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### Wood, Jennifer Linhart, ed. *Dynamic Matter: Transforming Renaissance Objects*

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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**Wood, Jennifer Linhart, ed.**

***Dynamic Matter: Transforming Renaissance Objects.***

University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2022. Pp. xiii, 276 + 28 b/w ill. ISBN 9780271092539 (hardcover) US\$119.95.

*Dynamic Matter: Transforming Renaissance Objects* is an edited volume that probes the “life histories” of Renaissance objects featured in early modern correspondences, poems, and texts, ranging from Edmund Spencer’s *The Faerie Queen* (1590) to William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* (c. 1611). In response to Douglas Bruster’s call to “begin taking sixteenth- and seventeenth-century materialist thought seriously,” the volume’s editor, Jennifer Linhart Wood, aims to interrogate theories and methodologies of research focusing on the materialities of early modern objects (2). According to Wood, *Dynamic Matter* foregrounds early modern ideas on matter in its study of objects approached as isolated things to which we have limited access and relational actors that directly affect their environments, simultaneously revealing themselves and disrupting the subject-object binary and hierarchy. Wood positions the volume’s theoretical framework amid Bruno Latour’s actor-network-theory (ANT) and Graham Harman’s OOO (Object Oriented Ontology). In Wood’s words: “We hold the distinction between ANT and OOO in tension, thinking carefully not only about the matter—and objects—we study but also about their relations and effects, especially transformative ones” (6). With this theoretical background in mind, Wood makes a case for a multisensory (sensory-perceptual) experiential approach to the study of early modern objects and texts. The methodology thus incorporates intersemiotic literary, musical, archival, and historical material studies (22).

The volume comprises an introduction, three parts with three chapters each, a selected bibliography, and an index. The chapters that form the first part, “Objects Within / Without the Body,” centre objects that closely interacted, shaped, and were shaped by skin, hair, and the body. Chapter 1, Josie Schoel’s “Farre Fetched and Deare Bought,” highlights the suppression of the influence and expenditure of foreign knowledges and resources in constructions of Englishness through the epistolary correspondence of Queen Elizabeth I and Melike Safiye Sultan, principal consort of Murad III and mother of Mehmed III. Erika Mary Boeckeler’s “Comb Poems,” the volume’s second chapter, looks at comb posies and texts written in books in various shapes, including those

of combs. Through a detailed consideration of the visibility of verses in William Browne's *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613), Boeckeler argues for a literary methodology that accounts for the "thingness" of language and the weaving of aesthetic forms and linguistic contents in early modern texts. In chapter 3, "Variable Vestments and Clothing Conversions," Naomi Howell traces the lives of Catholic vestments in post-Reformation Exeter. Howell shows how Catholic clerical robes became performative garbs and funeral palls and uses the converting robes to interrogate concepts such as historical anachronism, ruptures, and continuities.

The volume's second part, "Networking Objects," shifts the focus from the intimate scale occupied by individual objects and bodies to objects' wider spheres of circulation and the networks created by the objects' movement and transformation. In chapter 4, Edward McLean Test charts the networks of imported "New World" feathers of Indigenous origins and contends for alternate cultural histories of the early modern Atlantic. Anna Riehl Bertolet continues the exploration of networks in chapter 5, "Needlework Patterns on the Move." Bertolet carefully deliberates Anne Lawle's embroideries from c. 1655, which, most likely, drew from Giovanni Ostaus's pattern book, *La Vera Perfezione del Disegno di varie sorti di recami* (1561). Bertolet uses the ephemeral nature of the embroidery pattern book, and the way its use calls for its destruction, to discuss the augmentation of materiality and ideas about material (re)incarnation, transformations, and dynamism. Chapter 6 by Abbie Weinberg, "Whose Least Part Crackt, the Whole Does Fly," follows Prince Rupert of the Rhine's drops. Prince Rupert's drops were tadpole-shaped glass items formed by dropping molten glass into water. Weinberg traces the networks of poets, philosophers, glassmakers, and partygoers that studied, transported, and wrote about the drops, which included Margaret Cavendish, Christiaan Huygens, and Robert Hooke. Subsequently, the author argues that Hooke's experiments with the perplexing drops influenced his development of Hooke's Law, stating that the amount of force applied to an elastic object is proportional to how far it stretches. In short, Weinberg argues for the importance of the study of objects and things for the study of science.

The final part of the volume, "Staging Properties," goes back to the scale of the individual object as it investigates the role objects played in early modern English performances. Framing portable rare shows and portable peep shows as disruptive dynamic objects, Sarah F. Williams unravels the cultural and

political role of the travelling theatre box in “Traveling Music and Theatrics.” In chapter 8, “Protean Objects in William Percy’s *The Aphrodysial or Sea-feast*,” Maria Shmygol surveys the extant manuscripts of William Percy’s play to demonstrate the authorial creative process as a material protraction of a series of deletions, insertions, and transformations. In parallel, Shmygol invites the reader to reflect on Percy’s off-stage props—a whale and a magical bracelet—and consider “the protean, multitemporal, and multisensory properties inherent in all matter” (225). Emily E. F. Philibrick’s chapter, “I’ll Drown My Book,” wraps up the volume with a speculative inquiry into the agency of objects in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. Philibrick echoes Prospero’s implication of the audience in the epilogue to propose the extension and enmeshing of narrative agency to other non-human actors, including Prospero’s magic book. Overall, the author convincingly maintains the transformative material nature of Prospero’s book and outlines the grimoire as prevailing, dynamic, and, in a way, alive.

*Dynamic Matter* is sure to benefit early modern literary scholars, early modern art historians, and historians with a focus on England. However, it should be noted that the volume confounds “matter” and “materials,” as well as “materialities,” as conceptual apparatuses and does not expound their related and distinct meanings and histories. While the draw on contemporary theories is profuse, historians might sense a lack of contextualization through pertinent early modern English primary sources. Instead, the theoretical sources drawn from history are few and appear unsystematic. For example, the choice and significance of Aristotle—abundantly noted and cited in the introduction—to post-Reformational England is not made straightforward to the reader. The introduction also fails to problematize the English curiosity cabinet and the curation of the *Wunderkammer* through abductions and pillaging. Nonetheless, the volume is thought-provoking with a considerable thematic scope that deepens the conversation on material studies of early modern objects, texts, and ideas, including the notion of matter.

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