

The Quick Body in Early Modern Literature

J. A. Smith

University of Manchester
E-mail: James.Smith-2@Manchester.ac.uk

Abstract

This article considers some instances of the word “quick” in early modern literature: a word which in the period referred to the living – or in a Christian sense, resurrected – body. It discusses the impulse in some early modern texts to pun on the fact that this flexible word for being alive also meant “speed”. In turn, it compares this with the way in which speed has been an important category for considering the limits of the body under modernity in twentieth-century critical theory.

Keywords: *quickness, speed, critical theory, Early Modern Literature, Jacques Derrida, Walter Benjamin, Henry Vaughan, William Shakespeare, Thomas Middleton*

The relationship between speed and the body has been foundational for modern critical theory, especially in its role as, in part, a response to or critique of modernity. This theoretical preoccupation is intertwined with the way Western culture since the nineteenth century has represented itself as characterized by unprecedented speed, as life becomes increasingly technological and machine-like.¹ Such thinking about modernity has often meant assuming the comparative agricultural benignity of early modern culture, which is implicitly coded as a “slow” counter-example to modernity’s speed. However, as several critics have recently argued, early modern culture was also in the habit of describing itself in remarkably analogous terms of technological, machinic – even “cyborg” – modernity, with all the opportunities and anxieties that implies.² Without necessarily wanting to detract from the distinctiveness of the modern industrial moment, it seems worthwhile to think more about how early modern culture

Biblical quotations are from *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*, ed. Lloyd R. Barry (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969); Shakespeare is quoted from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. Stanley Wells et al. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005); Thomas Middleton is quoted from *Thomas Middleton: The Collected Works*, ed. Gary Taylor et al. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008); plays are referenced parenthetically by abbreviated title.

¹ See, for instance, the editors’ introduction to a recent anthology of theoretical texts on ‘speed’, *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*, ed. Hartmut Rosa and William E. Scheurman (PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 2: “it is now something of a commonplace that core social and economic processes are undergoing a dramatic acceleration, while general rates of social change are intensifying no less significantly”.

² See Jonathan Sawday, *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine* (London: Routledge, 2007); and Mareile Pfannebecker, “Cyborg Coriolanus/ Monster Body Politic,” in *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, ed. Stefan Herbrechter and Ivan Callus (London: Palgrave, 2012).

conceptualised its own relationship to speed: even when this came in the form of surreptitious puns and figurative language.

In this essay I want to examine one specifically early modern point of intersection between speed and the body, in the period's flexible uses of the word "quick". In Old English, to be "quick" meant primarily to be alive, while to "quicken" was to be brought back to life. The OED suggests that the word's other main modern meaning – of being possessed of speed – became available in the fourteenth century. By the end of the sixteenth and during the seventeenth century, the word had collected a remarkable range of implications alongside its key theological sense of resurrection, as a survey of early modern dictionaries attests. Thomas Thomas's *Dictionarium Linguae Latinae et Anglicanae* (1587) relates it to ability, and being "apt to everything", and via the Latin "rapidus", to violence, vehemence and cruelty. Translating the French "animer" as "quicken" in *A Dictionary of the French and English Tongues* (1611), Randle Cotgrave defines it as "to give life unto; inspire breath, infuse a spirit into; also, to animate, encourage, hearten, embolden; incite, incense". Thomas Wilson's *A Christian Dictionary* (1612) defines "quicken" similarly as "to give life to the dead, or to revive that which is dying". In Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* (1656), quickness ranges from diligence and prone readiness to hastiness and to sharpness of wit. And John Kersey's *English Dictionary* in 1702 compares it to "nimbleness, readiness, or subtlety".³ As we will see, the idiomatic use of the term in the period also allows being quick to mean pregnant, and more generally, to be sexual.

My interest here is in the fact that early modern literature often played on the way in which this key word for conceptualising the living body was also a synonym for speed: for things being done or happening "quickly". Beginning by sketching how modern theory has tended to argue that new forms of unprecedented speed in industrial society have had transformative effects on the living body, I then turn to some early modern instances of "quickness" to consider what is at stake in early modern culture having a language that already surreptitiously implied that the body was characterised by speed. I close with a more extended discussion of a single text, Thomas Middleton and William Rowley's play of 1622, *The Changeling*, as an example of a distinctively early modern exercise in interrogating the limits between speed, language, and the body.

Quick Theory

In *On Some Motifs in Baudelaire* (1940), Walter Benjamin proposes that the transformative physiological and mental effects of overwhelming stimulations Freud had found in trauma sufferers twenty years earlier did not apply merely to individual abnormal cases, but was rather increasingly structuring memory, identity and knowledge in general. In Benjamin's analysis, modernity's most ordinary personages – the machine operator, the gambler, the pedestrian on a crowded street – have their lives structured around destabilising speed and abrupt transitions as much as the shell-shocked soldiers examined by Freud did. Already placing this "shock experience at the very centre of his art" in the nineteenth century, Charles Baudelaire becomes Benjamin's spokesperson for this new way of experiencing the intersection of the body

³ These references can be found via the "Early Modern Lexicons" website: <http://leme.library.utoronto.ca/>

and the city. In Baudelaire's oeuvre, speed is not simply attributable to individual objects or people, but seems to have elided the limits between them: a "jerky gait", a stabbing motion with a pen or paintbrush, even a "cutting" remark, all become variations on the kinds of subjectivity-disrupting speed.⁴ More resistant to these developments than Benjamin's Baudelaire, John Ruskin is nonetheless similar in the nineteenth century, in seeing speed of communication and speed of movement as interchangeable aspects of an all-encompassing modernity. The telegraph line laid between Bombay and Cornwall in 1870 is simply part of the same gesture as the railways that allow "every fool in Buxton [to] be at Bakewell in half an hour".⁵ For these early cultural critics, the speeds imposed on everyday life after industrialization have the power to elide the conventional limits between previously discreet areas of experience, and indeed between human bodies themselves.

Benjamin's analysis of the nineteenth century takes on a new significance in the work of Theodor Adorno, and in light of the Second World War: a point at which the destabilising speeds that had characterised life in the nineteenth century for Benjamin, and in the First World War for Freud, seem to have become even more ubiquitous. The staggered and unpredictable campaigns, the new kinds of explosives, the dynamic cinema newsreels, and the propaganda slogans are all subject to this logic of fast interruption. "Life", for Adorno, both in the forces and for civilians, "has changed into a timeless succession of shocks, interspaced with empty, paralysed intervals". The speed of modernity in the form of these violent shocks is once again associated with the abandonment of certain body limits. Adorno is characteristically more pessimistic, less interested than Benjamin in a "dialectical" rehabilitation of the potentially radical beneficial effects of these kinds of speed, and speaks of "the body's incongruity" with them.⁶ In this respect he shares with Paul Virilio, the theorist who has done most subsequently to theorize modernity's relationship with speed, a final mistrust of it.⁷

As David Wills emphasizes, then, the figuration of speed as "a too rapid movement into otherness, a displacement fast enough to reveal a rupture" has been "a dominating theme of discussions of technology at least since the advent of the industrial revolution".⁸ As remarkable and suggestive as much of this critique has been, the modernity/speed thesis nonetheless comes up against certain aporia. The first is betrayed in Adorno's passing reference to "the body's incongruity" with such technologized speeds. The assumption here is that there is a cultural-technological situation with which the human body could be "congruous": and among Adorno's less theoretically sophisticated contemporaries this was invariably posited as the pre-

⁴ Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, ed. and trans. Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings et al. (Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 1996), 318, 319.

⁵ John Ruskin, *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*, ed. Dinah Birch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 26-27; for Ruskin and the speed of the railways, see Jeremy Tambling, *Going Astray: Dickens and London* (Harlow: Longman, 2009), 111.

⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*, trans. E. F. N. Jephcott (London: Verso, 1974), 54.

⁷ For the resemblances between Virilio and Benjamin, with the distinction that Virilio "nowhere speaks of using or refunctioning technology to serve positive ends," see Douglas Kellner, "Virilio, War and Technology: Some Critical Reflections" in *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*, ed. John Armitage (London: Sage Publications, 2000), 122.

⁸ David Wills, "Techeology and the Discourse of Speed" in *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthumanist Present to a Biocultural Future*, ed. Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006), 238.

industrial agricultural world of the early modern.⁹ Whether or not we think that the body has ever been anything other than a problem for discourse, we will see that early modern writers certainly had their own resources for conceiving speed as “a too rapid movement into otherness”, quite as much as their post-industrial counterparts have. Wills’ citation of Hamlet on Gertrude, “O most wicked speed, to post with such dexterity to incestuous sheets” (H I:ii:156-157) attests to that, for one. On the one hand then, technology continues to be deployed in surprising, transformative ways, and intellectuals today retain an obligation to respond to that. But, equally, it seems unacceptable to work from a position on the disrupting effect of speed on the body that assumes the body was ever stable to begin with – that there was ever a “right” speed for it to be moving at – and equally problematic to confidently affix a historical moment when this disrupting acceleration supposedly set in.

We may begin to find a way out of this impasse with reference to the work of Jacques Derrida. In *No Apocalypse, Not Now*, Derrida points out that the most pressing instance of this disturbing speed in the late twentieth century is the idea of nuclear war, which seems to have speed inscribed into it, both in its apocalyptic evocation of instantaneous destruction, and in its habitual vocabulary of “first use” and “arms race”. Derrida is careful to ask the question often elided by other theorists of modernity over whether the relation to “time and to motion” emblematised in this kind of technological warfare is “qualitatively different” to that experienced by people in earlier epochs in respect of their own revolutions in speed. Whether, that is, we are truly “having, today, another, a different experience of speed”, as opposed to simply re-treading anxieties about it that have in some ways always been present in culture.¹⁰ But Derrida is not particularly interested in appealing to the historical past in order to qualify the theoretical assumption that this “different experience of speed” is distinctively post-industrial or modern. Rather, his emphasis is on what the response to speed implied in our habitual ideas about nuclear war means for the concept of historicity itself, and with it, literature: a term that always comes up abruptly, as if by surprise, in Derrida’s work.¹¹

The apocalyptic anticipation of nuclear war concerns an absolutely radical abruptness not only because of its association with technological speed, but because it marks the limit of historical time as such. It is conceptually unique in being something that, by definition, could never *have happened*, in that there could never be a survivor to narrate it retrospectively. This exceptional position of nuclear war in relationship to history gives it a peculiar charge. As much as it is the event which disrupts the entire concept of history by positing something that cannot exist in – and so exposes the non-completeness of – its archive, it also has the status of the pure event, from which history as an institution derives its authority. At the same time, in this sense that it is

⁹ For an account of the emergence of the agricultural “organic community” idea in Germany and Britain, see Stefan Collini, “Where Did it All Go Wrong?: Cultural Critics and ‘Modernity’ in Inter-War Britain,” in *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate*, ed. E.H.H. Green and D.M. Tanner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 247-274.

¹⁰ Jacques Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)”, trans Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis in *Diacritics*, 14, no. 2 (1984): 20.

¹¹ For Derrida’s comments on the ambivalent place of literature in his own work, see Jacques Derrida, *On the Name* ed. Thomas Dutoit and trans. David Wood et al. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995), 27-28.

“something one can only talk about”, nuclear war must belong to fiction: to literature, as the discourse of the impossible. Derrida pushes this speculation yet further, contending that, therefore, the institution of “literature” itself “belongs to this nuclear epoch”.¹² The fiction, so to speak, of nuclear war simply presents in concrete form something it has always been the function of literature to do: to somehow rush into absolute difference. As Paul de Man had already put it in “Literary History and Literary Modernity”, “the appeal of modernity haunts all literature. It is revealed in numberless images and emblems that appear at all periods – in the obsession with a *tabula rasa*, with new beginnings – that finds recurrent expression in all forms of writing”.¹³ Literature as such, according to Derrida and De Man, implies the apocalyptic gesture of clearing the scene, or of embarking on a writing that somehow assumes to stand outside everything else. In this case, to conceive of writing a history of speed in literature, and to tie this to the question of modernity, elides the fact that history and literature have always established themselves by a certain apocalyptic rushing ahead, a certain speeding forth the apocalypse.

Quick Bodies

As if in support of Derrida’s contention, early modern literature presents instances of the destabilising effects of speed that trouble the conventional historical view that it was the industrial revolution that made possible such formulations. At the same time, its playful associations of speed with the “quick” – possibly resurrected – body, seems to outline a surprising meeting between literature, the body, speed, and the apocalypse, along lines that we have seen articulated in a theoretical context by Derrida. While deconstructive critics diagnose a partially secularized trace of apocalyptic thinking in modern thinking about speed, early modern literature seems interested in linking speed with the resurrection that in Christian thought is supposed to happen after the apocalypse. We can begin to make this rapprochement between modern theoretical perspectives on speed and literature, and the early modern discourse of the living body’s “quickness” with reference to a poem by the Welsh Anglican and Royalist poet Henry Vaughan.¹⁴ “Quickness” was included in the second part of his collection of religious poetry, *Silex Scintillans: Sacred Poems and Private Ejaculations*, in 1655:

False life! a foil and no more, when
Wilt thou be gone?
Thou foul deception of all men
That would not have the true come on.

Thou art a moon-like toil; a blind
Self-posing state;
A dark contest of waves and wind;
A mere tempestuous debate.

¹² Derrida, “No Apocalypse, Not Now”, 23, 27.

¹³ Paul de Man, *Blindness & Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 152.

¹⁴ Henry Vaughan, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alan Rudrum (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 307-308.

In the conventional Christian separation, worldly existence is “false life”, a mere “foil” to “the true”, which is deferred to after resurrection. The two stanzas create the neat paradox that one’s time of being “quick”, in the sense of alive, is not over quickly enough, at least from the perspective of a Christian impatiently anticipating the afterlife. Whereas the living commit themselves to work as pointless as pulling the seas backwards and forwards or to petty infighting, life after death is something slightly more difficult to identify:

Life is a fixed discerning light,
A knowing joy;
No chance, or fit: but ever bright,
And calm and full, yet doth not cloy.

’Tis such a blissful thing, that still
Doth vivify,
And shine and smile, and hath the skill
To please without Eternity.

Thou art a toilsome mole, or less
A moving mist
But life is, what none can express,
A quickness, which my God hath kissed.

Resurrected “life” may be “discerning” and “knowing”, but the poem, we might suspect, is not.¹⁵ Its reassurance that while this true life is “calm and full”, it nonetheless “doth not cloy”, and that while “blissful”, it ‘still doth vivify”, are slightly haphazard non-sequiturs, since in either case there is not much reason to have supposed that one should come at the cost of the other. True life, for Vaughan, has a quality of absolute continuity, outside random “chance” or any disruptive “fit”; and yet there is something of “chance, or fit” in the poem’s own structure, as it has the effect of trailing uncertainly behind an idea of “life” it doesn’t quite have a definition for, yoking various heterogeneous explanations together in its place. The pay-off for this, however, is in the final stanza. Of course the poem can’t really define quickness in the neat manner of metaphysical wit, because it is “what none can express”. Bogged down in language, the poem is as much subject to the toilsome laboriousness of moles and mists as the “mere” human existence they are brought in to characterise. But the poem seems to escape this problem in its enigmatic final line. True life’s “quickness” could not be more different from the slow mugginess of what has gone before, and something of its glancing escape is replicated in the satisfaction that is invited in the word of the title finally appearing for the first time. God’s breathing life into the earthly body has become his “kiss,” and the (characteristically in the seventeenth century) unembarrassed and unexamined trace of sexuality in that is part of the effect.

Vaughan’s poem works by accumulating images of slow cloyingness which its own writing doesn’t work very hard to rise out of, before the reference to “*quickness*” in the final line somehow allows it to cut out of itself, as the spirit is supposed to be joyfully cutting out of life. The power of the use of the word here may be compared with Shakespeare, who allows it to do similar work in *Macbeth*, where “quick” seems to

¹⁵ For an account of the poem’s “evocative rather than descriptive force”, see Patricia Beer, *An Introduction to the Metaphysical Poets* (London: Macmillan, 1972), 82.

be put against one of the play's other keywords, its rhyme word and apparent antonym: "thick". Anticipating the murder of Duncan, Macbeth reflects "if it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/it were done quickly" (M I:vii:1-2), quoting Jesus to Judas at the last supper: "that thou doest, do quickly" (John 13:27). John's Gospel accentuates the mysterious effect of the remark, saying of the other disciples, "none of them [...] knew, for what cause he spake it unto them". Macbeth's convoluted reworking of this is similar to Claudius's council to Laertes in *Hamlet*, that he should avenge the death of his father Polonius quickly, before his enthusiasm grows so strong as to cancel itself out: "that we would do/ we should do when we would, for this "would" changes/ and hath abatements and delays" (H IV:vii:115-117). "Quick" is here too, as Claudius adopts a raw bodily kind of language to describe speeding up even his own speech, promising to get "to the quick of th'ulcer" (IV:vii:121), the heart of the matter. But while the betrayals of Jesus, Duncan and Hamlet are to be done "quickly", Lady Macbeth's main speech anticipating Duncan's murder emphasises thickness: "make thick my blood," "come thick night" (M I:v:41,47). Here *Macbeth* differs from Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling*, which, as we will see, attributes the quality of quickness to female sexuality, as well as to the other kinds of feminized marginality represented by the deformed aide De Flores. Rather than making quickness feminine, when Shakespeare turns to Jesus's words to Judas in these male accounts of betrayal, he suggests that a certain abrupt speediness is required to avoid the disastrous capitulation or the kind of loss of nerve described by Claudius: and this is figured as a specifically male anxiety. Lady Macbeth meanwhile replaces that with an ostensibly opposite need to become "thick", immovable: be it in the image of being filled with liquid – "from the crown to the toe topfull/ of direst cruelty" – or to be enveloped in "the dunnest smoke of hell" (like Vaughan's "moving mist"), with heaven unable to "peep through the blanket of the dark" (M I:v:41-41,50). In this way, in their two main speeches anticipating the murder, Shakespeare's concerns about how Macbeth and Lady Macbeth figure the relationship between their respective genders and their respective ambitions is mapped onto this opposition between quickness and thickness.

In these examples from Shakespeare and Vaughan, the rather flexible associations of "quickness" allow for speed as a concept and a certain crossing into otherness to be brought together: a gesture some critics of modernity have tacitly treated as unique to our own epoch. The apocalyptic logic that Derrida finds in the modern discourse of speed is intuited even more explicitly too. Macbeth's "it were done quickly" speech shares the sense of "quickness" suggested in Vaughan's poem, of life not being over quickly enough. Reflecting that part of the problem of the betrayal of Duncan is that, while the act itself is terrible enough, the aftermath is even more horrific because of its unpredictability, Macbeth suggests it would be better to "jump the life to come" (M I:vii:7) after successfully committing the murder. The fantasy is not uncommon in early modern literature. Ben Jonson's ode to Henry Morison, for instance, includes in its elaborate defence of Morison's early death the idea that rather than merely dying, "he leapt the present age/ possessed by holy rage/ to see that bright eternal day".¹⁶ As much as according to Derrida and De Man, literature in general contains the fantasy of an apocalyptic clearing away and beginning anew, early modern

¹⁶ Ben Jonson, "To the Immortal Memorie, and Friendship of that Noble Paire, Sir Lucius Cary, and Sir H Morison," in *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse*, ed. H. Woudhuysen and David Norbrook (London: Penguin, 2005).

literature is often unexpectedly drawn to the Biblical apocalypse of St John of Patmos, and the “bright and eternal day” of the resurrection of all Christians.¹⁷ While Shakespeare’s “jump” and Jonson’s “leap” have a kind of energetic vitality which puts them close to the general cognates of early modern quickness, their fantasies of bypassing the untidiness of the immanent world and skipping straight to the apocalypse are more explicitly related to quickness in the Biblical text on which the Vaughan poem evidently draws. In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul responds to his detractors’ scepticism over the plausibility of Christ’s returning from the dead by explicitly relating it to Adam’s creation from dead clay, and to the eventual resurrection of all Christians after Christ’s return. This is effected via a meditation on the question of – as it were – what a body is. For Paul, first, the relationship of the living body to the form it takes after resurrection is as ostensibly arbitrary as that of a seed to the plant that eventually emerges from it: “God giveth it a bodie at his pleasure, even to every seed a body” (1 Corinthians 15:39). To demonstrate this distinction, Paul draws up a taxonomy of bodies, dividing those of humans, beasts, fishes and birds, but adding the “quickened” bodies of resurrected spirits as a category of their own (1 Corinthians 15:40). In the paradoxical mode subsequently adopted by Vaughan, Paul continues his seed metaphor, remarking “that which thou sowest, is not quickened, except it die” (1 Corinthians 15:36). Paul uses the word again in the Geneva translation, adding it to his citation of Genesis 2:7, on the “breath of life” animating dead clay in the creation of Adam: “Adam was made a quickening sprit (1 Corinthians 15:45). As in Vaughan, “quickness” here is both a word for life and for something more than life that necessitates death. At the same time it is as chaotically bodily in its figurative language, and as predisposed to apocalyptic thinking, as are the early modern plays and poems that make use of it.

G. Wilson Knight implies another Shakespearean engagement with Paul’s account of quickness and resurrection when he uses the Corinthians text as an epigraph for his 1948 essay on *The Winter’s Tale*.¹⁸ The play makes its own use of the word. In Act Four, Polixenes, the king of Bohemia, and his aide, Camillo, make a disguised visit to the household of a shepherd. They are suspicious that the king’s son, Florizel, is embarrassing the court by pursuing an affair with Perdita, the shepherd’s daughter. (None of the characters at this point realising that Perdita is herself an adopted princess). The anticipated confrontation is deferred by a sequence in which Perdita engages in a performance of “hostess-ship” (WT IV:iv:72) or hospitality, presenting flowers to the assembled guests and describing their folk meanings. Responding to Perdita’s promise that the summer flowers of rosemary and rue “keep/their seeming and savour all winter long”, Polixenes perceives an allusion to his and Camillo’s elderliness, remarking that such “flowers of winter [...] well fit out ages” (WT IV:iv:74-75, 78-79). In a literalization of the Derridean phrase, Perdita has inadvertently given them “the gift of death”.¹⁹ Polixenes intimates that celebrating the vital long-livedness of the rosemary and rue also has the opposite effect of turning them into traces of death and winter - *memento mori* - even in the middle of summer. As if in reparation for this unwanted

¹⁷ For accounts of how widespread it is in Shakespeare, see R.M. Christofides, *Shakespeare and the Apocalypse: Visions of Doom from Early Modern Tragedy to Popular Culture* (London: Continuum, 2012); and Jeremy Tambling, *Allegory and the Work of Melancholy: The Late Medieval and Shakespeare* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004), 170-193.

¹⁸ G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Final Plays* (London: Methuen, 1977), 76.

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, *The Gift of Death*, trans. David Wills (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

deathliness, Perdita turns to successively younger members of the party, offering them flowers with successively more youthful associations. The “flowers of middle summer” are handed to the “men of middle age”, before Perdita finally turns to her lover, Florizel and the other youths, regretting that she doesn’t have “some flowers of the spring, that might become your time of day” (WT IV.iv. 106-108, 112-113). The spring flowers, supposedly the most vital because furthest from the onset of winter, have already disappeared in the midsummer. But as much as Perdita seems compelled to cover over her accidental allusion to the deaths of the old men, she now covers over these spring flowers’ absence by describing them and their folk meaning in as intimate detail as she had those flowers actually to hand. Gifting these descriptions of the absent spring flowers to the company, she then turns to Florizel:

O, these I lack
To make you garlands of, and my sweet friend,
To strew him o’er and o’er.

“What”, Florizel interrupts, “like a corpse?” “No”, replies Perdita:

like a bank for love to lie and play on,
Not like a corpse; or if, not to be buried,
But quick, and in mine arms (WT IV:iv:127-132)

Even if the interruption is delivered light-heartedly, Florizel’s noticing a discordant suggestion of death in Perdita’s playful description should be taken seriously. Her previous reference to falling flowers was a rather violent one, to those the mythological Proserpina “letst fall from Dis’s wagon” (WT IV:iv:117-118) as he abducted her to the underworld, bringing winter to earth until she returns to it, resurrected, in spring. But there is an even greater logical problem at work. According to the play’s mythology of the seasons, replacing winter with spring is supposed to be a means of placating a disturbingly deathly absence with the living plenitude of presence. But this doesn’t quite cohere, because in Perdita’s performance, it is actually the flowers that survive into winter that are “present”, alive, while the supposedly life-giving spring flowers are so only in Perdita’s description of them.

Florizel’s misgivings are not, however, enough to throw Perdita off. His concern that having flowers thrown over him would make him like a corpse, is adroitly countered by her image of a bank strewn with petals on which lovers might “lie and play”. The unspoken link between the corpse and the bank is, of course, the body decaying to mix with the soil. Yet, in a characteristic piece of Shakespearean compression, the unpleasantness of this is sidestepped by the combination of the slight surprisingness of imagining Florizel as a bank, and by the introduction of the lovers, which allows the image to end with a reminiscence of Perdita and Florizel’s own relationship. If this work of imagery wasn’t enough, Perdita then shifts to the other seventeenth-century use of the word “corpse” to mean any body, dead or “quick”. Perdita seems to be using “quick” to mean simply “not dead”, perhaps with the additional suggestion of subtly sexual liveliness in “in mine arms”. But the work the word “quick” performs in the passage also places it in the Pauline context of resurrection. Perdita’s answer enacts what it describes, transforming Florizel’s query about his death into a statement of life, and finding life in the word he had intended to indicate death. Perdita’s hasty reversion has the structure of a resurrection, much like

the entire sequence of the giving of the flowers. The accidental comment on the old men's deaths is repaired by handing out more youthful flowers, the absence of the spring flowers is repaired by Perdita's descriptions of them, and finally the idea of the death of Florizel is reversed in Perdita's ingenious work of imagery. The apparent innocuousness or casualness of the use of the word "quick" in the last of these is belied by the way the entire scene is organised around this series of "quickenings", of little resurrections. In this respect, the flower scene also stands for the whole play in miniature, which reaches a destructive crisis of actual, faked, and demanded deaths at the end of act three, before spending acts four and five working to return Perdita to her royal state, and her supposedly dead mother Hermione back to life.

Modern critical theory has often represented the modern body as undertaking dramatic and usually destructive transformations as a result of its encounters with speed. As Derrida has shown, such argument has often been determined by an apocalyptic logic, which slyly links it to an apocalyptic tendency in literature itself. Taking the language of "quickness" as it is explored in Vaughan and Shakespeare's various engagements with its Biblical uses shows that these alluring links between speed, apocalypse/resurrection, and literature have even earlier and more heterogeneous precedents than even Derrida discusses. The neatly paradoxical nature of quickness as life dependent on death going back to Paul's writings furnishes Shakespeare and Vaughan with a conveniently flexible device: we have seen that *The Winter's Tale* can be conceived as virtually structured around the use of the word at its centre. In the final section of this essay, however, I want to consider a text which makes a much more violent and unstable use of the early modern discourse of quickness, and which is much more difficult to reduce to either witty metaphysical paradox or Pagan/Christian fantasies of rebirth.

Writing Quickly

Act Four of Middleton and Rowley's *The Changeling* (1622) begins with Beatrice Joanna in a state of anxiety. After employing the deformed servant, De Flores to murder her betrothed so that she can marry another suitor, Alsemero, Beatrice has been forced to have sex with De Flores as a condition of his silence. Examining her new husband's closet, she discovers a strange library of transcribed manuscripts dedicated to methods of testing women for pregnancy, and, more concerningly, virginity. This inspires the play's well-known "bed trick," in which Alsemero is to unknowingly sleep with the waiting-woman, Diaphanta, instead of Beatrice, on the wedding night, her virginity preventing him from detecting that Beatrice's has now been lost. The negotiation of terms with Diaphanta for this arrangement includes an apparently innocuous quibble on "quick," which in fact – or so I want to show – is even more significant for the working of the play than the analogous use in *The Winter's Tale* was for that text a decade earlier.

The speed with which Diaphanta accepts Beatrice's offer of her "first night's pleasure, and... money too" (TC IV:i:88) makes her suspect that the servant is "too quick, I fear, to be a maid" (TC IV:i:90). "Too quick" in hastily agreeing to sell her virginity for it to be altogether convincing, Diaphanta is also "too quick" because, as such, she is potentially pregnant, and, in her knowing reference to the "pleasure" of the marriage bed, is "too quick" in the sense of being too generally alert to sensuality. This

concern over the sensual quickness of the lower class woman stays with Beatrice into the start of Act Five, which begins with her waiting for the bed trick to be completed as the clock strikes one. The “quick” Diaphanta is not being quick enough, and Beatrice complains that rather than serviceably completing the act and allowing the two women to switch back, “the strumpet serves her own ends [...] devours the pleasure with a greedy appetite” (TC V:i:2-3). De Flores places the same emphasis on the relationship between Diaphanta’s sexual luxuriousness and the amount of time the trick is taking, complaining to Beatrice, “I could have helped you to a pothecary’s daughter/ would have fall’n off before eleven and thanked you too” (TC V:i:21-22). As sunrise approaches and threatens to ruin the trick, De Flores proposes to start a fire in Diaphanta’s empty chamber, forcing her to escape from Alsemero’s bedroom in the ensuing panic. The cry of “fire” sounds out, and Beatrice reflects on how quickly De Flores seems to act: “Already? how rare is that man’s speed!” (V:i:68). When, as planned, Diaphanta flees, she is murdered by De Flores, who partially burns her body, before carrying it onstage as if attempting to rescue her. Unlike the servant who comments on the speed with which Diaphanta has been killed in the fire (“how soon was she stifled!” (TC V:i:119)), Beatrice and De Flores both emphasise her personal slowness as the cause of the fire and her death: “As good a soul as ever lady countenanced,” says Beatrice, “but in her chamber negligent and heavy” (TC V:i:103-104); “those sleepy sluts are dangerous in the house” (TC V:i:106).

Beginning with Beatrice’s misgivings about the sexual quickness of Diaphanta, the bed trick sequence proceeds to her fear – coming from both jealousy and self-preservation – of the waiting-woman’s slowness in finishing the sexual act with her husband. The situation is remedied by the “speed” of De Flores, and concludes with the two conspirators attesting to Diaphanta’s chastity, but to also her slovenly slowness. In this way, the bed trick is organised around a series of exchanges between being fast and being slow, being sexual and being chaste, and being alive and being dead: all of which are based on the various senses of Beatrice’s use of “quick” at the start. The attention drawn to the speed and suddenness with which De Flores breaks up Beatrice’s vacillation by starting the fire is consistent with a suggestive aside of T.S. Eliot’s on Middleton’s plotting generally. “Characters talk too much, and then suddenly stop talking and act”, he remarks, and “this mixture of tedious discourse and sudden reality is everywhere in the work of Middleton”.²⁰ But as we have begun to see, the language of *The Changeling* is also peculiarly self-conscious about its tendency towards suddenness. Characters greet each other with “good speed” (TC V:i:48), lovers are described as “quick-sighted” (TC IV:iii:139), and rings stick on fingers “fast” (TC III:ii:24), as characters seem compulsively drawn to the language of quickness when referring to their own and each other’s actions.

The play begins in the context of an unusual slowing down or delaying. Concerned that the traveller, Alsemero, seems uncharacteristically slow to take advantage of weather conditions lending themselves to “a swift and pleasant passage” (TC I:i: 14), his friend, Jasperino says:

I never knew
Your inclinations to travel at a pause
With any cause to hinder it till now.

²⁰ T.S. Eliot, *Elizabethan Dramatists* (London: Faber and Faber, 1963), 84.

Ashore you were wont to call your servants up,
 And help to trap your horses for the speed;
 At sea I have seen you weight the anchor with "em,
 Hoist sails for fear to lose the foremost breath (TC I:i:26-32)

At the start of *The Merchant of Venice*, Shakespeare suggests that merchants are unable to dissociate the most banal details of their domestic life on land from concern for the fate of their merchandise at sea: blowing on soup to cool it brings to mind storming winds, the sand of an hourglass recalls perilous shallows, and even the "holy edifice" of a church takes on a resemblance to enormous rocks at sea (MV I:i:22-40). Similarly here, Jasperino says that under ordinary circumstances the dexterous quickness of Alsemero's conduct when sailing also characterises his behaviour on land: even the harnessing of his horses – never mind his actually riding them – is an exercise in drastic momentum. When Alsemero objects to "how violent" his friend is in his keenness to leave, meanwhile, Jasperino responds, "is this violence? 'Tis but idleness compared with your haste yesterday" (TC I:i:40-43). This kind of quickness that used to characterise Alsemero is now opposed to another kind. Until now, Alsemero appeared to be sexless, but it is an entanglement with Beatrice that has caused him to "take his leisure," and ignore the sailors' calls for a speedy departure (TC I:i:55). Whereas his earlier indifference to women had given him an animal-like slipperiness – "your mother/nor best friends, who have set snares of beauty/ [...] could never trap you that way" (TC I:i:37-39) – his newfound desire has slowed him both in terms of physical movement and in language. As he tells Beatrice while wooing her, "I want more words to express me further/ and must be forced to repetition" (TC I:i:69-70).

Alsemero's new sexual interest in Beatrice has brought to an end the speed with which every part of his life was previously associated. For Beatrice meanwhile, her meeting with Alsemero has arrived altogether too slowly – "for five days past to be recalled!" (TC I:i:83) – or time has moved too fast, because she has become engaged to Alonzo five days previously. Her initial attempt to extricate herself from the situation is also presented in the language of speed. When her father tells her that the wedding must take place within a week, she responds "nay, good sir, be not so violent. With speed/ I cannot render satisfaction", adding that she is unwilling to part with "the dear companion of my soul/ Virginitie, whom I thus long have lived with/ [...] so rude and suddenly" (TC I:i:195-199). Later she will say of her father's determination to bring about the wedding, "he's so forward... so urgent that way, scarce allows me breath to speak to my new comforts" (TC II:i:24-26). If quickness is sexual, then sudden speed is sexually violent, abruptly forcing a departure of what Beatrice personifies as her "companion", Virginitie, in a manner analogous to the proposed departure of Alsemero's sailors. In this way, the play makes explicit an equation of speed with violence which was only implied when Alsemero and Jasperino used "violence" as a synonym for "haste" at the start of the scene: we may recall Jacques's "the world's a stage" speech in *As You Like it*, which similarly refers to young men as "jealous in honour, sudden, and quick in quarrel" (AYLI II:vii:151).

Beatrice reflects that "some speedy way" (TC II:i:23) must be devised to avoid the marriage to Alonzo, and this is where she turns to De Flores. We have seen that when the bed trick stumbles, De Flores becomes associated with precisely the kind of adept speedy action that Alsemero has left behind in falling for Beatrice. But De Flores is also associated with speed in another sense that is important to the play, in that he is always surrounded by abrupt, sudden change. The dramatis personae in the 1653 quarto

edition of the play identifies Antonio, the gallant who disguises himself as a madman in order to seduce the madhouse doctor's wife in the subplot, as "the changeling" of the title. But commentators have often noted that the play gives little support for this, because beyond changing his identity by disguise, Antonio shows few of the qualities early modern people tended to associate with the designation: a "changeling" in this period being someone who had been switched at birth by fairies, as Titania's Indian boy has been in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, possibly with some mental or physical disability. Rather than puzzling over which of the play's characters is properly "the changeling" of the title however, it may be more important to stress how the play actually holds back from explicitly identifying which of its characters is not quite human in this way. It may rather be the case that a certain "changeling" faculty – a tendency towards abrupt change – works more obliquely through the play and its characters, and is not reducible to one person. In his manipulateness and physical deformity, De Flores has sometimes been identified as the "real" changeling; but perhaps more important is the way he seems to provoke abrupt changes around him. Like Richard at the opening of Shakespeare's *Richard III* or Walter Benjamin's "wizened hunchback" in the revolutionary manifesto "Theses on the Philosophy of History", the deformed character has so little invested in the status quo that he is well positioned to effect traumatic change from within it.²¹

When the audience first meets De Flores, he describes himself as existing in a kind of constant motion with Beatrice – "follow(ing) still whilst she flies from me" (TC I:i:102) – while she describes her own hatred for him as completely baseless and arbitrary: "tis my infirmity/ nor can I other reason render you" (TC I:i:109-110). Desire and repulsion in this play are vulnerable to abrupt shifts that cannot be reduced to an ordered logic or timeline. Time is at the mercy of appetite as much as appetite is defined by a quickness that short circuits the normal running of time. The play seems to reinforce this by drawing on Hal's rebuke to Falstaff in *1 Henry IV* that he would only need to know what time it was if "hours were cups of sack, and minutes capons, and clocks the tongues of bawds" (1H4 I:ii:7-8), when the inhabitants of the madhouse refer to themselves dining at "belly-hour," waking up at "eye hour," getting drunk at "mouth hour," and so on (TC I:ii:69-77).

In this way, finally, Middleton and Rowley's play can be read as a kind of dismantling of the logic of quickness as it is enacted in however multiplicitous a way in Shakespeare and in Vaughan. Quickness in the texts examined in the previous section tends towards apocalyptic fantasies of resurrection: a tendency Derrida's work suggests is replicated in our own modern discourse of speed. *The Changeling* however seems distinctive from this, punning on "quickness" as if its paradoxical associations were sufficiently safe for it to do so, and yet inscribing abrupt, too-speedy *change* at every level of its discourse, from the title outwards. The quality of quickness belongs not just to its characters, but somehow to the writing itself. In this way it seems to prefigure the way Derrida wants to argue that our modern discourse of speed must ultimately return to literature. It may be no accident that early modern literature seems to have an even more polyvalent and powerfully apocalyptic vocabulary for speed in this old term

²¹ Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 389; for another comparison of Richard III and De Flores in terms of male ugliness and deformity, see Naomi Baker, *Plain Ugly: The Unattractive Body in Early Modern Culture* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), 80-93.

“quickness” than our own supposedly too-fast modernity. In its habitual commitment to words quickly changing their meanings, to characters abruptly shifting function, and to symbols and motifs that refuse to remain stably fixed to a particular referent, “quickness” may be conceived as the reigning quality of early modern literature itself.

References

1. Adorno, Theodor. *Minima Moralia: Reflections from Damaged Life*. Translated by E. F. N. Jephcott. London: Verso, 1974.
2. Baker, Naomi. *Plain Ugly: The Unattractive Body in Early Modern Culture*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010.
3. Beer, Patricia. *An Introduction to the Metaphysical Poets*. London: Macmillan, 1972.
4. Benjamin, Walter. *Selected Writings*. Edited and translated by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings et al. Cambridge MA: The Belknap Press, 1996.
5. Christofides, R.M. *Shakespeare and the Apocalypse: Visions of Doom from Early Modern Tragedy to Popular Culture*. London: Continuum, 2012.
6. Collini, Stefan. “Where Did it All Go Wrong?: Cultural Critics and “Modernity” in Inter-War Britain.” In *The Strange Survival of Liberal England: Political Leaders, Moral Values and the Reception of Economic Debate*, edited by E.H.H. Green and D.M. Tanner, 247-274. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
7. de Man, Paul. *Blindness & Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971.
8. Derrida, Jacques. “No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives).” Trans Catherine Porter and Philip Lewis. *Diacritics*, 14. 2 (1984): 20-31.
9. Derrida, Jacques. *On the Name*. Edited by Thomas Dutoit and translated by David Wood et al. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.
10. Derrida, Jacques. *The Gift of Death*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995.
11. Eliot, T.S. *Elizabethan Dramatists*. London: Faber and Faber, 1963.
12. *The Geneva Bible: A Facsimile of the 1560 Edition*. Edited by Lloyd R. Barry. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969.
13. Jonson, Ben. “To the Immortal Memorie, and Friendship of that Noble Paire, Sir Lucius Cary, and Sir H Morison.” In *The Penguin Book of Renaissance Verse*, edited by H. Woudhuysen and David Norbrook, 638-643. London: Penguin, 2005.
14. Kellner, Douglas. “Virilio, War and Technology: Some Critical Reflections.” In *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*, edited by John Armitage, 103-125. London: Sage Publications, 2000.
15. Knight, G. Wilson. *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare’s Final Plays*. London: Methuen, 1977.
16. Middleton, Thomas. *The Collected Works*. Edited by Gary Taylor et al. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.

17. Pfannebecker, Mareile. "Cyborg Coriolanus/ Monster Body Politic." In *Posthumanist Shakespeares*, edited by Stefan Berbrechter and Ivan Callus, 114-132. London: Palgrave, 2012.
18. Rosa, Hartmut and William E. Scheurman, eds. *High-Speed Society: Social Acceleration, Power, and Modernity*. PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009.
19. Ruskin, John. *Fors Clavigera: Letters to the Workmen and Labourers of Great Britain*. Edited by Dinah Birch. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000.
20. Sawday, Jonathan. *Engines of the Imagination: Renaissance Culture and the Rise of the Machine*. London: Routledge, 2007.
21. Shakespeare, William. *The Complete Works*. Edited by Stanley Wells et al. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005.
22. Tambling, Jeremy. *Allegory and the Work of Melancholy: The Late Medieval and Shakespeare*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004.
23. Tambling, Jeremy. *Going Astray: Dickens and London*. Harlow: Longman, 2009.
24. Vaughan, Henry. *The Complete Poems*. Edited by Alan Rudrum. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976.
25. Wills, David. "Techeology and the Discourse of Speed." In *The Prosthetic Impulse: From a Posthumanist Present to a Biocultural Future*, edited by Marquard Smith and Joanne Morra, 237-263. Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2006.

Corpul viu în literatura modernă timpurie

Articolul exemplifică utilizările cuvântului „quick” în literatura modernă timpurie: dacă în perioada respectivă acesta se referea la corpul viu sau la corpul înviat în sensul său creștin, în continuare cuvântul a început să desemneze nu doar noțiunea de a fi viu, ci și pe aceea de „viteză”. Articolul compară modul în care viteza a reprezentat pentru teoria criticii moderne o categorie importantă pentru considerarea limitelor corporalității în modernitate.