

Elizabeth Williamson The Evergreen State College



Altar Properties and Their Trappings

Using a set of highly adaptable stage properties -- objects that functioned as banquet tables in one scene and sacrificial altars in another -- the early modern theater staged dramatic conflicts over the difference between "idolatrous" Catholic ceremonies and "godly" Protestant ones. Although the public playing companies never explicitly addressed the communion ritual that replaced the Roman mass, texts such as Ford's *Broken Heart* (1630) reveal the slippage between the altar and the table in post-Reformation England. Rather than registering as necessarily Catholic or Protestant, many of these altar properties drew attention to the complicated connections between social memory and ritual implements. Taking advantage of the overlap between theatrical and religious practice, they functioned as fulcrums around which surprisingly urgent questions about proper Christian worship were played out.