Hamlet's Tables and the Technologies of Writing in Renaissance England

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Books play a prominent role in *Hamlet*. In 2.2, the prince enters "*reading on a Booke*," according to a stage direction in the First Folio (TLN 1203 [2.2.167 s.d.]); and in 3.1, Polonius instructs Ophelia to "Reade on this booke" (TLN 1695 [3.1.43]).[1] In the former scene, Gertrude comments on Hamlet's entrance, saying "looke where sadly the poore wretch / Comes reading" (TLN 1204–5 [2.2.168]). In the first quarto it is Claudius who says "see where hee comes poring vppon a booke," and here, as Margreta de Grazia notes, Hamlet is "reading a book at a particularly critical point: just before he delivers the most famous speech in the language, 'To be, or not to be.'"[2] But perhaps the most important book in the play, both figuratively and literally, is that of memory.[3] After seeing the ghost of his father, Hamlet says:

> Remember thee?
> I, thou poore Ghost, while memory holds a seate

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[1] Unless otherwise noted, quotations of *Hamlet* throughout this essay follow *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, prep. Charlton Hinman (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968), a facsimile edition of *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies* (London, 1623), as do quotations from all other plays by Shakespeare. Citations include both Hinman's through-line numbers and act-scene-line numbers keyed to *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). Translations of foreign-language quotations are our own.

[2] *The tragicall historie of Hamlet Prince of Denmarke by William Shake-speare . . .* (London, 1603), sig. D4^{v}; and Margreta de Grazia, "Soliloquies and Wages in the Age of Emergent Consciousness," *Textual Practice* 9 (1995): 67–92, esp. 73–74.

[3] See Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990); and Lina Bolzoni, *La Stanza della Memoria: Modelli Letterari e Iconografici nell'Età della Stampa* (Turin: Einaudi, 1995).

> In this distracted Globe: Remember thee?
> Yea, from the Table of my Memory,
> Ile wipe away all triuiall fond Records,
> All sawes of Bookes, all formes, all presures past,
> That youth and obseruation coppied there;
> And thy Commandment all alone shall liue
> Within the Booke and Volume of my Braine,
> Vnmixt with baser matter. . . .
> (TLN 780–89 [1.5.95–104])

Hamlet imagines his memory as an inscribed "Table" that can be wiped clean. This virtual table seems, however, to require the supplement of actual tables: "My Tables, my Tables; meet it is I set it downe, / That one may smile, and smile and be a Villaine" (TLN 792–93 [1.5.107–8]).

Stage directions in several other Renaissance plays show that Hamlet is not the only character to use tables onstage: "*Draw*[s] *out his Table-booke*" (*Loues Labour's Lost*); "*Balurdo drawes out his writing tables, and writes*" (*Antonios Reuenge*); "*He drewe furth his writing tables*" (*The Cuck-Queanes and Cuckolds Errants*); "*Writes in his tables*" (*The Sparagvs Garden*); "*Pulls out a Table Book*" (*Pandora*); "*takes a Memorandum in his Table Book*" (*The Fair Example*).[4] Tables are also alluded to within the dialogue of the playtexts: "Draw your tables, and write what wise I speake" (*Iames, slaine at* Flodden); "Boy my Tables? . . . Your Tables are ready Sir" (*Everie Woman in her Humor*); "the author defies [his critics], and their writing-tables" (*Euery Man Ovt of His Hvmovr*); "Write you that in your table booke" (*Apollo Shroving*); "I will put all dow[n]e in my Table-book, and con it by the way" (*The City Wit*); "out with your Table-books" (*The Guardian*); "I'l note that down in my Table-book" (*The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman*).[5]

What exactly are these "tables," "writing-tables," or "Table-books"? If we accept that Hamlet supplements the metaphorical tables of memory with a stage-prop notebook, then what kind of book might an actor playing Hamlet on the

[4] Shakespeare, *Loues Labour's Lost*, TLN 1755 (5.1.15 s.d.); John Marston, *Antonios Reuenge* (London, 1602), sig. B2^{r}; William Percy, *The Cuck-Queanes and Cuckolds Errants*, ed. William Nicol (London: Shakespeare Press, 1824), 12; Richard Brome, *The Sparagvs Garden: A Comedie* (London, 1640), sig. I3^{v}; Sir William Killigrew, *Pandora: A Comedy* (London, 1664), sig. E4^{v}; Richard Estcourt, *The Fair Example: or the Modish Citizens. A Comedy* (London, 1706), sig. H3^{r}.

[5] Robert Greene, *The Scottish Historie of Iames, slaine at* Flodden (London, 1598), sig. C2^{v}; Anonymous, *Everie Woman in her Humor* (London, 1609), sig. B1^{r}; Ben Jonson, *Euery Man Ovt of His Hvmovr* in *The Workes of Beniamin Jonson* (London, 1616), sig. K6^{r}; William Hawkins, *Apollo Shroving* (London, 1627), sig. C3^{r}; Richard Brome, *The City Wit, or, The VVoman wears the Breeches: A Comedy* (London, 1653), sig. D3^{r}; Philip Massinger, *Three New Playes; viz. Bashful Lover, The Guardian, Very VVoman* (London, 1655), sig. I7^{v}; Edward Ravenscroft, *The Citizen Turn'd Gentleman: A Comedy* (London, 1672), sig. B3^{v}.

Renaissance stage have employed? The book that Hamlet refers to would need to have three material features: first, it must be small enough to be portable; second, it must be easily held so that it can be used while standing; and third, it must be erasable. To write with ink, the actor would need to hold a notebook, a pen, and an inkhorn at the same time. How would the actor playing Hamlet use *two* hands to hold the *three* pieces of equipment necessary to "set . . . downe" in ink that "one may smile, and smile and be a Villaine"?[6] Even if the actor attached an inkhorn to his belt, he would still find it very awkward—and messy—to write while standing. While scribes and scholars did sometimes carry inkhorns, a prince (or, more to the point, an actor) would be unlikely to risk ruining expensive clothes with ink stains. There are, then, two separate questions: what were erasable notebooks like in the Renaissance, and how did one write in them without ink?

When we began looking for such erasable notebooks, we discovered a small almanac titled *Writing Tables with a Kalender for xxiiii. yeeres, with sundry necessarie rules* and published by Robert Triplet in 1604 (see figure 1). Bound together with the almanac are ten blank leaves of specially treated paper. The surface of these leaves is a hard coating that has cracked and yellowed with age, revealing a layer underneath of something like white plaster.[7] Where the edges of the leaves have been abraded, the paper that supported the coatings is now visible. These blank pages retain writing (see figure 2). But is this writing surface erasable? Could Hamlet have wiped away his records from such a notebook? Not according to any of the online-catalogue records we consulted for descriptions of these tables: ESTC and RLIN records of copies at the Bodleian Library, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Huntington Library, and the Pierpont Morgan Library all noted, in the same words, that the tables "include chalked and sized pieces of board the size of the book's leaves, apparently intended to offer a firm surface upon which to write."[8] There was no mention in these particular records of the possibility that these "chalked and sized boards" are erasable. Examining a later copy published in 1625, we were struck by visual evidence that the treated pages had been repeatedly wiped, although faint

[6] We have found only two stage directions that explicitly call for inkhorns. In Robert Davenport's *A Pleasant and Witty Comedy: Called, A New Tricke to Cheat the Divell* (London, 1639) the parodied scrivener does not use the inkhorns that he wears: "*Enter an Anticke habited in Parchment Indentures, Bills, Bonds, Waxe Seales, and Pen, and Inkhornes, on his breast writ,* I am a Scrivener" (sig. F4^{v}). But in Sir William D'Avenant's *The Platonick Lovers* (London, 1636) writing with ink is actually staged. In the last act, Fredeline enters "*with a Parchment writing, and Pocket Inckhorne*" and, after the further direction "*drawes out a paper Pen and Inke*" (sig. I4^{r}), forces Castraganio and Amadine to sign a patent.

[7] Robert Triplet, *Writing Tables with a Kalender for xxiiii. yeeres, with sundry necessarie rules* (London, 1604), Folger STC 24284 (renumbered in the second edition of STC as 26050.6).

[8] This was the original description in the online catalogues for STC (2d ed.) 26050.4, Bodleian; STC (2d ed.) 26050.16, Folger; STC (2d ed.) 26050.12, Huntington; and STC (2d ed.) 26050.8, Pierpont Morgan. The catalogue entries have since been changed to take account of our findings.

traces of writing remained, as in a palimpsest. To test the tables' erasability, Frank Mowery, Head of Conservation at the Folger, recreated the writing surface of the tables, made ink from oak galls and iron filings according to a Renaissance formula, and wrote on the coated pages, first with pen and ink, then with a silver stylus, and finally with graphite pencil. A little moisture on a sponge (or a fingertip) took the ink off immediately and completely. Graphite was equally easy to erase, while silverpoint left only a slight groove (see figures 3 through 8).

In fact, Triplet's tables carry their own cleaning instructions. On the December page of the almanac a small manuscript cross corresponds to the following printed passage, which appears between the entries for "The 13. day the shortest day" and for the feast of Thomas Apostle:

> To make cleane your Tables, when they are written on.
> Take a lyttle peece of a Spunge, or a Linnen cloath, being cleane without any soyle: wet it in water, and wring it hard, & wipe that you haue written very lightly, and it wyll out, and within one quarter of an howre, you maye wryte in the same place agayne: put not your leaues together, whylst they be very wet with wyping.

That these instructions are included as part of the almanac (see figure 9) shows that the printed pages were always supposed to be bound together with erasable leaves. Since the erasable pages could be reused year after year, they needed to be accompanied by a reusable, as opposed to an annual, calendar. The sturdy original bindings that still survive on several copies of the table-books (see figures 10 and 11) offer further evidence that the tables were made to endure.

Almanacs bound with erasable tables were still in use in the nineteenth century, and sales catalogues and library records contain mentions both of writing tables and of their significance in Shakespeare.[9] More recent scholarship on the topic of table-books includes Henry Woudhuysen's 1996 observation that

> the pocket notebook or set of writing-tables became a staple of the publishing trade: the earliest known example, incorporating a calendar and useful informa-

[9] See, for example, *Rider's British Merlin: For the Year of Our Lord 1807* (London: Company of Stationers, 1806) and *Peacock's Historical Almanack, Containing Correct Lists of Both Houses of Parliament, Great Officers of State, Remarkable Events &. &c. &c.* (London: [s.n., 1846?]). That the relation between erasable tables and *Hamlet* was well established in bibliographical circles is suggested by the legend stamped in gold on the spine of a nineteenth-century box housing the Bodleian Library's copy of Frank Adams's *Wryting Tables* (London, 1577[?]): "WRITING | TABLES | HAMLET | ACT I. SCENE 5." The sales receipt for the University of Illinois's copy of James Roberts's *Writing Tables* (London, 1598) notes that "considerable interest is attached to this book owing to references made to it by Shakespeare" and quotes the relevant passages from *Hamlet* and from *2 Henry IV*, as does P. M. Barnard's *Catalogue of Rare and Interesting Books* (Tunbridge Wells, UK: P. M. Barnard, n.d.), which lists for sale a 1604 copy of Triplet's *Writing Tables* (Item 149). Peter Stallybrass is writing an account of erasable notebooks in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

> tion about fairs and so on, was produced by Francis Adams in 1577 and, although they are now very rare, many editions were evidently printed.[10]

But while table-books have long been the subject of bibliographical investigation, our rediscovery of them has prompted questions not yet raised by our scholarly predecessors. What, for instance, was the recipe for making erasable leaves?

Wax Tablets

In classical antiquity wax tablets were the dominant technology for erasable writing and were used by poets and politicians alike. As Shane Butler notes, Cicero frequently used wax tablets for his letters, which survive only because they were transcribed from the tablets onto papyrus by their recipients or, more likely, by a servant or slave trained in transcription.[11] In the twelfth century Baudri de Bourgueil still thought of wax tablets as the appropriate medium for his own poetry, which his scribe, Gérard, later copied out on parchment.[12] Throughout the Middle Ages wax tablets were widely used as pedagogical tools, account books, and notebooks for drafts of poems or letters. The persistence and multiple uses of wax tablets led Richard and Mary Rouse to conclude that, "as a support for the written word, wax tablets had a longer uninterrupted association with literate Western civilization than either parchment or paper, and a more intimate relationship with literary creation."[13]

Wax tablets were not necessarily single wax-covered boards; they could also be polyptychs that effectively formed small codices. Baudri addresses a poem to his "*tabulae*," which he describes as a notebook made of eight tablets, offering fourteen

[10] H. R. Woudhuysen, *Sir Philip Sidney and the Circulation of Manuscripts, 1558–1640* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 21.

[11] Shane Butler, *The Hand of Cicero* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), passim. See also Jocelyn Penny Small, *Wax Tablets of the Mind: Cognitive Studies of Memory and Literacy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Routledge, 1997).

[12] Baudri de Bourgueil, "Ad Girardum scriptorem suum" in *Poèmes*, ed. and trans. Jean-Yves Tilliette, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1998), 1:33. See also Roger Chartier, "Writing in the Middle Ages: Between Wax and Parchment. Baudri de Bourgueil, Abbot and Poet," lecture presented at the Technologies of Writing conference at the University of Pennsylvania, 28–29 March 2003, and forthcoming in French from Gallimard/Le Seuil in Roger Chartier, *Inscrire et effacer. Culture écrite et littérature (XIe–XVIIIe siècles)*.

[13] Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, "The Vocabulary of Wax Tablets" in *Vocabulaire du Livre et de l'Écriture au Moyen Age . . .* , Olga Weijers, ed. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1989), 220–30, esp. 220. See also Richard H. Rouse and Mary A. Rouse, "Wax Tablets," *Language and Communication* 9 (1989): 175–91; and Michelle P. Brown, "The Role of the Wax Tablet in Medieval Literacy: A Reconsideration in Light of a Recent Find from York," *The British Library Journal* 20 (1994): 1–16. For a fascinating account of the centrality of erasable writing surfaces in the Renaissance, see Juliet Fleming, *Graffiti and the Writing Arts of Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 2001).

interior "*paginulae*" for writing drafts of his poems.[14] (He did not write on the first or last pages, which served as the covers of his notebook.) More common were diptychs, made up of two tablets fastened together.[15] Something like these diptychs seems to be suggested by the "pairs of tables" that are frequently mentioned in Renaissance texts. In Thomas Tomkis's *Lingva*, the character Memory holds in his hand "*a paire of Table-bookes*"; in William Percy's *The Cuck-queanes*, Wright refers to "a paire of Tables"; in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fayre*, Grace mentions "a paire of tables" being bought; in Jonson's *Euery Man Ovt of His Hvmovr*, Fungoso asks a tailor, "Haue you a paire of tables?"; in *A Countercuffe giuen to Martin Iunior*, Thomas Nashe refers to "a newe paire of Writing-tables" which contain "profitable Notes"; in *The Wonderfull yeare*, Thomas Dekker, describing the ferment of James I's accession, says that the event could "fill a hundred paire of writing tables with notes"; in Aphra Behn's *Love-Letters Between a Noble-man And his Sister*, Philander sends a letter to Silvia "*Writ in a pair of Tablets*"; and in "The Last Instructions to a Painter," Andrew Marvell refers to the use of "a pair of tables" in Parliament.[16]

It is not clear whether wax tablets were commonly used in Renaissance Europe. In some German monasteries and cities wax tablets were undoubtedly used for accounts until the seventeenth century, and in France "*tablettes de cire*" were being used in the Rouen fish-market as late as the nineteenth century.[17] But these occasional and scattered references are not sufficient to challenge the conventional view that relates the decline of wax tablets to the increased use of paper throughout Europe. Paper, produced in Spain in the eleventh century, in Italy in the twelfth, and in France from 1320 onward, was cheaper than wax tablets, although by no means inexpensive.[18] In a 1611 dictionary of the Spanish language, the entry for

[14] Baudri de Bourgueil, "Ludendo de tabulis suis" in *Poèmes*, 1:34.

[15] See Armando Petrucci, *Le Tavolette Cerate Fiorentine di Casa Majorfi* (Rome, 1965). Some of these diptychs had one tablet covered with wax for erasable writing and one tablet covered with parchment or paper for more permanent records; see Élisabeth Lalou, "Inventaire des Tablettes Médiévales et Présentation Générale" in *Les Tablettes à Écrire de l'Antiquité à l'Époque Moderne*, Élisabeth Lalou, ed. (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 1992), 233–88, esp. 266–67. See also Reinhard Büll, *Das Grosse Buch vom Wachs*, 2 vols. (Frankfurt: Georg Callwey, 1977), 2:821–61, esp. figs. 560, 572, 573, 595, 605, 606, 607, 610, and 658.

[16] Thomas Tomkis, *Lingva: Or The Combat of the Tongue, And the fiue Senses For Superiority. A pleasant Comœdie* (London, 1607), sig. D3^{v}; William Percy, *The Cuck-Queanes*, 12; Ben Jonson, *Bartholomew Fayre* in *The Workes of Benjamin Jonson. The second Volume* (London, 1640), sig. A2^{r}–M4^{v}, esp. H4^{v}; Jonson, *Euery Man Ovt* (1616), sig. L3^{r}; Thomas Nashe "Pasquil," *A Countercuffe giuen to Martin Iunior . . .* (London, 1589), sig. A2^{v}; Thomas Dekker, *The Wonderfull yeare* (London, 1603), sig. C1^{v}; Aphra Behn, *Love-Letters Between a Noble-Man And his Sister, Part 1* (London, 1684), sig. H4^{v}; Andrew Marvell, "The Last Instructions to a Painter" in *The Complete Poems*, ed. Elizabeth Story Donno (Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin Books, 1972), 157–83, esp. 159.

[17] Lalou, 247.

[18] See Lucien Febvre and Henri-Jean Martin, *L'Apparition du Livre* (Paris: Éditions Albin Michel, 1958), 39–60.

cera (*wax*) directly connects the disappearance of writing on wax with the development of paper: "Before paper and ink were discovered, people wrote on wax tablets [*tablas ceradas*] and entered the letters into the wax [*abran en la cera las letras*] with a stylus [*puntero*]."[19] A cartography of paper's dissemination explains why surviving medieval wax tablets are rare in Spain and Italy and much more common in England and Germany, where the production of paper began later. In France, with its rapidly growing paper industry, the Parisian tablet-makers' guild, the "*tabletiers*," merged in the fourteenth century with other trade guilds, and its members began making a variety of wooden objects, writing tables (*tables d'écrire*) becoming only a small part of their business.[20] While wax tablets continued to be widely used in England, they were probably a marginal technology by the sixteenth century.

Erasable Paper and Asses' Skin

Paper eventually eclipsed wax tablets, but until the invention of cheap woodpulp paper in the nineteenth century, erasable notebooks remained a practical necessity. Surviving customs records indicate that tables were being imported into England as early as the 1520s. On 30 December 1529, for example, three separate shipments to London included writing tables, two dozen imported by Thomas Dychefeld, two dozen by Martin Cale, and four dozen by Edward Dormer.[21] In 1536 Andreas Hymerhof imported nine dozen, and a year later Barnardo Tynbanke imported eighteen dozen "coarse" writing tables.[22] And in 1571/2, Gherard Tines imported ten dozen "coarse" writing tables, Martin Claison a single dozen, and Robert Cambier received two shipments, the first of two and the second of three dozen.[23]

These writing tables were probably first manufactured in the Low Countries or Germany.[24] The earliest tables that we have found were made in 1527 in Antwerp, where they were bound together with a printed almanac.[25] *The Secrets of*

[19] Sebastián de Covarrubias Orozco, *Tesoro de la Lengua Castellana o Española* (Madrid: Editorial Castalia, 1994).

[20] See Élisabeth Lalou, "Les Tablettes de Cire Médiévales," *Bibliothèque de l'École des Chartes* 147 (1989): 123–40, esp. 129.

[21] PRO E122/83/4B, fol. 3^{v}. We are indebted to Peter Blayney for this and the following two references.

[22] PRO E122/81/18, fols. 2^{r} and 13^{v}.

[23] PRO E190/8/2, fols. 3^{v} and 16^{r}.

[24] For an account of table-books in the Low Countries, see Ernst van de Wetering, *Rembrandt: The Painter at Work* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam UP, 1997), 47–73. An inventory made in Antwerp in 1617 records "[e]en out tafelboecksken met silver beslagen" ("one small table book with silver clasps"); see *Antwerpe Kunstinventarissen uit de Zeventiende Eeuw*, vol. 1: 1600–1617, ed. Erik Duverger (Brussels: AWLSK, 1984), 425. We are indebted to David McKitterick for the latter reference.

[25] *Calengier* (Antwerp, 1527), Spencer Collection, Neth. 1527, 94–143, New York Public Library.

the reuerend Maister Alexis of Piemont, first published in Venice in 1555, describes "white tables to write in . . . such as come out of Germanie."[26] Sixty years later, when he visited Ulm, Fynes Moryson observed that "the writing Tables, made in this City, are famous for their goodnesse, and are thence carried into forraine parts."[27]

By the early 1580s writing tables were being published in London in multiple editions. Prior to 1581, however, the average book-buyer seems to have been unfamiliar with writing-table technology, since the cleaning instructions printed in the earliest editions are headed: "To make cleane your Tables when they be written on, which to some as yet is vnknowne."[28] These English tables are composed of a twenty-four-year almanac and other printed material, bound together with blank pages of erasable paper or parchment. In 1582, Christopher Barker, the king's printer, refers to those who are "of oure Companye [i.e., the Stationers' Company]" as "Bookesellers, bookebynders and *makers of writing tables*," in addition to printers.[29] It is striking that Barker should single out "makers of writing tables" as a discrete group. Two of the leading publishers of tables were Frank Adams and Robert Triplet, both of whom are described in Stationers' Company records as "makers of tablets" rather than as printers or booksellers; they produced nothing *but* writing tables as far as we know.[30] The first recorded edition of *Writing Tables* was published by Adams sometime in the 1570s (the *Short Title Catalogue* gives 1577 as a conjectural date). Adams was buried on 22 January 1595, after which date Edward White published the writing tables as the assign of James Roberts. Robert Triplet's name appears on the title page as the "maker" of the tables published between 1603, when he became a freeman of the company, and 1615. Finally, John Hammond and Oliver Ridge produced table-books, of which only single copies of 1618 and 1628 editions survive. In 1603 the printed portions of the *Writing Tables*

[26] Girolamo Ruscelli, *The Secrets of the reuerend Maister Alexis of Piemont . . .* , trans. W. Warde (London, 1595), sig. M5^{v}. Originally published under the title *I Secreti del Reverendo Alessio Piemontese*, this work was translated into English and published in London in 1558, just three years after the first Italian edition.

[27] Fynes Moryson, *An itinerary vvritten by Fynes Moryson Gent. first in the Latine tongue, and then translated by him into English . . .* (London, 1617), sig. B5^{r}. See also Charles Estienne, *Maison Rustique, or The Countrey Farme* (London, 1616), where the "Geometrician" is advised to carry both a slate and a "little paire of Tables" with "a Copper penne" (i.e., stylus) "like vnto those which are brought out of Germanie" (sig. Yy3^{r-v}).

[28] See, for example, Frank Adams, *Writing Tables* (London, 1578[?]), British Library STC (2d ed.) 26049.2; shelfmark C.194.a.342, sig. A8^{v}; and Frank Adams, *Writing Tables* (London, 1580), Beinecke Library, STC (2d ed.) 26049.6, sig. A8^{v}.

[29] *A Transcript of the Registers of the Company of Stationers of London, 1554–1640*, ed. Edward Arber, 5 vols. (London: Privately printed, 1875), 1:144, emphasis added.

[30] See Arber, 2:19; and *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company, 1602 to 1640*, ed. William A. Jackson (London: The Bibliographical Society, 1957), 4.

became part of the English Stock—that is, the property of the Stationers' Company as a whole.[31]

It is not at all clear who supplied the printed material for the *Writing Tables*. The title-page claim that the tables were "made" by Adams, White, Triplet, *et al*. is an unusual one (see figure 1). The "making" of the tables was almost certainly not the same as their *printing*, but binding was probably considered part of the making, and Frank Adams is described as "Stationer and Bookbinder" on some title pages. In fact, Adams clearly sold his tables prebound, often or perhaps usually in the distinctively stamped brown calfskin in which the Folger's 1584 copy is bound (see figures 10, 11, and 14).[32] Part of the work of "making" tables, then, was the work of binding the printed material together with sheets of treated blank paper or parchment, which are sometimes referred to as "pasteboard" or "asses' skin" (*peau d'asne*). Jessie Ann Owens notes that

> Documents from the account books of fra Tommaso Minerbetti, organist at Santa Maria Novella, describe the substance [covering a writing table] as plaster. . . . Some of the iconographic and documentary evidence suggests that the tablets could have been a kind of stiff paper (perhaps an explanation for the name *car-tella*). . . . A much later witness, Johann Gottfried Walther [Leipzig, 1732], described a *palimpsestus* as made from donkey skin that had been treated with plaster and varnish. . . . In 1529 and again in 1533 [Giovanni] Spataro, who was living in Bologna, asked [Giovanni] Del Lago to buy him a *cartella* in Venice. Several of the 1529 letters refer to a "foglio rigato," which Bonnie Blackburn equated with the *cartella*: "By calling it 'foglio rigato,' Spataro seems to indicate that it is made of heavy paper, perhaps pasteboard, and not stone."[33]

John Florio defines the Italian *cartella* as "a kind of sleeked pasteboord to write upon and may be blotted out againe. Also leaves of writing tables."[34] Here, the "sleeked pasteboord" and the "leaves of writing tables" appear as separate, if related, materials. In the 1688 edition of Florio's dictionary, however, *cartella* is translated

[31] On the English Stock, see Cyprian Blagden, *The Stationers' Company: A History, 1403–1959* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1960), 75 and 92–106.

[32] Similar calfskin bindings survive on the British Library copies of the 1578[?] and 1581 editions (STC 26049.10), and on the Houghton Library copy of the 1581 edition (STC 26049.8). The binding of the Folger copy of the 1625 edition bears the Stuart coat of arms.

[33] Jessie Ann Owens, *Composers at Work: The Craft of Musical Composition 1450–1600* (New York and Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), 78. This passage is from Owens's groundbreaking chapter "Erasable Tablets," where she shows that erasable tablets were commonly used in musical composition. But Owens's focus is mainly on slates, whereas the "tables," "writing tables," and "table-books" that are so frequently mentioned in Renaissance England are, as far as we know, never associated with slate. See also Randall A. Rosenfeld's illuminating account in "Technologies for Musical Drafts, Twelfth Century and Later," *Plainsong and Medieval Music* 11 (2002): 45–63, esp. 54–59.

[34] John Florio, *Qveen Anna's New World of Words . . .* (London, 1611), *s.v.* "cartella"; quoted here from Owens, 78.

as "*a kind of sleeked paste-board to write upon, and to blot out again, such as they make Writing-tables of; also a writing table-book, or but the leaves of it*." According to Florio, then, pasteboard is the actual substance out of which writing tables are made.[35]

The precondition for large-scale production of writing tables was the ability to make an erasable surface in quantity. Despite the complexity of some of the recipe-book formulae, the basic ingredients of the coating are gesso and glue. That gesso was indeed a standard element in the making of writing tables is confirmed by John Minsheu, who defines the Spanish *yeso* (gesso) not only as "Playster, morter, pargetting" but also as "stuffe wherewith writing tables are done ouer to make them beare writing."[36] In the Folger copy of Triplet's 1604 tables the contrast between the smooth yellow surface and the crumbling white layer underneath it creates the misleading impression of two separate treatments, applied one after the other. But in fact the gesso and glue have been mixed together and applied in several coats. Like a custard, this mixture dries with a darker, firmer "skin" on the surface and a lighter, more spongy layer below. Since little paper for writing or printing was manufactured in England during this period, table-makers probably used imported paper which they then treated themselves. Adams would have used glue, paper, and parchment for his work as a bookbinder, and these were the main components of erasable leaves. With the addition of gesso, he would have had all the necessary elements.

Marketing Writing Tables

Copies of sixteen editions of the *Writing Tables* printed between the 1570s and 1628 have been recorded to date in the STC. Of these sixteen editions, thirteen now survive in only a single copy. Of the other three editions, the 1611 edition exists in two copies and the 1589 and 1604 editions in three copies each, for a total of twenty-one extant copies. This represents a miniscule proportion of the total number of copies printed, however. Despite the scarcity of surviving copies, large-scale production of the *Writing Tables* may be confirmed by the fact that they became part of the English Stock in 1603.[37] Assuming that the *Writing Tables* were like other bestsellers

[35] John Florio, *Vocabolario Italiano & Inglese* and Giovanni Torriano, *A Dictionary, English and Italian* (London, 1688), *s.v.* "cartella, cartelle."

[36] John Minsheu, *Vocabularium Hispanico Latinum* (London, 1617), sig. Q1^{r}. Since we began writing this piece, Sarah G. Pringle of Cinch, Easthampton, MA, has perfectly recreated the erasable surface with gesso and glue, and Peter Geraty of Praxis Bindery has recreated the writing tables and stylus.

[37] See Blagden, 75. We have no direct evidence for the number of copies in each edition of the *Writing Tables*, but we have four reasons for believing that most editions consisted of at least a thousand copies, and possibly significantly more. First, in 1603 the tables became part of the English Stock and the Stock was composed only of bestsellers. Second, as Michael Mendle has pointed out to us, various parts of different editions were printed from standing type (see, for example, the notes

in the English Stock, at least one edition of the tables was published every year, and therefore many editions must have disappeared altogether, undoubtedly used and discarded when the erasable surfaces wore out.

Adams and his successors by no means cornered the market, however. Erasable notebooks continued to be imported from the Continent long after they were being produced in London. In fact, the largest shipments of writing tables from the Continent were made *after* the publication of Adams's *Writing Tables*.[38] It is consequently impossible to say how many of the references to "writing tables" from this period are specifically to tables manufactured by Adams and his successors in London, and how many are to other kinds of notebooks with erasable leaves. For example, we know nothing about the seven "'writinge tables'" that were part of Roger Ward's 1585 stock at his Shrewsbury bookshop.[39] But in Exeter in 1603 the stationer Christopher Hunt was selling "'writing tables with callenders & gold waytes'" referring to the multi-year calendars and the charts of monetary weights and values (with woodcut illustrations) that were always included in the *Writing Tables* (see figure 12).[40] And John Foster's 1616 inventory of his York bookshop lists an impressive selection of different kinds of "Writeinge Tables,"[41] hinting at the range of sizes and qualities available to prospective buyers:

Item three paire dull gilt best sorte	iii^{s} vi^{d}
It seaven paire of little tables gilt	ii^{s} iiii^{d}
It twenty three paire of large white Tables	v^{s} viii^{d}
It thirty one paire of number thre	v^{s}
It twenty of the least sorte	ii^{s} viii^{d}

in the revised STC on STC 26049.4, 26049.16, and 26050.4), and printers usually locked up type in this way only for bestsellers like almanacs, which they knew they were going to reprint (see Philip Gaskell, *A New Introduction to Bibliography* [Oxford: Oxford UP, 1974], 116–17). Third, the six small woodblocks that depicted various European coins were sufficiently valuable to be the cause of a major dispute between Robert Triplet and Edward White (see William A. Jackson, ed., *Records of the Court of the Stationers' Company, 1602 to 1640* [London: The Bibliographical Society, 1957], 4). Fourth, Frank Adams was described as specifically a "maker of writing tables" (see Arber, ed., 2:19 and 2:779), and the only evidence we have for Robert Triplet before he was translated into the Brewer's Company in 1631 is as an apprentice to Adams and then as a maker of tables in his own right. If Adams and Triplet were primarily makers of tables, they would have had to produce a sufficient number of copies annually to earn a living.

[38] In 1589, Thomas Brookman imported 40 dozen, and in 1603 a merchant whose name cannot be deciphered imported 108 dozen "coarse table books" (PRO E190/8/2, fols. 3^{v} and 16^{r}).

[39] Woudhuysen, 46.

[40] Woudhuysen, 46. For a facsimile copy of this fragment from Chrisopher Hunt's account book, see T. W. Baldwin, *Shakspere's 'Love's Labor's Won': New Evidence from the Account Books of an Elizabethan Bookseller* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1957), 20.

[41] This itemized list of "Writeinge Tables" is reproduced from John Barnard and Maureen Bell, *The Early Seventeenth-Century York Book Trade and John Foster's Inventory of 1616* (Leeds, UK: The Leeds Philosophical and Literary Society, 1994), 47.

The availability of such a wide variety of tables at Foster's shop, along with diverse references to writing tables in account books, letters, and New Year's gift rolls, suggests that erasable leaves were not always bound together with printed almanac material. Could one buy bound table-books composed only of treated blank paper? Indeed, John White issued an almanac with a bonus leaf at the end: "A briefe and easie Almanack for this Yeare 1650, which being cut out, is fit to be placed into any Book of Accompts, Table book, or other, conteyning the whole Kalender, in a short method."[42] This bonus leaf has been removed from the Folger copy of White's 1650 almanac, while in Thomas Birche's manuscript notebook of legal formularies the bonus leaves from John White's 1650 and William White's 1656 almanacs have been glued to the front and back pastedowns.[43] John White's recommendation that the calendar be pasted into a "Table book" implies the existence of tables *without* the extensive printed materials. Similarly, the British Library has a small table-book from the later seventeenth century in which the single leaf of an engraved calendar is all that is bound with twelve erasable leaves.[44]

A blank table-book of c. 1580 with Italian inscriptions, thought to have been produced in Germany, and a Spanish blank table-book from about the same time are composed entirely of erasable leaves.[45] And it is highly unlikely, for instance, that the "payre of writing Tables covered with vellatt with too Claspes of Sylver" that Lady Layton gave as a New Year's gift to Elizabeth I in 1584/5 contained the almanac and mercantile tables of Adams's editions.[46] Although we have not yet discovered any English blank table-books from the late-sixteenth or early-seventeenth centuries, such tables were surely among those that were imported to England.

If not all tables contained printed material, what is the evidence that they always contained erasable leaves? A revealing aside in Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis* suggests that "writing tables" were defined by their erasable leaves. Lost in the South Seas, the travelers meet a man who produces "a little Scroul of Parchment (somewhat yellower than our Parchment, and *shining like the Leaves of Writing Tables*, but otherwise soft and flexible)."[47] The "shining" that Bacon describes is characteristic of the mixture of glue and gesso with which the leaves of tables were treated. The erasability of such leaves, as well as the fact that the words *tables* and *table-book* could be used interchangeably, is further supported by an anonymous seventeenth-century writer who gives a recipe for a surface that one can draw on with silver-

[42] John White, "A briefe and easie Almanack for this Yeare 1650 . . ." (London, 1650).
[43] Folger Ms. V.a.395.
[44] *London Almanack for the Year of Our Lord 1697* (London [1696]), British Library C.109.n.26.
[45] Folger Ms. V.a.480 (formerly Ms. Add. 1156) and Princeton University Ms. C0938 (no. 8).
[46] Folger Ms. Z.d.16.
[47] Francis Bacon, *The New Atlantis* (London, 1659), 2, emphasis added.

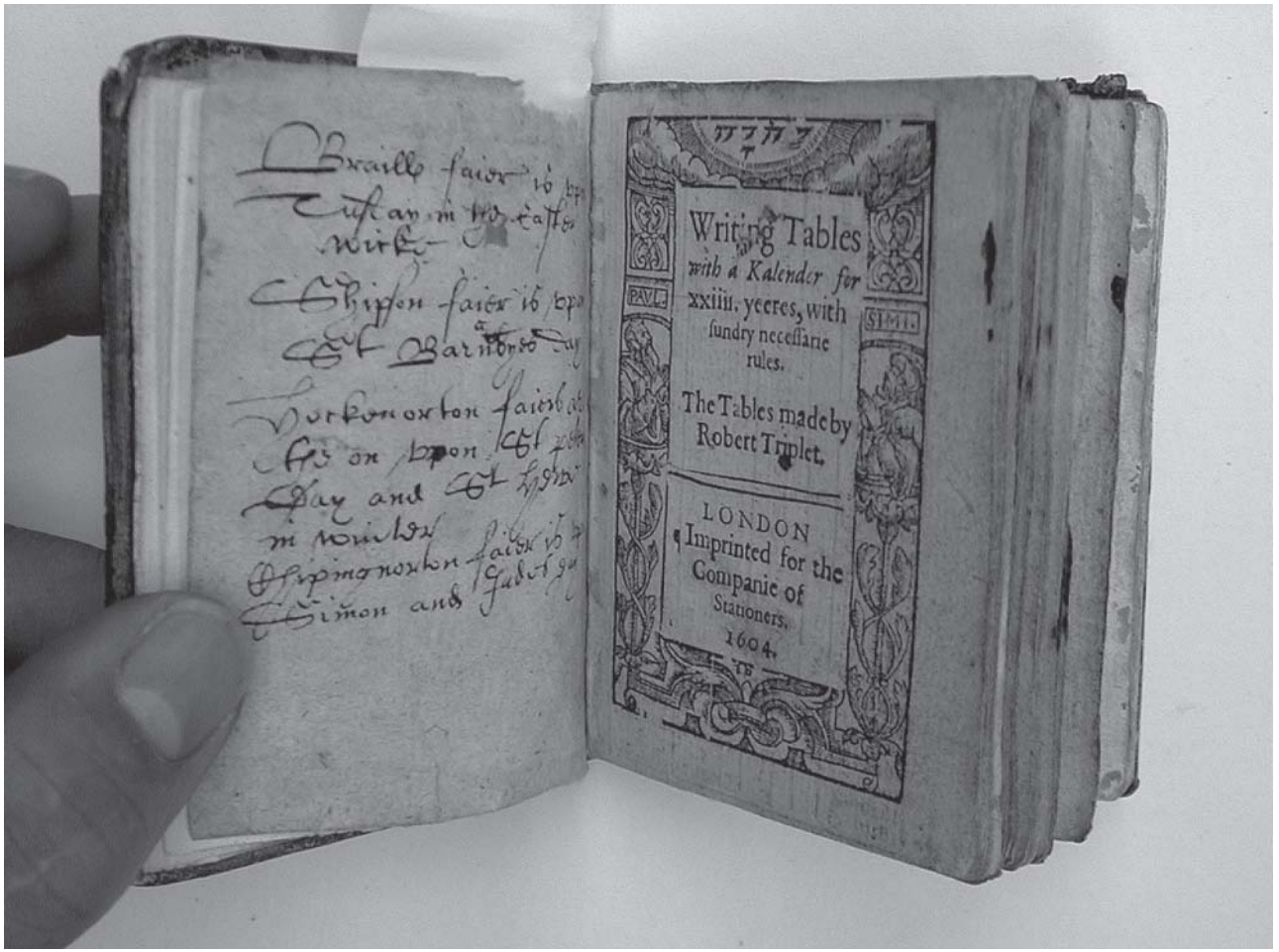

Figure 1: The manuscript notes opposite the title page in this copy of Robert Triplet's 1604 *Writing Tables with a Kalender for xxiiii. yeeres, with sundry necessarie rules* (STC 24284) give the locations and dates of several fairs, beginning with "Brailles faier is vpon Tusday in the Easter wicke." These notes supplement the list of fairs that was printed in the almanac for the benefit of merchants, who would have used table-books to keep temporary records of their sales.

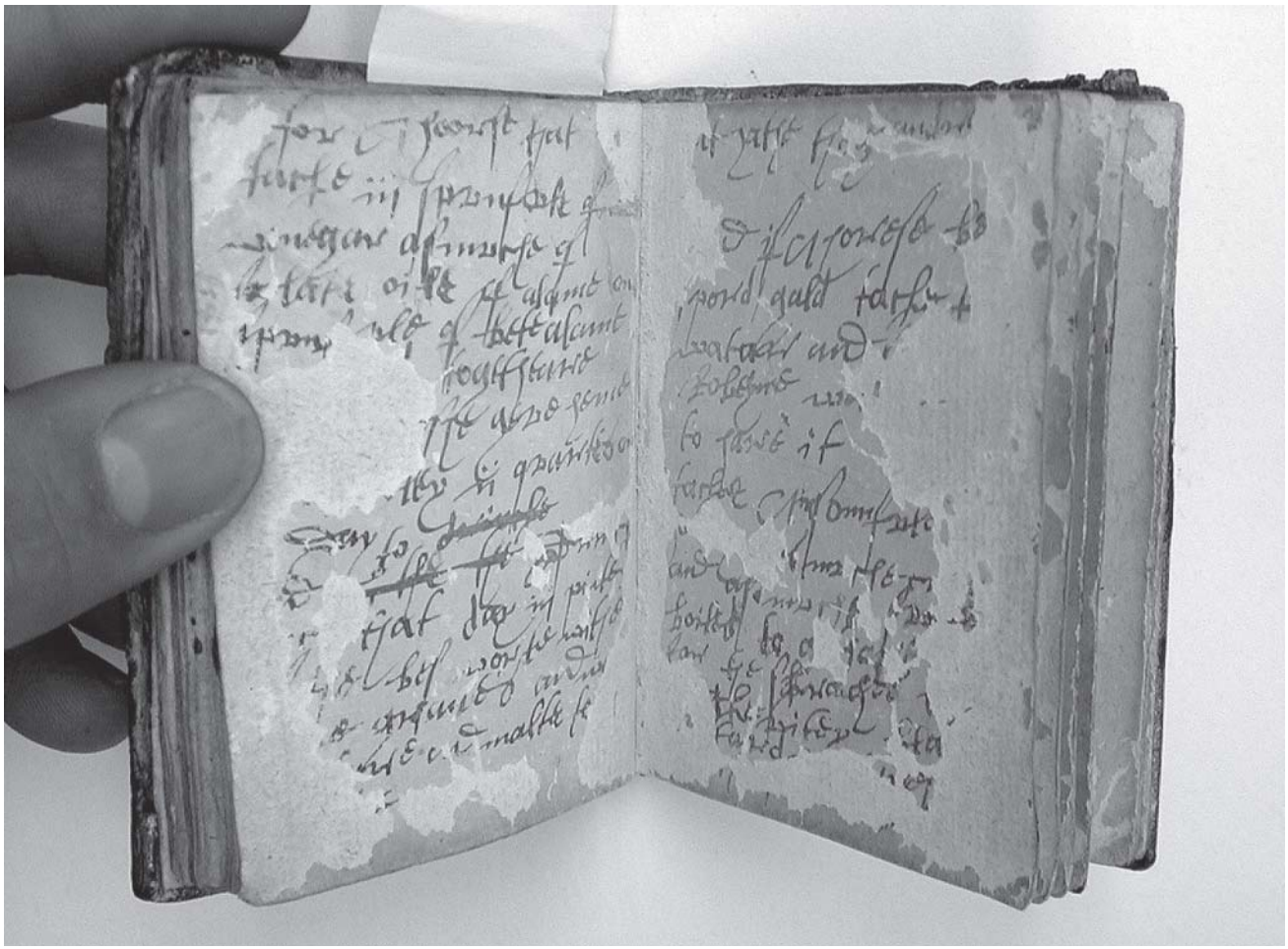

Figure 2: These erasable leaves in the Folger's 1604 *Writing Tables* (STC 24284), coated with a mixture of gesso and glue that has decayed over time, preserve an early modern recipe for curing the equine maladies of glanders, mange, and spurring sores. The size of the hand in the photograph reveals how small these writing tables are.

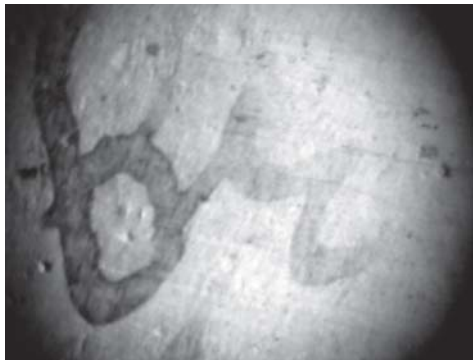

Figure 3

Figure 4

Figure 5

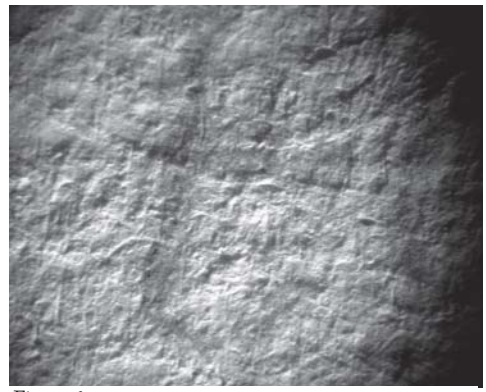

Figure 6

Figure 7

Figure 8

Figures 3–8: The magnified images above show writing made with an ink pen (figure 3), a graphite pencil (figure 4), and a metal stylus (figures 5–8) in the Folger's 1625 copy of Robert Triplet's *Writing Tables* (STC 24285.2). In figure 3, the ink writing has been partially removed, and figure 5 shows the trace left on the treated surface after metalpoint writing has been erased. Figure 6 shows the same mark under raking light. Figures 7 and 8 are details of the seventeenth-century metalpoint signature of Robert Bydall. The magnification reveals the fine line made by the stylus.

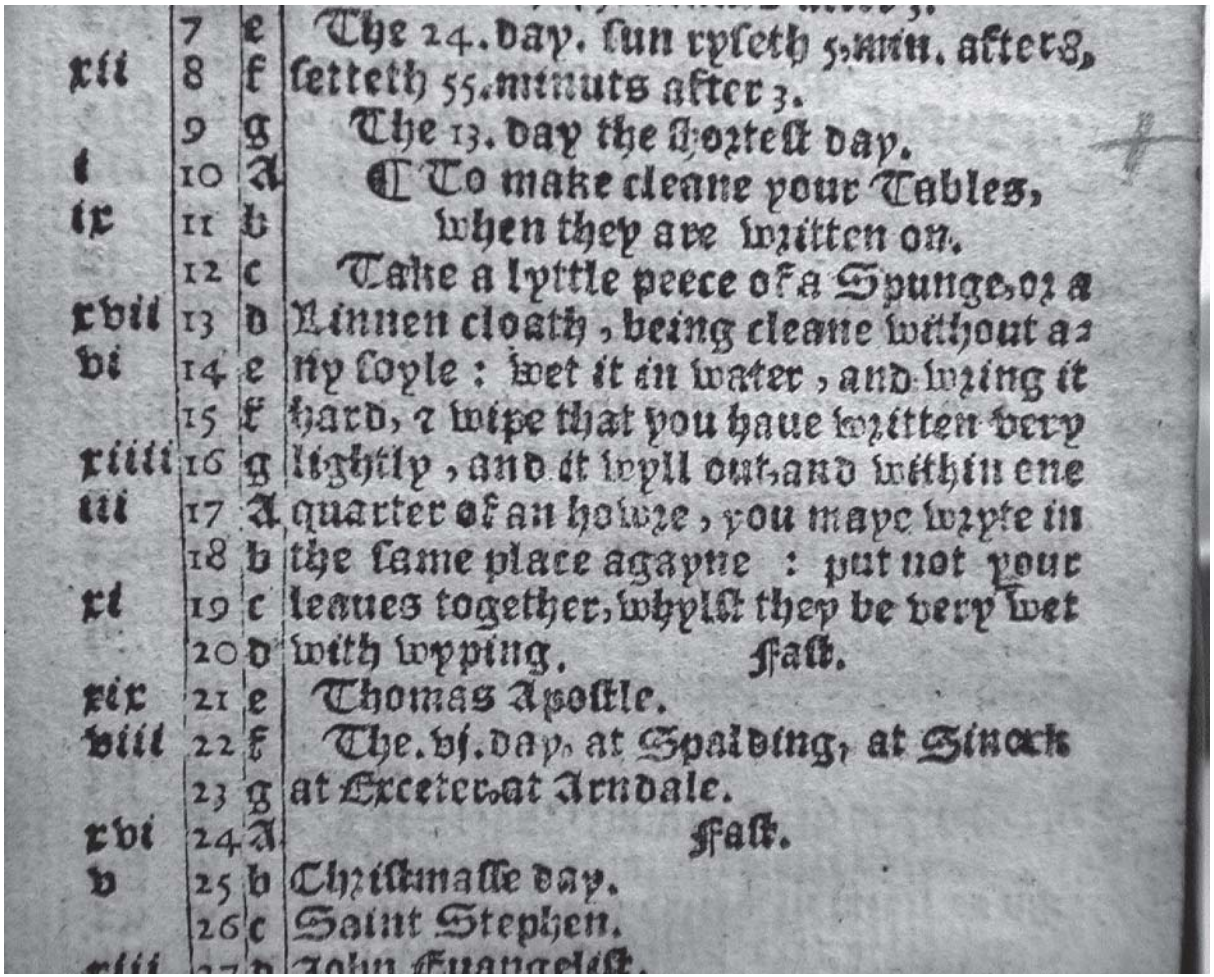

Figure 9: Instructions on how to erase what is written in this table-book (STC 24284) appear on the December calendar between "The 13. day the shortest day" and "Thomas Apostle," the 21st, in the printed almanac. They caution against closing the tables when its leaves are "wet with wyping" because glue is a main ingredient of the erasable surface.

Figure 10

Figure 11

Figures 10 and 11: Stamped calfskin bindings of the Folger copy of Frank Adams's 1584 tablebook (STC 26049.14; shelfmark 101.2) and of the British Library's copy of the 1581 edition (STC 26049.10; shelfmark C.194.a.344). Adams is described on the title page of the Folger copy as "Stationer and Bookbinder," and he produced several bindings with the same decorative pattern, to which he sometimes added further tooling. Figure 11 is reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

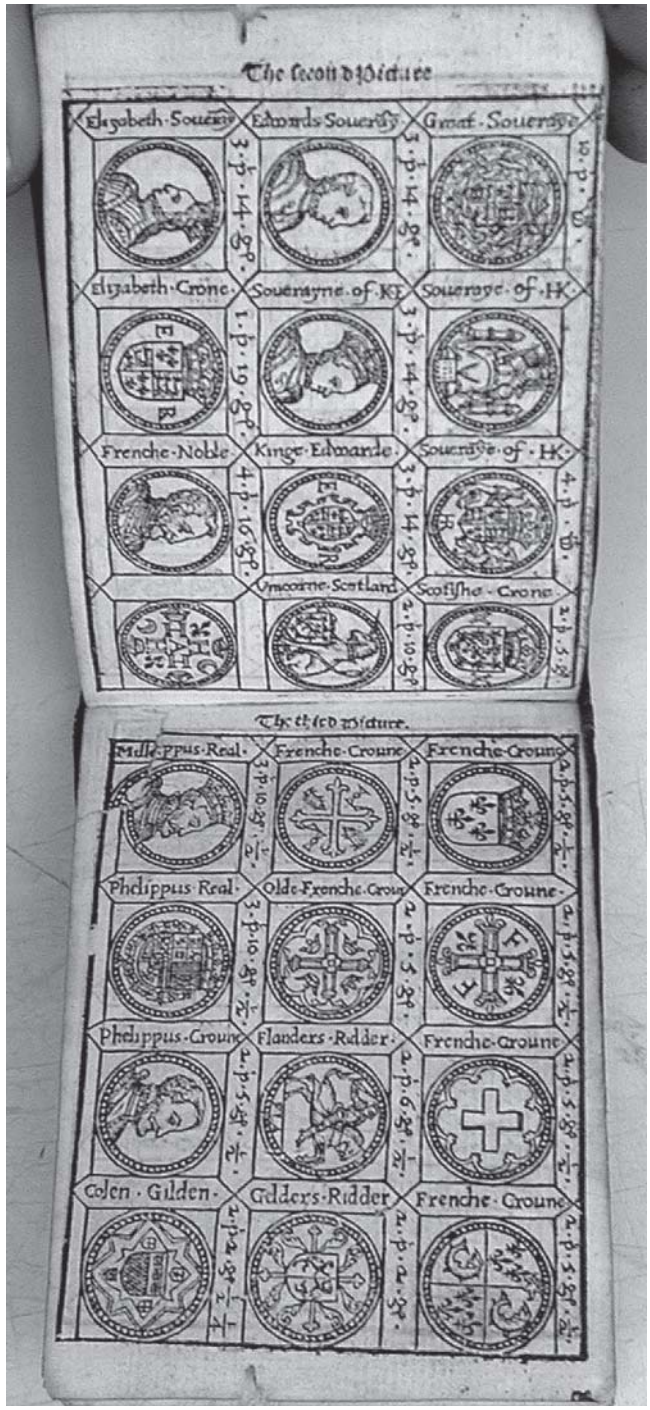

Figure 12: Woodcut charts of European coinage appear in all the *Writing Tables* manufactured by Adams and Triplet, and ownership of the blocks from which they were printed became the focus of a legal dispute between Triplet and another London stationer, Edward White. The chart pictured above is in the Folger's 1584 copy of *Writing Tables*.

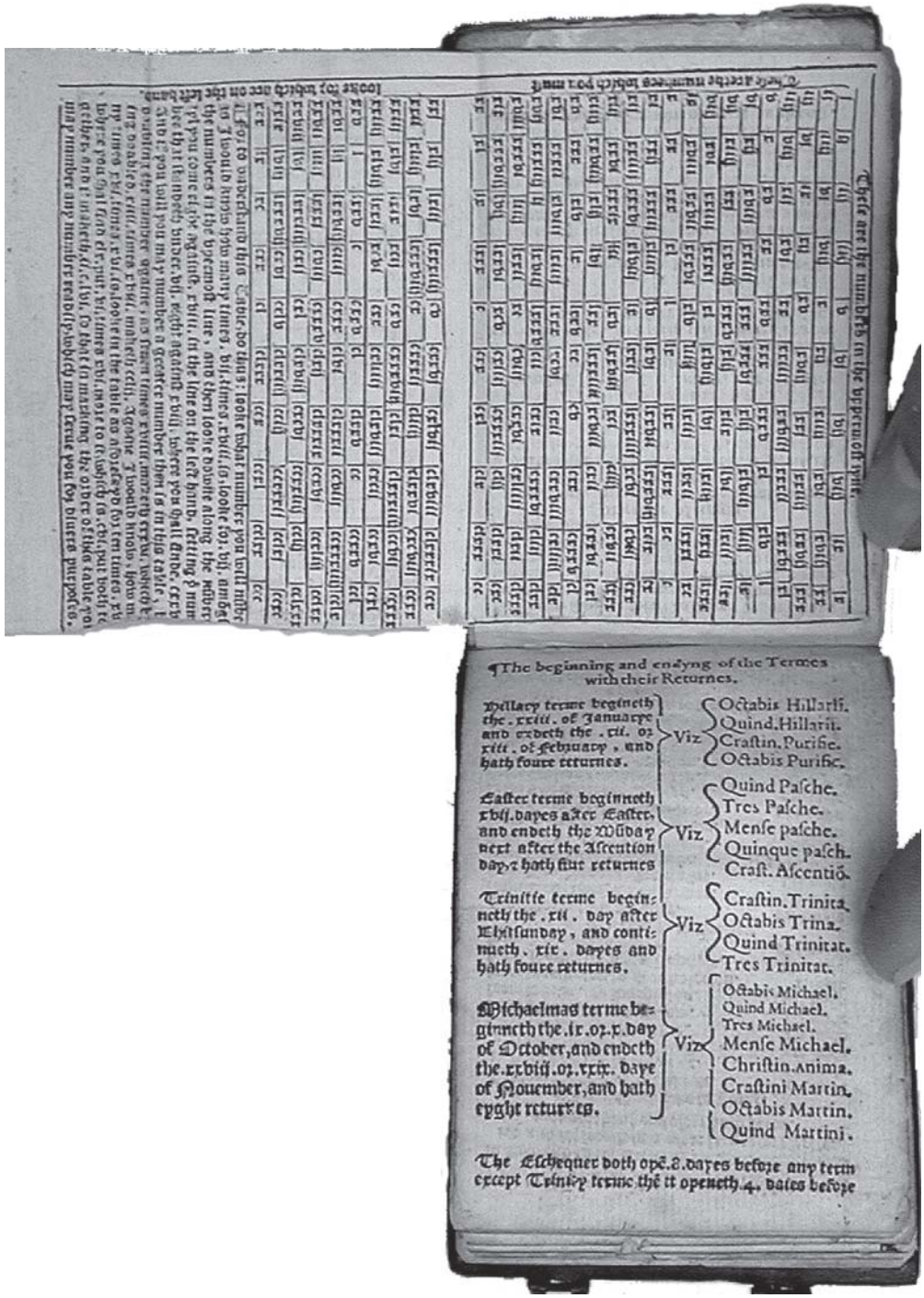

Figure 13: The wide availability of printed multiplication charts such as those included in the Folger's 1584 *Writing Tables* may help to explain why English merchants continued to use Roman numerals long after most European merchants had abandoned them.

Figure 14: The British Library copy of the 1578[?] *Writing Tables* produced by Frank Adams (STC 26049.2; shelfmark C.194.a.342). An arrow indicates where the stylus would have been inserted through the edge of the binding (see corresponding arrow in figure 15). Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

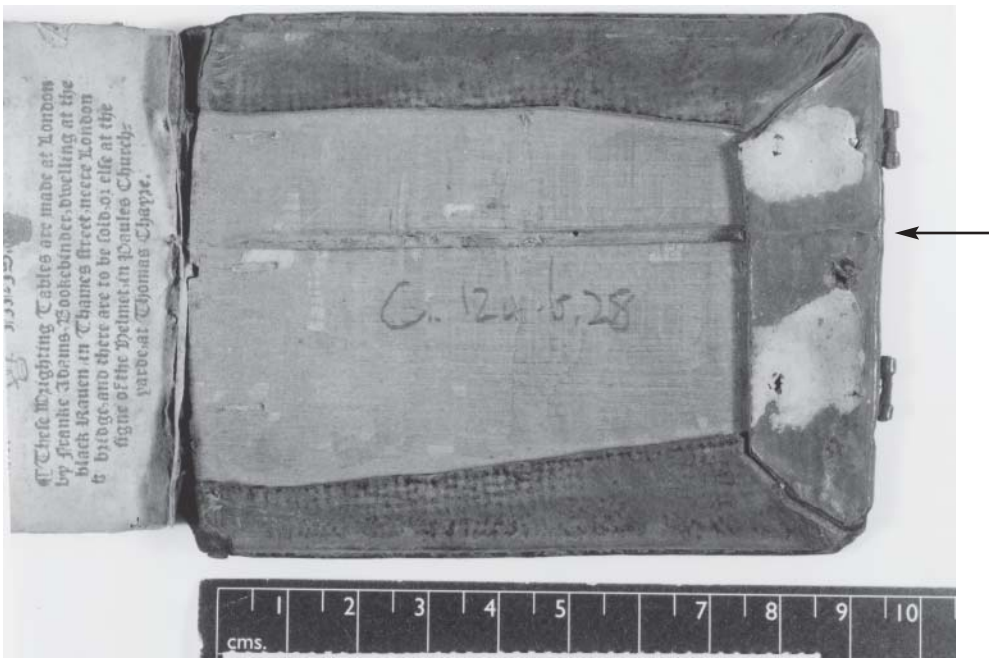

Figure 15: Inside the backboard of the binding of the British Library copy of the 1578[?] *Writing Tables* (STC 26049.2; shelfmark C.194.a.342) is a groove, indicated by an arrow, in which a stylus has been stored. Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

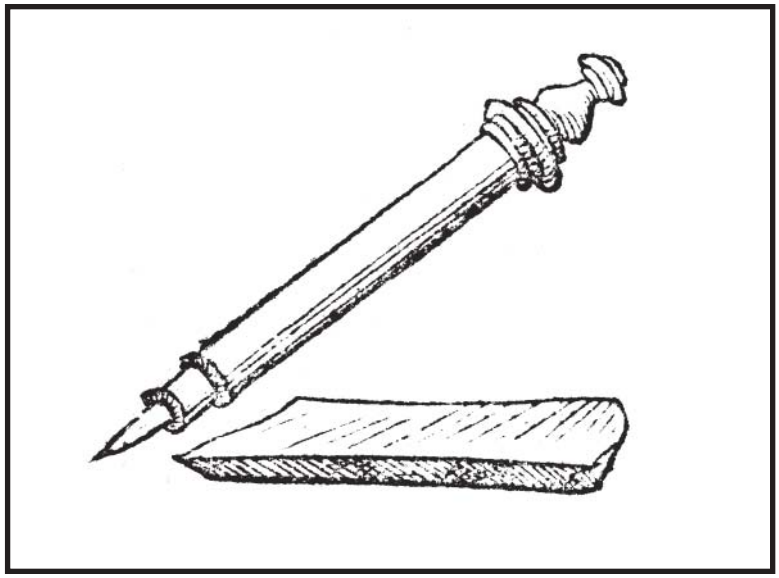

Figure 16: The first known depiction of a graphite pencil, from Konrad Gesner, *De Omni Rerum Fossilium* (Tiguri, 1565), fol. 104.

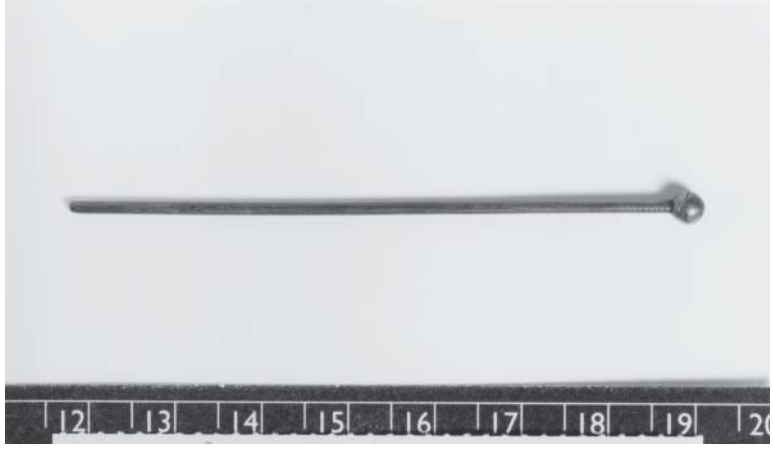

Figure 17: Brass stylus of the British Library's copy of Adams's 1581 *Writing Tables* (STC 26049.10; shelfmark C.194.a.344). The length (7 cm.) and shape explain why this kind of stylus was sometimes called a "pin." Reproduced by kind permission of the British Library.

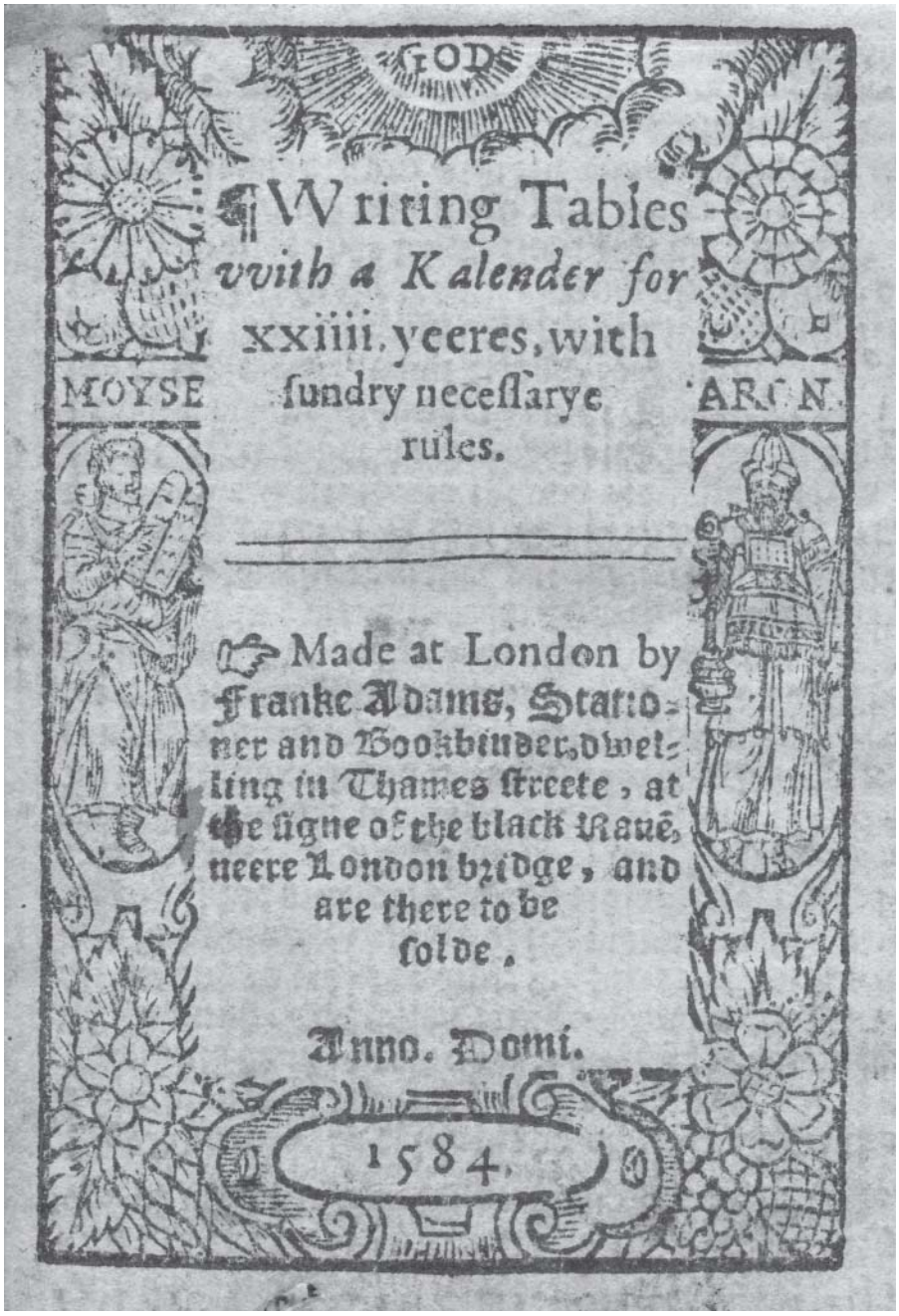

Figure 18: The title-page woodcut in the Folger copy of Frank Adams's 1584 *Writing Tables* juxtaposes his erasable tables with the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments to which Moses points in the oval at the left.

point, noting that "you cannot wipe out your drawing & draw on it againe *as you may doe on a Table booke leafe*."[48] In other words, while some treated surfaces for the use of a stylus were not erasable, tables and table-books were specifically designed for reuse.

Purchasing, Giving, and Using Writing Tables

Who bought these writing tables? At the end of the fourteenth century Cennino d' Andrea Cennini noted that parchment tables were used by merchants to record their calculations.[49] And merchants seem to have been the primary market for Adams and Triplet, since the printed materials included woodcuts of coins; charts of weights, measures, and the distances of towns from London; dates of fairs; a fold-out multiplication table for calculating in roman numerals; and instructions on how to reckon a servant's wages (see figure 13). The Folger copy of Triplet's 1604 edition (see figure 1) contains additional references to the dates of Warwickshire and Oxfordshire fairs in a contemporary secretary hand:

> Brailles faier is vpon | Tusday in the Easter | wicke.
> Shipson faier is vpon | St Barnabyes day
> Hockenorton faiers are | the on vpon St Peters | Day and St Hewe | in winter
> Chipingnorton faier is vpon | Simon and Judes Day.

But while there is evidence for associating writing tables with merchants, tables were undoubtedly bought by a wide range of other people at a wide range of prices: in 1581 Richard Stonley, one of Elizabeth's tellers of the Exchequer of the Receipt, paid 5s for "a pere of w[ri]ting tables" and thirteen years later, in1594, paid a mere 12d for "a peire of writing tables & a Brasse penne"; in 1597 William Petre, second baron Petre, purchased "a paier of table bookes" for 6d; in 1619 an Oxford undergraduate bought "wryting tables" for 8d; and in 1620 a table-book cost Sir Edward Dering 10d.[50] Since many of the smaller printed books that Stonley purchased cost 3d, the prices of writing tables suggest that the treated paper and the binding

[48] British Library Harleian 6376, fol. 5, cited in Edward Norgate, *Miniatura or the Art of Limning* (c. 1648–49), ed. Jeffrey M. Muller and Jim Murrell (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1997), 238, emphasis added; the same passage is quoted in British Library Sloane 2052, which is also cited in Norgate, 212n. We are grateful to Andrew Honey for drawing this book to our attention.

[49] Cennino d'Andrea Cennini, *The Craftsman's Handbook* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 1933), 1–4, quoted here from Wetering, 57.

[50] Folger Ms. V.a.495, fol. 10^{r}; Folger Ms. V.a.460, fol. 78^{v}; Folger Ms. V.a.334, fol. 23^{v}; Vivienne Larminie, ed., "The Undergraduate Account Book of John and Richard Newdigate, 1618–1621" in *Camden Miscellany XXX*, 4th ser. (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1990), 39:149–269, esp. 194; "The Dering Book of Expences," Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone, UK, shelfmark U350 E4.

added significantly to their cost. Stonley's 1594 table-book and "penne" cost him four times what he paid for his copy of Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, for example. But 6d to 12d was still not particularly expensive as books went. The cheapest copies would have been affordable to most purchasers who bought books at all. By comparison, a copy of Shakespeare's First Folio cost Dering £1. He could have bought more than twenty writing tables for that sum.[51]

Luxury tables with elaborate bindings were popular as gifts among the aristocracy. In 1575/6 Sir Henry Lee gave Elizabeth I "a booke of golde, with leaves in it of paper and parchement to write in"; in 1584/5 Lady Layton gave Elizabeth the aforementioned "too payre of writing Tables covered with vellatt with too Claspes of Sylver"; and in 1602 "Writing tables" were the lot that Lady Effingham drew, accompanied by the "posy": "These tables may Contayne your thoughtes in parte, / Butt write nott all thatts written in your harte."[52] In 1594 Sir Walter Raleigh's wife, Elizabeth, thanked Robert Cecil for a New Year's gift of "tables of no less rare device then the sentans within was cumforttabell"; and in 1632 Richard Boyle, earl of Cork, sent Lady Moore "a wryting table book" as a suitable gift.[53] A 1606 inventory of Anne of Denmark's jewelry includes two writing tables with elaborate bindings. The first one, "[a] paire of writing tables, couered with blacke veluett & garnished with gold and seuerall flowers of sparkes of Rubies & Hopalls, hanging at a knotte of Pearles pendant, with a Romane A in it," had originally been a gift to Elizabeth I in 1586 from Mrs. West. The binding of the second, "[a] paire of writing tables couered with goldsmithes worke, garnished with small table Diamondes and Rubies, with Cyphers of greeke letters, hauing a small chaine of gold with sixe knoppes sett with small rubies," was plundered in 1610, by Anne's orders, to make "a Gold Salt."[54]

If the owners of writing tables varied, so did the uses to which tables were put. The blank leaves assumed the purchaser's ability to write, but surviving copies suggest that at least some owners (and/or their children) used table-books as suitable places in which to learn how to write. Tables were also used for collecting pieces of

[51] On 5 December 1623, Dering purchased two copies of the First Folio for £2, presumably at £1 apiece. See Anthony James West, *The Shakespeare First Folio: The History of the Book*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2001), 1:8.

[52] New Years' Gift Roll for 1575/6, quoted here from John Nichols, *The Progresses and Public Processions of Queen Elizabeth . . .*, 3 vols. (London: J. Nichols and Sons, 1823), 2:1; New Years' Gift Roll for 1584/5, Folger Ms. Z.d.16; "The devise to entertayne hir Ma^{ty} att Harfielde . . ." (1602), Folger Ms. X.d.172, fol. 5^{v}.

[53] Hatfield House, Hertfordshire, Cecil Papers 2, 8 February 1594, fol. 50; and *The Lismore Papers of Richard Boyle, First and "Great" Earl of Cork*, ed. Alexander B. Grosart, 1st ser., 5 vols. (London: Chiswick Press, 1886–88), 2:93.

[54] Diana Scarisbrick, "Anne of Denmark's Jewellery Inventory," *Archaeologia* 109 (1991): 193–238, esp. 220. We are indebted to Georgianna Ziegler for this reference.

poetry, noteworthy epigrams, and new words; recording sermons, legal proceedings, or parliamentary debates; jotting down conversations, recipes, cures, and jokes; keeping financial records; recalling addresses and meetings; and collecting notes on foreign customs while traveling.[55]

During the seventeenth century, however, tables were increasingly associated with Puritanism. In Robert Heath's "Satyr 2," a Puritan "*Sister*" at a sermon "glean'd in her spruce table book / Such crums of comfort as the *Caiaphas* took"; in Samuel Speed's "On the Hypocrite," the Puritan's "Table-book, / In Sermon-time comes from beneath his coat"; and in the epilogue to Nicholas Rowe's *Tamerlane* (1702), Mrs. Bracegirdle complains that the "good Days of Poetry" are over:

> Now sow'r Reformers in an empty Pit,
> With Table Books, as at a Lecture, sit,
> To take Notes, and give Evidence 'gainst Wit.[56]

Despite such mockery, erasable tables were used by every literate social class. Their continued popularity depended less on any single function than on the fact that they made it possible to write without the formidable array of equipment that was standard for both scribe and scholar.[57] Tables were indeed the ideal prop for an actor called on to take notes as he stood on the Renaissance stage.

Writing Implements

It required the invention of the fountain pen, which combines stylus and ink in a single tool, to enable one-handed writing in ink. While the *Oxford English*

[55] Evidence of tables' many uses may be found in the Folger copies of Triplet's 1604 and 1625 *Writing Tables* (STC 24284 and STC 24285.2), Folger Ms. V.a.480, the Cambridge copy of Adams's 1594 *Writing Tables* (shelfmark Syn 8.59.109), and the British Library copy of Triplet's 1611 *Writing Tables* (shelfmark C.194.a.341). In addition to the sources cited above, see Richard Brathwaite, "The Ape of Honour" in *The Honest Ghost* (London, 1658), sigs. H8^{r}–I3^{v}, esp. H8^{v}; Joshua Sylvester, "Arithmetick" in Guillaume de Salluste Du Bartas, *Du Bartas: His Divine Weekes and Workes . . .* (London, 1621), 288; Richard Hakluyt, *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques and Discoveries of the English Nation*, 16 vols. (Edinburgh: E. and G. Goldsmid, 1886), 8:116; *The East India Company Journals of Captain William Keeling and Master Thomas Bonner, 1615–1617*, ed. Michael Strachan and Boies Penrose (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1971), 10; Aphra Behn, *The Town-Fopp* (London, 1677), sig. E1^{v}; Norgate, 211–12; Wetering, 47–73; and Owens, 74–107.

[56] Robert Heath, "Satyr 2" in *Clarastella* (London, 1650), sigs. H5^{r}–H6^{v}, esp. H5^{v}; Samuel Speed, "On the Hypocrite," *Prison-Pietie: or, Meditations, Divine and Moral* (London, 1677), sigs. D4^{r}–D5^{r}, esp. D4$^{r–v}$; and Nicholas Rowe, *Tamerlane* (London, 1702), sig. b3^{r}.

[57] This array of writing equipment would have included paper or a blank book; an inkpot, often with holders for extra quills; a pen-knife; a sandbox for use in blotting; wax and/or starch disks for sealing letters and documents; scissors for cutting paper; and a case (known as a penner) for carrying quills, which was often attached by a cord to an inkhorn. An inkhorn was any "small portable vessel (originally made of horn) for holding writing-ink" (*The Oxford English Dictionary*, 2d ed., prep. J. A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 20 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford UP, 1989], *s.v.* "ink-horn," 1).

Dictionary gives 1710 as the first reference to a *fountain pen*, Samuel Pepys seems to have been using a similar implement nearly fifty years earlier. In his diary entry for 5 August 1663, Pepys notes: "This evening came a letter about business from Mr. Coventry, and with it a Silver pen he promised me, to carry inke in; which is very necessary."[58] Four days later, on a Sunday, Pepys took the pen to church with him and began "to make use of the Silver pen (Mr. Coventry did give mee) in writing of [the] sermon, taking only the heads of it in Latin; which I shall I think continue to do."[59]

Renaissance playtexts often specify in stage directions the props necessary for writing. In George Chapman's *Bussy D'Ambois* a direction calls for "*One bearing light, a standish* [inkpot] *and paper, which sets a Table*"; Philip Massinger's *The City-Madam* calls for "*A Table, Count book, Standish, Chair and stools set out*"; and Samuel Harding's *Sicily and Naples* gives the direction "*A Table is set forth; taper, pen, inke, &c.*"[60] In Cosmo Manuche's *The Loyal Lovers* the character Mettle enters "*with a black gown, and pen, ink, paper, and books*," but a further direction clearly implies the presence of a table: "*Mettle . . . seats himself behinde a curtain, with some books, pen, ink, and paper before him.*"[61] And a detailed stage direction in Margaret Cavendish's *Love's Adventures, Part 1*, makes clear the significance of chair and table for writing: "*Enter Sir* Peaceable Studious *with a Book in his hand; a Table being set out, whereon is Pen, Ink and Paper. After he hath walked a turn or two, with his eyes fixt upon the ground, he sits down to the Table, and begins to write.*"[62] In *Much Ado About Nothing*, Dogberry instructs Verges to tell Francis Seacoal to "bring his pen and inkehorne to the Gaole: we are now to examine those men" (TLN 1648–49 [3.5.58–59]). When the examination takes place, the sexton is required to take notes of the trial (TLN 2003–10 [4.2.7–15]). He is certainly seated, since the second line in the scene is "O a stoole and a cushion for the Sexton" (TLN 2000 [4.2.2]). With the aid of a stool, it would be possible for the sexton to write, particularly if his inkhorn was attached to his body, or if he was using a portable writing desk. But it would not be easy to manipulate pen, ink, and paper in two hands.

[58] See *The Diary of Samuel Pepys: A new and complete transcription*, ed. Robert Latham and William Matthews, 11 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1970–83), 4:263–64. Latham and Matthews note that "pens which carried their own ink had been made in Paris for some years" (4:264n). The earliest reference they give, however, is to 1657. See also *OED*, *s.v.* "fountain," *n.*, 6.b.

[59] Pepys, 4:268.

[60] George Chapman, *Bussy D'Ambois: A Tragedie* (London, 1607), sig. G4^{v}; Philip Massinger, *The City-Madam, A Comedie* (London,1658), sig. C2^{v}; S[amuel]. H[arding]., *Sicily and Naples, or, the Fatall Vnion. A Tragedy* (Oxford, 1640), sig. I1^{v};

[61] Cosmo Manuche, *The Loyal Lovers: A Tragi-Comedy* (London, 1652), sig. C2^{r}.

[62] Margaret Cavendish, Duchess of Newcastle, *Love's Adventures, Part 1*, in *Playes Written by the Thrice Noble, Illustrious and Excellent Princess, the Lady Marchioness of Newcastle* (London, 1662), sig. E1^{r}.

Writing onstage often requires the aid of a second person, usually a servant. In *North-ward hoe*, for example, Bellamont enters "*with leaues in his hand, his man after him with lights, Standish and Paper*."[63] In *The Wasp or Subject's Precedent*, Varletti says, "heres pen & Ink," to which Prorex responds, "And hears my hand"; but before he writes, Prorex says, "thy shoulder," presumably using Varletti's shoulder as a desk in the absence of a table.[64] In Sir Robert Howard's *The Great Favourite*, Lerma calls for "Pen, Ink, and Paper," and Paulo exits to get them.[65] In John Dryden's *Amphitryon*, when Mercury and Phaedra draw up a contract, "*Gripus gets ready Pen, Ink, and Paper*."[66] In Elkanah Settle's *Love and Revenge*, a stage direction reads: "*Exit Attendant, and brings in Pen, Ink, and Paper, and Aphelia sits down and writes*."[67]

Other kinds of onstage writing occur, however, when the use of pen and ink would be effectively impossible. In Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, Sir Hugh Evans says, "I will make a priefe of it in my note-booke"; in Philip Massinger's *The Roman Actor*, Caesar first "*Pulls out a Table booke*" and then "*Writes*"; in Richard Brome's *The Court Begger*, Court-Wit first "*draws his Tables*" and "*writes*" and then "*writes in his tables sometimes scratching his head, as pumping his Muse*"; and in Robert Armin's *The History of the two Maids of More-clacke* the following stage direction appears: "*Enter Tutch the Clowne, writing*."[68] That Tutch can walk and write at the same time suggests that he is holding writing tables, since such tables did not require the use of ink.

Forms of writing that would not have been possible with pen and ink are frequently noted. According to John Aubrey, Sir Philip Sidney "'was often wont, as he was hunting on our pleasant plains, to take his table-book out of his pocket, and write down his notions as they came into his head, when he was writing his Arcadia.'"[69] The association of tables with traveling is commonplace. Henry Peacham notes that the verses which he wrote on the birth of Prince Henry Frederick were written "[for] the most part in my trauailes heere in the Low Countries vpon the way, without other helpe then a bad memorie, and my Table

[63] Thomas Dekker and John Webster, *North-vvard hoe* (London, 1607), sig. E2^{r}.

[64] Anonymous, *The Wasp or Subject's Precedent* (c. 1636–39), ed. J. W. Lever (Oxford: Malone Society, 1976), 21.

[65] Sir Robert Howard, *The Great Favourite, Or, the Duke of Lerma* (London, 1668), sig. B1^{v}.

[66] John Dryden, *Amphitryon: Or, The Two Socia's* (London, 1690), sig. H4^{r}.

[67] Elkanah Settle, *Love and Revenge: A Tragedy* (London, 1675), sig. H4^{r}.

[68] Shakespeare, *The Merry Wiues of Windsor*, TLN 134–35 (1.4.144); Philip Massinger, *The Roman Actor, A Tragœdie* (London, 1629), sig. I3^{v}; Richard Brome, *The Court Begger* in *Five New Playes* (London, 1653), sigs. N3^{r}–S8^{v}, esp. S2^{v}–S3^{r}; and Robert Armin, *The History of the two Maids of More-clacke . . .* (London, 1609), sig. A2^{v}. See also the examples in Marston, Estcourt, and Hawkins cited on page 380 above.

[69] John Aubrey, quoted here from Sir Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia*, ed. Jean Robertson (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), xv. We are indebted to Cy Mulready for this reference.

booke."[70] And John Harrison describes "my meditation coming downe the Rhyne . . . written in my table booke, among other observations."[71] In his essay "That to Philosophi[z]e, is to learne how to die," Montaigne makes the same point:

> Some body, not long since turning over my writing tables [*feuilletant l'autre jour mes tablettes*] found by chance a memoriall of something I would [like to] have done after my death: I told him (as indeed it was true), that being but a mile from my house, and in perfect health and lustie, I had made haste to write it, because I could not assure my self I should ever come home in safety.[72]

Here, Montaigne hastily jots down notes in his writing tables while he is outside, far away from the usual paraphernalia for writing with pen and ink. The question of what he may have used for the purpose is illuminated by an exchange in Edward Sharpham's *The Fleire*:

> FROMAGA . . . ha you anye Tables?
> GENTLEMAN Yes, sure I neuer go without Tables.
> FROMAGA Plucke out your pin and write downe as I shall vtter. . . .[73]

"[P]in" might be supposed a misprint for *pen* were it not that the compositors of three later editions of the play found no problem with the word and saw no reason to correct it.[74] The gentleman's pin is almost certainly a stylus. As the editors of Edward Norgate's *Miniatura or the Art of Limning* note:

> Because Norgate referred to "a silver pen," it has been suggested mistakenly that Gerbier executed his drawing in pen and ink. Metal pens, however, were virtually unknown in the seventeenth century, and a table-book leaf would be a most inappropriate surface on which to draw with so notoriously scratchy an instrument. The technique was, of course, silver-point. The confusion arose because of the lack of seventeenth-century English terms for solid-state drawing media; "stylus" was not used and, unlike De Mayerne, who could avail himself of the convenient *stile d'argent* (BL. Sloane 2052, 29^{v}), English writers perforce described the instrument with such makeshifts as "silver pin" or "pen."[75]

Muller and Murrell also cite an anonymous commentary on the use of "A Table-booke & silver pin": "There are some that will draw neatly on a Table-booke leafe,

[70] Henry Peacham, *Prince Henrie revived* (London, 1615), sig. A2^{v}.
[71] John Harrison, *A Short Relation of The departure of the high and mightie Prince Frederick . . .* (Dort, 1619), sig. A1^{v}.
[72] Michel de Montaigne, *The Essayes . . . of Lo: Michaell de Montaigne*, trans. John Florio (London, 1603), sig. D5^{v}.
[73] Edward Sharpham, *The Fleire* (London, 1607), sig. B2^{r}.
[74] See Edward Sharpham, *The Fleire* (London, 1610), sig. B2^{r}; *The Fleire* (London, 1615), sig. B1^{r}; and *The Fleire* (London, 1631), sig. B2^{r}.
[75] Norgate, 211n.

which they doe with a Silver pin, for that is best for that purpose."[76] The fact that *pin* and *pen* were sometimes used interchangeably suggests that many Renaissance references to "pens" actually denote styluses. According to a 1556 inventory, Sir William More's closet contained "a wrytyng boke of parchment," valued at 2s. 6d., and "a pene of yron" worth 1d.[77] It seems likely that this "pene" was a stylus.

The type of stylus that has been most fully described is the silverpoint, usually a simple silver stick, used for sketching. In *St. Luke Painting the Virgin*, for instance, Rogier van der Weyden depicts the evangelist with a silverpoint in his hand, and one can make out the sketched face of the Virgin on his treated paper. Francis Ames-Lewis notes that "When the sharp point [of the stylus] passes across the prepared paper, a thin deposit of silver is scraped off by the texture of the preparation. This rapidly tarnishes in the air to leave a pale grey line."[78] In fact, however, most of the Renaissance writing styluses that we have found are made of brass or copper rather than silver (see figure 17). A surprising number of these styluses survive, although some have escaped notice, since they are almost invisibly tucked into the bindings of writing tables. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, for instance, contains a photograph of Frank Adams's 1581 *Writing Tables*,[79] but it does not note, any more than Harvard's catalogue record did, the presence of a brass "pin" with a crook at the top tucked into the binding, with only the very tip of the crook showing. In the fragmentary remains of a copy of Adams's writing tables in the British Library, there is a groove in the wooden backboard and a hole in the leather to hold a stylus (see figures 14 and 15).[80] It would have been cheaper and easier to make the stylus-holder before the binding had been completed. So it is probable that Adams made at least some bindings with the addition of a stylus in mind.

Some bindings actually required a stylus to fasten the covers when the table was not in use. Jan Gossart's *Portrait of a Merchant* (c. 1530) depicts a figure surrounded by all the accoutrements of writing. In the lower right-hand corner of the portrait is a notebook, about half the size of the merchant's hand, which would make it approximately the same size as Adams's writing tables. The tables are rather difficult to see because a scale for weighing gold coins has been put on top of them, but Gossart's painting suggests that such notebooks and styluses were standard tools for a merchant. The tables in Gossart's painting have a wallet binding with metal clasps on the flap, which are secured by inserting a brass stylus with an

[76] Norgate, 238 (from British Library Harleian 6376).

[77] Folger Ms. L.b.550, fols. 3^{v} and 4^{r}.

[78] Francis Ames-Lewis, *Drawing in Early Renaissance Italy* (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 2000), 36.

[79] *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 146. We are grateful to Kurt Schreyer for this reference.

[80] Frank Adams, *Writing Tables* (London, 1578[?]), British Library C.194.a.342.

elaborately crooked head.[81] Without the stylus, the wallet binding could not close properly. By a wonderful coincidence, the earliest tables that we have discovered were made at the same time, in the same city, and clearly by the same man who made the tables in Gossart's painting. The two writing tables have an identical stylus and very similar bindings, although the tooling is different. Like the English writing tables, these Flemish ones are composed of erasable leaves and a printed almanac. The title page of the almanac both gives cleaning instructions and calls attention to the significance of the stylus:

> Calendar: ¶*Item* you may write here with a stylus of gold, silver, tin, copper, or brass, and you may erase [what you have written] with a wet finger. ¶And when you have worn out [the erasable surface], so that you cannot write on it any more, you can get it repaired by Jan Severszoon, parchment maker, for a little money, and you can then write on it as well as if it were new. ¶Sold for your benefit in the famous mercantile city of Antwerp, on the Lombaerde veste: wholesale by Jan Severszoon, at the house of Jan Gasten, bookbinder. ¶*Item* if you get grease on it by erasing with your finger, you should use a clay sponge with a little white flour, and the grease will come off. ¶In the year of our Lord. 1527.[82]

The same kind of wallet binding with a stylus as a closing device can be seen in the late-sixteenth-century German table-book at the Folger (see cover image).[83]

To write effectively with a stylus, one needed to use specially coated paper or parchment. On ordinary paper, metalpoint leaves only the finest of traces, which is usually inadequate for sketching, note-taking, or composing a musical rough draft. The many recipes for erasable paper can perhaps be seen as ways of making paper suitable for metalpoint writing. In *The Secrets of the reuerend Maister Alexis of Piemont*, a book well known throughout Renaissance Europe, a recipe for treating parch-

[81] Jan Gossart, *Portrait of a Merchant*, National Gallery of Art, Washington, DC. Another version of this painting, known by the title *Portrait of a Banker*, is in the John G. Johnson Collection at the Philadelphia Museum of Art; see Max J. Friedländer, *Jan Gossart and Bernat van Orley*, Vol. 8 of *Early Netherlandish Painting*, Max J. Friedländer, 11 vols., trans. Heinz Norden (New York: Praeger, 1967–), plates 57 and 56. See also John Oliver Hand and Martha Wolff, *Early Netherlandish Painting* (Washington, DC: National Gallery of Art, 1986), 103–7.

[82] "Calengier: ¶*Item* men mach hier in scriuen met priemen ghemaect van gout, of van siluer, of van ten, of van koeper, of van laettoen, ende met eene[n] natten vingher machment wt doen. ¶Ende wanneert soe veroudt is, dattet niet meer scriuen en wil, soe salt den seluen Jan Seuers soon parkementmaker om een cleyn ghelt vermaeken, dattet so wel scriuen saloft nieuwe waer. ¶Met vinste te koop in die vermaerde coopstadt van Antwerpen, op di Lombaerde veste: By Jan Seuers soon int gros, in die huyse van Jan Gasten boecke bijnder. / ¶*Item* of den wtwisschers vingher vet waer, soe salmen neme[n] een cleyspongie met wat weyten bloems, en daer salt veter mede wt gaen. / ¶Int iaer ons Heeren. 1527" (*Calengier* [Antwerp, 1527], Spencer Collection, Neth. 1527, 94–143, New York Public Library).

[83] Folger V.a.480. There is a similar stylus in STC 26049.8, a copy of Frank Adams, *Writing Tables* (London, 1581), now in Harvard's Houghton Library.

ment begins: "To make white tables to write in with the point of a wire."[84] And the connection between writing tables and styluses is clearly established by Comenius in his popular schoolbook: "With a quill or pen (whose nib, slit, or clift is tempered or mended with a penneknife) wee write in paper or in parchment: with a stile or pen for tables, in writing tables (little bookes) that it may be blotted out."[85] Thus the table-book served the need for a reusable surface. Even more significantly, it provided a technology that permitted writing at almost any time, whether walking, like Tutch, or riding, like Sidney. Artists, too, from Leonardo to Rembrandt, used styluses and erasable paper for outdoor sketching.[86]

Why should a stylus have been preferred to a graphite pencil? A graphite pencil was first depicted by Conrad Gesner in 1565 (see figure 16). In his technical analyses of books in the Bodleian Library and the British Museum, however, C. A. Mitchell found no examples of the use of graphite before 1630 and only occasional uses after that.[87] The "lead" sometimes used in the ruling of medieval manuscripts was ordinary metallic lead, unsuitable for writing. A single mine in Borrowdale, England, produced what we now know as graphite, and it was not commercially marketed on any substantial scale until Friedrich Staedtler began to manufacture pencils in Nüremberg in 1662.[88] Confusion arises because *pencil* was a common word long before the development of graphite pencils and until at least the eighteenth century referred usually to a painting brush, not a stylus. Richard Crashaw writes that "[t]wixt pen and pensill rose a holy strife" to describe the conflict between writers and painters; and Philip Massinger imagines "the pencill of . . . memory" in order to paint upon his heart "[i]n living colours."[89] Even as late as 1771, the *Encyclopaedia Britannica* defines *pencil* as "'an instrument used by painters for laying on their colours.'"[90]

[84] Ruscelli, sig. M5^{v}.

[85] J. A. Comenius, *Porta Lingvarvm* (London, 1631), sig. L8^{r}

[86] Wetering convincingly argues that Rembrandt's pen-and-ink sketches, in contrast to his sketches with silverpoint on an erasable surface, were never done outdoors (47–73).

[87] Framlingham Gawdy apparently used a black-lead pencil in his parliamentary notebooks (1640–41); see *Proceedings in the Opening Session of the Long Parliament, House of Commons*, ed. Maija Jansson, 2 vols. (Rochester, NY, and Suffolk, UK: U of Rochester P, 2000–), 1:xlii. There are, however, some puzzling earlier references. In 1564, Johann Mathesius wrote: "'I remember . . . how one used to write with silverpoint . . . and now one writes on paper with a new unrefined mineral'" (quoted here from Henry Petroski, *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* [New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990], 41).

[88] See Petroski, 45–49, 79–85.

[89] Richard Crashaw, "An Epigramme Upon the pictures in the following Poemes which the Authour first made with his owne hand, admirably well, as may be seene in his Manuscript dedicated to the right Honorable Lady the L. Denbigh" in *Steps to the Temple, Delights of the Muses, and Other Poems*, ed. A. R. Waller (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1904), 189; Philip Massinger, *The Vnnatvrall Combat: A Tragedie* (London, 1639), sig. K1^{r}.

[90] *Encyclopaedia Britannica* (Edinburgh, 1771), quoted here from Petroski, 55.

Styluses continued to be used long after the publication of *Writing Tables* ceased. In his translation of "The Third Satire of Persius," John Dryden notes that Quintilian recommends "Table-books, lin'd with Wax, and a Stile, like that we use in our Vellum Table-books."[91] The literary evidence thus confirms the material evidence: table-books were made with blank pages of prepared paper or vellum and often sold with a stylus. It is usually the context alone that implies the use of a stylus as the normal implement for writing out of doors and/or standing up, and/or in haste, and/or in secret. The latter connection between tables and secrecy is implicit in Polonius's denial that he has "playd the Deske or Table-booke" (TLN 1165 [2.2.136]), concealing his thoughts from his king and queen. In *Valentine and Orson*, not only does Valentine keep his tables, "in whych was wryten all the secretes of hys arte," hidden in his "bosome," but his friend Pacolet reads them only "[a]fter he entred in to hys secrete chambre."[92]

We can now suggest four characteristic features of Renaissance writing tables:

1) Ubiquity: they were published and imported on a large scale.
2) Erasability: they contain leaves of erasable paper or parchment, the cheaper sort being bound with printed almanacs, charts, and other materials.
3) Portability: they are small enough to fit in a pocket, and their durable bindings protect them when carried about.
4) Convenience: they allow a stylus to be used in situations where it would be difficult or impossible to use pen and ink.

These features of table-books not only elucidate many scenes of writing in Renaissance literature but also have wide-ranging implications for our understanding of the structures and stages of Renaissance note-taking, memorization, and cultural production.

Tables, Memory, and Erasure

We still rely on erasable memory systems, such as computers and electronic organizers. Indeed, the modern Palm Pilot is about the same size as the *Writing Tables* and also comes with a stylus. But if Renaissance tables could serve some of the same functions as a Palm Pilot (recording dates, addresses, accounts), they also shaped and were shaped by a structure of memory different from our own. In particular, they were part of a pedagogical system that emphasized the gathering of commonplaces, their organization under topical headings, and their redeployment

[91] John Dryden, "The Third Satire of Persius" in *The Works of John Dryden*, ed. A. B. Chambers, William Frost, and Vinton A. Dearing, 20 vols. (Berkeley: U of California P, 1956–2002), 4:309.

[92] Henry Watson, *Valentine and Orson*, ed. Arthur Dickson (London: Oxford UP, 1937), 282 and 291. Valentine then takes "paper and ynke" and transcribes what has been written in the tables (291).

as the materials of one's own writing. Montaigne used his writing tables to break down into graspable pieces a "discourse that hath many heads":

> Memory is an instrument of great service, without which, judgment wil hardly discharge his duty, whereof I have great want. What a man will propose unto me, he must doe it by peece-meales: For, to answer to a discourse that hath many heads, lieth not in my power. I cannot receive a charge, except I have my writing tables about me [*je ne saurais reçevoir une charge sans tablettes*].[93]

Francis Goyet argues that such uses of writing tables are both staged and interrogated in *Hamlet*. In the same essay he also explores the role that tables play in Philip Melanchthon's pedagogy:

> In his *Rhetoric* of 1525, [Melanchthon] notes that it is necessary first "to record in your tables [*in tabulas referatur*] every maxim, adage or apothegm found in books; then these extracts are copied into the permanent record of commonplaces under the appropriate heading [*suo loco*]." . . . Melanchthon constantly repeats that the collection of commonplaces requires *iudicium*. . . . [A]ccumulation of commonplaces is pointless without selection and analysis. Recopying induces thought. The same sentence or anecdote can be classified under various headings, or the heading itself can be made more precise and explicit. . . . The task of recopying, seemingly so rudimentary, is an intellectual exercise. . . . The goal is not to assemble the largest collection. Rather, it is the interior mastery of this knowledge, as one makes it one's own through memory and judgment. The word that denotes this goal is "digest." . . . The repeated expression for such an arrangement of commonplaces is "*per locos communes digesta*," everything under its heading. . . . [and] refers to a material order that is equally an intellectual order. The mind better retains what it has "digested." This is the meaning of Seneca's and Erasmus's famous image of the bee. The bee gathering pollen from flowers is the first copying of the "flowers" of rhetoric into a portable notebook. Back in the hive, the pollen from the flowers is distributed, every part to its own place in the honeycomb: this is the moment of "digestion," or distribution.[94]

For Melanchthon, then, writing tables and commonplace books correspond to two stages in the process of commonplacing. Tables correspond to the moment when the bee indiscriminately collects pollen; commonplace books correspond to the honeycomb, in which the pollen is organized into different compartments. Melanchthon argues that *copia* can actually threaten memory. Mere accumulation creates what Ann Blair calls "information overload."[95] One role of erasable tables

[93] Montaigne, *Essayes*, sig. Kk3^{r}.

[94] Francis Goyet, unpublished essay on *Hamlet* and the commonplace tradition (trans. Yvonne Freccero).

[95] Ann Blair, *Information Overload in the Renaissance* (forthcoming). We are grateful to Blair for sharing her unpublished work with us.

was to prevent information overload. Their diminutive size encouraged "epitomizing," and their erasability permitted selectivity at a later stage.[96] If a permanent record was required, notes had to be transcribed a second time.

Melanchthon emphasizes this process of repetition. Repetition is itself a memorial system, but the moment of copying from table to commonplace book also allows for organization through digestion and distribution under specific headings. In a long letter to his brother, Sidney observed that it is crucial to "note much with our penn than with our mind," asserting that "[t]he confused trust of our memory" is overcome not only by writing down one's notes but also by organizing them under the proper headings: "[T]hat I wish herein, is this, that when yow reade any such thing, yow straite bring it to his heade, not only of what art, but by your logicall subdivisions, to the next member and parcell of the art."[97]

Sidney appears to be advocating the method that his nephew, the second earl of Leicester, recorded in a note: "This I presently writt in my Table bookes the same day, but I transcribed it in this paper the 5th of January, 1640."[98] The notes in one's table-book acquire value only when they have been transcribed in ink under the proper "heade" and in "logicall subdivisions."

But if table-books played an important role in the Renaissance art of memory, they also provided an antithetical model of the mind: a model of the most unreliable of traces and of human forgetfulness. In *2 Henry IV* the archbishop of York says that the king will

> wipe his Tables cleane,
> And keepe no Tell-tale to his Memorie,
> That may repeat, and Historie his losse,
> To new remembrance.
> (TLN 2068–71 [4.1.199–202])

As remembrance can be erased from one's tables, it can be erased from one's mind. In *The Academy of Complements* a widow resists remarriage, arguing that her heart is not like an erasable table: "I would not have you imagine, that my love to my former husband was written on a Table booke, the letters whereof may bee soone

[96] A character in John Marston's *The History of Antonio and Mellida* (London, 1602) compares the size of a play to that of a tablet: "I feare it is not possible to limme so many persons in so small a tablet as the compasse of our playes afford" (sig. B1^{r}).

[97] Sir Philip Sidney in a letter to Robert Sidney, 18 October 1580, quoted here from *The Complete Works of Sir Philip Sidney*, ed. Albert Feuillerat, 4 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1922–26), 4:131–32. We are indebted to Germaine Warkentin both for the Sidney references and for sharing with us her illuminating work on the Sidneys' use of commonplace books.

[98] *Sydney Papers, Consisting of a Journal of the Earl of Leicester, and Original Letters of Algernon Sydney*, ed. R. W. Blencowe (London: J. Murray, 1825), 263.

wiped out againe; no, it was engraved upon my heart."[99] The widow contrasts ephemeral writing on an erasable surface with permanent inscription, engraved in stone. Similarly, Francis Bacon writes that the "*Decemvirs* laws" were "in respect of laws, as writing tables in respect of brass; the one to be put in and out, as the other is permanent."[100]

The entries in two late-seventeenth-century French dictionaries capture the tension between imagining tables as enduring records and as surfaces that can be wiped clean. On the one hand, tables are memorial prostheses. A 1690 dictionary gives the following quotation: "I pray you, write this down on your tables so as to remember it" ("*Je vous prie de mettre cela sur vos tablettes pour vous en souvenir*").[101] On the other hand, they memorialize the ability to forget. The 1694 *Dictionnaire de l'Académie* quotes the expression "*Otez cela de dessus vos tablettes*"—literally "wipe it from your tables," meaning "forget it."[102]

But if tables materialize the opposition between memory and forgetfulness, they also suggest a tension within memory itself. Hamlet wants to erase his memory because the saws that Melanchthon considers the foundations of a pedagogical system are for him mere trivia. It was Hamlet's perspective rather than Melanchthon's that informed the Renaissance theater. While tables were frequently associated with dramatists or would-be dramatists, it became a source of pride to claim that good writers did not use a table-book. Perhaps this trivalizing of the table-book can be understood as a projection of playwrights' own insecurities: by deriding tables, dramatists rejected a technology identified with schoolchildren and merchants.[103] At the same time, they attacked those who used such memory aids to patch together their own plays from those of others. According to Richard Brome, a great writer like John Fletcher is distinguished by the fact that, in contrast to hacks, he does not go "To Wit • conventions with Note-booke, to gleane / Or steale some Jests to foist into a Scene: / He scorn'd those shifts."[104] Brome is preempting the detractor who, like a character in a play by Thomas Nabbes, imagines that a man with a "table-booke" is "taking a humour for a Play."[105] In *Tarugo's Wiles*, a table-book is similarly imagined as the prop of the plagiarizing dramatist:

[99] J[ohn]. G[ough]., *The Academy of Complements* (London, 1639), sigs. I3^{r-v}. We are indebted to Rebecca Chung for this reference.

[100] Francis Bacon, *Law tracts, containing 1. A proposition for compiling and amendment of our laws. 2. An offer of a digest of the laws* (London, 1737), 18.

[101] Antoine Furetière, *Dictionnaire Universel* (La Haye and Rotterdam, 1690).

[102] *Dictionnaire de l'Académie Française*, 2 vols. (Paris, 1694).

[103] We are indebted to Paul Yachnin for this suggestion.

[104] Richard Brome, "To the memory of the deceased but ever-living Authour in these his Poems, Mr. John Fletcher" in *Comedies and Tragedies. Written by Francis Beavmont and John Fletcher* (London, 1647), sig. g1^{r}.

[105] Thomas Nabbes, *Covent Garden: A Pleasant Comedie* (London, 1638), sig. H4^{r-v}.

2ND CUSTOMER I wonder what kind of man that is who is so busie with his Table-book?
3RD CUSTOMER I suspect this is a *Dramatick Poet* of a weak memory, come to pick up materials to help his fancy.[106]

In its critique of the table-book, the seventeenth-century theater sketched out a theory of writing that would become normative over the next two centuries: "original" fictions should not be recomposed from other fictions; imitation is a form of theft; a story must be the product of the writer's imagination. But such principles contradict the usual practice in a period when a play such as *Hamlet* was manifestly pieced together from the fragments of other plays—including an earlier play called *Hamlet*. Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, in other words, was constructed according to the productive theory of imitation that Renaissance pedagogy encouraged. While Hamlet scorns the audience's table-books in Q1, the scripts through which he comes into existence are themselves the products of writing tables and commonplace books.[107] Faced with the task of remembering, Hamlet himself holds a table-book in his hands.

The Tables of the Mind

To the extent that memory works like a table-book, it implies forgetfulness as much as remembrance. It is consequently in the "Booke and Volume" of Hamlet's brain that the Ghost's commandment will be indelibly imprinted, unmixed with baser matter. The antithesis between the small, erasable notebook and the large, indelible record of "Commandment[s]" was condensed in Renaissance England within a single word—*tables*—which was the word used in both the Geneva and the King James Bibles to denote the stone tablets of God's commandments.[108]

The biblical tables, though, already figure the opposition between enduring and temporary forms of writing. For Moses destroys the first tables that God gives him: "Moses wrath waxed hote, and he cast the Tables out of his handes, and brake them in pieces" (Exodus 32:19).[109] Even God's writing on tables of stone, like the pedagogy of erasable writing tables, requires an act of repetition: the commandments

[106] Sir Thomas St. Serfe, *Tarugo's Wiles: Or, The Coffee-House. A Comedy* (London, 1668), sig. E1^{v}.

[107] On the textuality of Hamlet's speech, see de Grazia, "Soliloquies and Wages"; and Margreta de Grazia, "Shakespeare in Quotation Marks" in *The Appropriation of Shakespeare: Post-Renaissance Reconstructions of the Works and the Myth*, Jean I. Marsden, ed. (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991), 57–71.

[108] Thomas Playfere explicitly makes the connection between erasable tables and stone tables when he claims that the law of God is "[n]ot noted in writing tables, or written in tables of stone, but noted & written in the fleshie tables of the heart" (*Ten sermons Preached by that eloquent divine of famous memorie, Th. Playfere Doctor in Divinitie* [Cambridge, 1610], sig. M7^{v}).

[109] *The Bible* (Geneva, 1560), Exodus 32:19. Subsequent biblical references all follow this edition.

that God wrote with his own finger (Exodus 31:18) must be transcribed a second time by his amanuensis, Moses (Exodus 34:27–28). The second tables that God gave to Moses not only endured, but their endurance also came to signify the permanence of the Father's "command."

In Frank Adams's 1584 edition of his *Writing Tables* two technologies of memory confront each other. On the title page is a printed image of Moses holding "a pair of tables" that are both like and unlike the writing tables that Adams has produced (see figure 18). Moses' tables, folio-sized and made of stone, epitomize permanence, which is here inscribed through the modern materials of permanence: the printer's ink that stamps Moses upon the page. But the title page and printed charts are bound with erasable tables, which work only because they make writing *impermanent*. When Hamlet uses writing tables as a model of memory, they also suggest forgetfulness: Hamlet wants to forget all that "youth and obseruation" have "coppied" in his mind. His mind's tables must first be wiped clean of all this earlier copying so that a single command can be permanently inscribed there—the Ghost's "Remember me." It is surely because there could be no less suitable technology than erasable tables for a permanent remembrance that Hamlet metamorphoses the "Table of . . . Memory" into the quite different "Booke and Volume" of his brain, which he imagines as a place of indelible writing, like the Mosaic tablets.

But no sooner has Hamlet turned to the permanent technology of the "Booke and Volume" than he calls for erasable tables: "My Tables, my Tables; meet it is I set it downe. . . ." The tables are now materialized as a theatrical prop in which to record the commonplace that "one may smile, and smile and be a Villaine." Recording this sententia, Hamlet follows the pedagogical conventions for commonplacing in which an observation about a specific person, situation, or occasion (in this case, the observation of Claudius's hypocrisy) is transformed into a general statement that can be applied outside the immediate context. Having moved from the specific to the general in setting down the commonplace, Hamlet immediately reapplies the general to the specific: "So Vnckle, there you are" (TLN 795 [1.5.110]). In other words, the singular Claudius becomes an example to be filed under the general heading of hypocrisy, but then the commonplace about hypocrisy is reapplied to the singular Claudius.[110] It is only after copying a commonplace about his uncle into his writing tables that Hamlet recalls his promise to remember his father: "now to my word" (TLN 795 [1.5.110]). The uncle is set down in writing upon an erasable table, but the father is inscribed upon the even less trustworthy surface of Hamlet's memory.

Throughout *Hamlet* an opposition occurs between technologies of permanence and technologies of erasure. But this antithesis is anything but secure: graves are

[110] Our account here is deeply indebted to Francis Goyet.

broken open (TLN 3189ff [5.1.ff]); tombstones are never erected (TLN 2964–66 [4.5.214–16]); parchment can give assurance only to "Sheepe and Calues" (TLN 3307 [5.1.116]); in Q1, the Ghost's suit of armor, a memorial of Old Hamlet's combat with Old Fortinbras, disappears, replaced by a nightgown (TLN 2482 [3.4.101 s.d.]). Hamlet first imagines the tables as figuring a mind from which the past can be erased so as to store a present memory. But the present memory is in turn vulnerable to the material form on which it is inscribed: an erasable surface, from which the present "command" can be wiped out as easily as the trivial records of the past.

Understanding that tables are above all an erasable technology leads to a fuller understanding of Sonnet 122:

> Thy guift,, thy tables, are within my braine
> Full characterd with lasting memory,
> Which shall aboue that idle rancke remaine
> Beyond all date euen to eternity.
> Or at the least, so long as braine and heart
> Haue facultie by nature to subsist,
> Til each to raz'd obliuion yeeld his part
> Of thee, thy record neuer can be mist:
> That poore retention could not so much hold,
> Nor need I tallies thy deare loue to skore,
> Therefor to giue them from me was I bold,
> To trust those tables that receaue thee more,
> To keep an adiunckt to remember thee,
> Were to import forgetfulnesse in mee.[111]

Katherine Duncan-Jones gives an excellent summary of this poem: "The speaker has parted with a notebook or manuscript volume given him by his friend, but claims that his own memory provides a more lasting memento."[112] Ophelia calls gifts "Remembrances" of the giver (TLN 1748 [3.1.92]). They materialize the giver even when the giver is absent. But this gift—a book with erasable inscriptions—needs to be supplemented if the speaker is to turn it into a memento of enduring love. So he transcribes the erasable notes into a written account, "characterd [i.e., inscribed] with lasting memory" upon the brain. (The permanent impression is "[f]ull characterd," in contrast to the tables, which were used for jottings, sometimes in shorthand. In his transcription the speaker fleshes out the notes to make a complete record in his brain.) The opposition in Sonnet 122 is therefore similar to the opposition that Hamlet tries to draw between the erasable tables of the mind and the permanent book and volume of the brain.

[111] *Shake-speares Sonnets. Neuer before Imprinted* (London, 1609), sig. H2^{r-v}.
[112] *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Katherine Duncan-Jones (London: Thomas Nelson, 1997), 354n.

Like Hamlet, the speaker in Sonnet 122 contrasts the writing table's "idle rancke" that will not endure (which the Oxford editor of the *Sonnets* glosses as "the row of mere physical letters in the book"[113]) to the inscriptions on his brain that will last "[b]eyond all date euen to eternity." But in the second quatrain the problem posed by the erasable tables returns with a vengeance. Even if the inscriptions on the poet himself are not erasable, they can endure only as long as "braine and heart" endure. And these will inevitably decay, giving up the memory of the beloved to "raz'd obliuion." Erasability is endemic to the human body. "[T]hy record" may be stored for the moment, but it will not endure to "eternity." The second quatrain thus undoes the grand claims of the first, collapsing the antithetical technologies of writing tables and bodily inscription into each other.

The rest of the sonnet reconstructs the opposition between the tables of the speaker's mind and the erasable table-book but in a much more modest form. The tables given to the speaker have "poore retention" both because the writing can be erased and because the notebook is too small to record all his love. Giving away the gift, he turns himself into a more adequate version of the notebook because the tables of his brain and heart "receaue . . . more"—that is, receive more of the beloved because of their imagined spaciousness (like the "Booke and Volume" of Hamlet's brain) and offer a more receptive surface (like St. Paul's "fleshly tables of the heart" [2 Corinthians 3:3]). The beloved both uses and is the pen or stylus that will write upon the speaker's "braine and heart."[114]

The odd flatness of the sonnet's concluding couplet captures the speaker's reduced claims for his memory: "To keep an adiunckt to remember thee, / Were to import forgetfulnesse in mee." A supplement or "adiunckt" to memory, whether in the form of a book or of writing itself, would cast suspicion on the reliability of the speaker's memory. A supplement would "import" (both "introduce" and "signify"[115]) the very thing that it would cure: "forgetfulnesse." But this general claim takes on a specific charge when the "adiunckt" is an erasable table, designed for a form of writing that can be wiped away at any moment. Such a supplement suggests the difficulty of making any complete separation between remembering and forgetting. A technology of memory, the tables are also a technology of erasure.

The claims to memory's endurance in Sonnet 122 differ significantly from the claims concerning the immortality of writing in earlier sonnets. In Sonnet 55 nothing can destroy "[t]he liuing record of your memory," and the power of writing will

[113] *The Complete Sonnets and Poems*, ed. Colin Burrow (Oxford: Oxford UP), 624–25.

[114] For the sexual implications of writing on tables, see Cotgrave's translation of "*Jouer de la navette*" as "'a wench to enter a man into her Tables,'" quoted here from *Shakespeare's Sonnets*, ed. Stephen Booth (New Haven, CT, and London: Yale UP, 1977), 415.

[115] See Burrow, ed., 624n.

make the beloved "pace forth" against "death, and all obliuious emnity" (55.8, 9).[116] In Sonnet 81 "[y]our monument shall be my gentle verse" (l. 9) long after "[t]he earth can yeeld me but a common graue" (l. 7): "From hence your memory death cannot take, / Although in me each part will be forgotten" (ll. 3–4).[117] But in Sonnet 122, as in *Hamlet*, memory is subject to death, when brain and heart shall "each to raz'd obliuion yeeld his part / Of thee." In Sonnet 81 it is only "each part" of the *poet* that will be forgotten; but in Sonnet 122, the *beloved*'s parts will also be subject to oblivion. In 122, as the lover's memory decays, so do the parts of the beloved that are stored there. Brain and heart can perhaps receive a more lasting impression than the tables, but the similarity between human memory and erasable tables requires that the latter be given away, so as to forget the forgetfulness they materialize.

In *Hamlet* that forgetfulness is memorialized with increasing insistence:

> [D]ye two moneths ago, and not forgotten yet? Then there's hope, a great mans Memorie, may out-liue his life halfe a yeare: But byrlady he must builde Churches then: or else shall he suffer not thinking on, with the Hoby-horsse, whose Epitaph is, For o, For o, the Hoby-horse is forgot.
>
> (TLN 1984–89 [3.2.130–35])

Hamlet obsessively stages erasures of memory, from the memory of King Hamlet, erased by Gertrude's hasty marriage, to the memory of Polonius, erased by his "obscure buriall" (TLN 2936 [4.5.214]), to the memory of Ophelia, erased by her abbreviated funeral and the curses of the priest. Before her death, Ophelia offers rosemary for remembrance, but she ends her catalogue of flowers with violets that are "wither'd all" (TLN 2936 [4.5.185]). The rotting bodies of kings, which the armored ghost of the old king occluded by its very presence, become the subject of Hamlet's meditations. In Act 4, Hamlet traces the progress of a king through the guts of a beggar (TLN 2686–93 [4.3.21–31]), and in Act 5, he meditates on the transformation of Alexander into the stop for a bunghole (TLN 3391–99 [5.1.203–12]). As Ulysses observes in *Troilus and Cressida*: "Loue, friendship, charity, are subiects all / To enuious and calumniating time" (TLN 2025–26 [3.3.173–74]).

The "Booke and Volume" in which Hamlet imagines memorializing his father's command fails to work, while the erasable tables, filled with commonplaces and jests, perform an ever-greater role within the play. After Act 3 the father's ghost exits, never to return, and his memory is greatly attenuated.[118] It is Yorick, the jester,

[116] *Shake-speares Sonnets. Neuer before Imprinted*, sig. D4^{r}.

[117] *Shake-speares Sonnets. Neuer before Imprinted*, sig. F1^{v}.

[118] From Act 4 onward, Hamlet is strikingly contrasted to Laertes, who repeatedly mentions his dead father and who moves relentlessly toward his revenge. Our modern prejudices notwithstanding, it is the dead Polonius who occupies the role of father in the last two acts. In the composite

whose bones are memorialized. The play moves relentlessly away from the kind of records that, stored in a library, might protect the remembrance of the old king for posterity. It is the "triuiall fond Records" of Yorick (TLN 784 [1.5.99]) that increasingly haunt, inhabit, and shape Hamlet. The ghost of his father, after changing into his nightgown, suffers an even more ignominious fate than does his murderous brother: he simply fades away, erased from the tables of memory.

Riverside edition of *Hamlet* there are twenty-nine references to Old Hamlet as "father" in the first three acts of the play, compared to nine such references to Polonius. But in the last two acts, Polonius is referred to as "father" nineteen times and Old Hamlet only twice.