beg him to “be converted, be converted!” and he assents, “Let it go on, for I am changed, and will become a beholder with you!” and sits down to watch the play (5.5.103–5). Even in its magical efficacy, the puppet-ghost flashing embodies the pointlessness of pinning too much ontological content to sexual difference. It does its unexplained something (by way of nothing) in or to Busy’s psyche by means of fancy, and nothing else. The puppet-ghost flashing also signals the failure of heterosexual climax (on the part of Bartholomew Cokes) and the triumph of queer generativity, for even
the end of the puppet show (and the end of the play) are not the end of festivity. The wayward Justice Overdo hospitably invites everyone to his house for dinner; Bartholomew Cokes demands that the actors (by which he means the puppets, who still hold his fancy, though in practice they cannot be delivered without Leatherhead and Littlewit) come along, to have “the rest o’ the play at home” (5.6.109–10).

“His Fancy’s Queen”

I now return to *Twelfth Night* to show how the production and reproduction of “fancy” in its resolution can be just as anticlimactic and just as asexually generative as that of *Bartholomew Fair*’s consumption-crazed libidinal universe. In *Bartholomew Fair*, some of the most compelling objects of longing are fantasmatic and imag- inative: Win’s longing for pig, the wedding masque that never takes place, the puppet-ghost’s sex organs. *Twelfth Night*, on the other hand, ostensibly ends with a marriage between Orsino and Viola, but in fact we see no more of their wedding than we do of Bartholomew Cokes’s. And even in the resolution, the play never mentions reproduction; it projects no future offspring for any of the couples. It seems insistent in thematizing alloerotic relations, but none actually occur.

*Twelfth Night*’s play with gender and sexuality seems to be resolved at the end, with the focus on Viola as she is being described by Orsino—but it is not exactly Viola being described. With characteristic indirection, the Duke projects himself into a future “golden time” when he and Viola will be married. The Viola onstage, though, is not Viola. She is still Cesario, he says, “for so you shall be while you are a man.” “But,” he tells her, “when in other habits you are seen,” she will take on a different sex and a different status: “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen” (5.1.374–75). This last line raises real doubt as to whether Orsino will be able to corporeally apprehend that future Viola. Changed back into women’s clothes, she will “be seen” as Viola by others, but she does not seem to be seen by Orsino. She will be “Orsino’s mistress,” not “my mistress”—Orsino refers to himself in the third person—and “his fancy’s queen.”

The lines efface her agency, even her presence, as they imaginatively body forth a new status for Viola. Their physical and lin-
guistic incoherence recalls the incoherent structure and random sequence of a dream, and my final gesture will be to unpack some of their irresolvable, almost inarticulable implications for the structure of erotic desire in the play. If fancy is the intangible generative organ that conceives and holds the imaginary forms of love objects (or ideas for poems to be written), then Viola will be a mere apparition constructed inside Orsino’s imagination. This model precludes any possibility of Viola’s being fully embodied in her own right. Orsino would either keep her enclosed inside himself forever as an inert, unrelinquished love object, or he would have to somehow give birth to Viola, as a fancying mother. Even if some queer metaphor could be located by which this could take place, the Viola to whom Orsino would give birth would not be the embodied Viola standing before him onstage. It would be his constructed fantasy made flesh, like the racially marked child in the myth of the “mother’s fancy.” We would love to see Orsino’s ideal form of Cesario/Viola; we wonder whether that Cesario/Viola would then possess the “little thing” that would cement their homoerotic bond—but we must recognize it would be a different being from an enfleshed, agentive Viola.

If Orsino gets his own autoerotically conjured version of Viola at the end of the play—which he arguably does here, because these lines make it so difficult for her to become differentiated—it can be taken as a piece of evidence that the play is actually “the Duke’s fancy,” and that Orsino is the dreamer whose wish-fulfillment structures the whole play. We can trace a narrative thread through the play that looks like something Orsino might dream into being, beginning with the manifesto on his fickle erotic desires. The push and pull of submerged (homo)erotic tension he enjoys with Cesario/Viola gives way to the boy’s transformation into a juridically perfect wife, yet Orsino still stands at a remove, speaking of himself in the third person, as in the oblique proposal of marriage where Orsino reverses both his gender and Viola’s: “Boy, thou hast said to me a thousand times/Thou never shouldst love woman like to me” (5.1.262–63). Alternatively, this dream may easily transmute into a nightmare. If, as in the play’s first figurations of fancy, fancy is a polymorphous sea of shapes that dehierarchizes the objects of desire it receives, then it shouldn’t—and arguably can’t—have a queen. Viola’s value and
attraction to Orsino will fall “into abatement, and low price./Even in a minute” (1.1.13–14), as swiftly as so many objects of his desire have “surfeited” before. Heterosexual marriage—especially as defined by the changes in name and status that result from entering into its economic and kinship bonds—looks surprisingly unstable from this angle. (Viola’s abortive lesbian marriage to Olivia goes further in the play—all the way to the moment of sacramental solemnization—than any heterosexual union progresses.) When Viola is spoken of as “Orsino’s mistress and his fancy’s queen,” even indirectly, she is in peril from the same ideation that was Malvolio’s downfall when he murmurs “Count Malvolio” in a daydream. However hypothetical these transformations, the peril of linking one’s identity to a single dominion—materially, Viola’s new status as the Duke’s wife and metaphorically, her queenship of his fancy—is part of the play’s suspicion that reproductive heteronormativity, though inevitable, is neither natural nor safe, and that Viola is being offered a dominion that she will never be able to rule. Viola is arguably queen of nothing substantial at the end of this play—appropriately, as “nothing” fits with what Dympna Callaghan calls the “undecipherable” piling on of pudenda in the Duke’s final line. She has nothing but her sex, which, since it has been revealed, has arguably just fallen into “abatement and low price.”

Is there no way out for Viola? The insertion of a queen here at the end of the play may undo some of the queering effected by the unpredictable, nonreproductive play of fancy. It may rehierarchize Orsino’s object world, placing his wife at the top. It may (mostly) reassign to Viola a unitary female sex and feminine gender. However, even if pronouncing Viola “fancy’s queen” represents an effort to those intended binarizing ends, the attempt falls as strangely null and void as a flashing by a puppet-ghost. The phrase is too bizarrely redundant. “Fancy’s queen” conflates, splits, reverses, and confuses sexual roles in every possible way. It seems to turn the ostensibly heterosexual pairing of Orsino and Viola into a residually lesbian—or somehow homoerotic—pairing of two unreadable fancy queens who, even as the play ends, have in no way gotten their desires straight. Gender has not arrived at a resolution. Orsino reverses the existing master/servant power dynamic, telling Viola that “you shall from this
time be/Your master’s mistress” (5.1.319–20), but she has not been “seen” in her “other habits” in order to give her any identifiable bodily form in the new gender.

This ambivalent ending for Twelfth Night reinstates the sexes on the surface, as it must, but that does not mean that capacious, consuming fancy is resolved out of existence. In fact, as is the case when Bellario/Euphrasia remains with the prince and princess at the end of Philaster in the previous chapter, a major source of the resolution’s pleasure is that Olivia, Viola, Sebastian, and Orsino get to remain together. The projected marriages do not seem to require them to differentiate too much among their love objects; they get to hold on to spouses, former loves, ex-suitors, and siblings in a double-crossed quadrilateral of queer incestuous love. As Laurie Shannon observes, the erotic energies between siblings, and those based on likeness, are still present among, not subordinated to, those based on sexual difference. I would add to Shannon’s point that reading the play through its mechanisms of generativity—fancying, promiscuous proliferation, transformation—allows us to notice other axes on which the resolution is structurally queer. It refuses any developmental telos of supersession: taking in new erotic objects does not entail releasing or demoting old ones. The household configuration of multiple interlaced conjugal and familial bonds is propagated not by any sort of sexual reproduction but by a chance materialization that looks a great deal like budding or cloning, as when Sebastian shows up, supplying his body to stimulate erotic cathexes that neither Olivia nor Orsino could have foreseen. New love objects can look like slightly different (or not at all different) imprints of the same form and shape as old ones; in fact, especially if the old love is still there too, it is almost as though they were stamped from the same mold in Orsino’s capacious fancy. As the play ends, Viola’s gender metamorphosis is still to be performed, and no consummation or sexual reproduction has actually taken place. In a spirit of unsated queer perversity, it is important to note (particularly at the ends of comedies, when it is the last thing anyone wants to hear) that this is not an outcome that promises or delivers erotic satisfaction of any kind, for anyone—except the audience and the readers who collectively receive these “high fantastical” shapes.
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