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Things "newly performed": the Resurrection Tradition in Shakespeare's Plays

What role did resurrection motifs play in the secular theater of post-Reformation England? Although the Protestant reformers had outlawed the ritual use of Easter sepulchers and the performance of biblical resurrection dramas, tombs and the theatrical conventions associated with them continued to appear regularly in public theater plays. But this convention was itself firmly rooted in the medieval drama, whose stage directions provide a rich account of the theatrical possibilities inherent in the tomb property. And while some early modern plays framed their resurrections satirically in order to distance themselves from the Catholic theater, many others used moments of resurrection to stir playgoers' emotions, just as medieval actors had done for hundreds of years. Building upon Michael O'Connell's insights about connections between the mystery cycles and the secular dramas performed in the London theaters, I contend that several seventeenth-century plays borrowed an affective technology—a dramatic structure removed from its original context but not entirely devoid of an emotional charge—from the medieval stage. I use this term to describe the ways in which the public theater companies sought to access the power associated with resurrections in the Catholic drama without bringing Christ himself on stage. By focusing on several Shakespearean moments of resurrection, including the final scene of *The Winter's Tale* (1610), I also suggest that Shakespeare's plays provides some of the best examples of the way Renaissance playwrights worked through the various permutations of the stage resurrection in order to elicit emotional responses from their audiences.