

*Chests of the Mind in Early Modern England***Objects and Affordances**

‘Anything you need you can fit in a kist’, declares Isabella, one of the noblewomen of the Scottish court in Rona Munro’s 2014 play *James I: The Key Will Keep the Lock*. She continues:

And it’s proper furniture. A kist has a hundred uses, a table, a shelf, a chair. You could fit two bairns and a week’s rations for a squadron of men in a kist like this. You can have all your wealth ready to carry the minute you smell smoke. And you could barricade a door with the thing. Drop it out the window and brain any bastard climbing up the castle. A cupboard is just a door in a wall. Get more kists. I’ll have the man make you up a few.¹

Her tribute to the chest (‘kist’) as an object with ‘a hundred uses’ including everything from the very ordinary to the outright violent, which she pronounces in a scene of quiet domesticity as a group of women sit mending clothes, is more prescient than any of the characters realise at this moment. In the play that follows in Munro’s trilogy, several central scenes feature the young James II hiding from his antagonists inside a wooden chest. ‘Stay in the box, you have to stay in the box’, his mother tells the boy king as they attempt, unsuccessfully, to escape from their house arrest after the assassination of James I.²

All three of Munro’s plays about successive generations of Stuart rulers of Scotland in the turbulent fifteenth century explore the dramatic potential of the dark and draughty interior spaces of Scottish castles, inside which, as Isabella emphasises, the chest is a ubiquitous and versatile piece of furniture. Chests in these plays are ordinary furnishings for noble households, but also become theatrically powerful locations, associated with the political potency of secrecy and the unseen. Indeed, the image

¹ Rona Munro, *The James Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2014), pp. 65–6.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 94–8; pp. 120–4.

of lock and key in the title of the first play could allude as much to a chest as to a castle door. The concealing of the king inside a box makes him vulnerable even as a secure hiding place is sought for him, and that he is but a child makes this claustrophobic concealment particularly disturbing to witness. In theatrical terms, Munro deploys the chest as visual shorthand for the environment her historical characters inhabit, reimagining late medieval Scotland for a twenty-first century audience, but at the same time her plays make room for the rich symbolism and dramatic potential of the chest as an object that ‘gapes’, a ‘bottomless pit of shadows’, as the stage directions in *James II: Day of the Innocents* put it.³

In her praise for the chest, Munro’s Isabella articulates a very unsettling mixture of possibilities for this object, which go beyond its most obvious function as a container. It is an everyday piece of household furniture with the versatility to be a table, shelf, or chair (and as we later see, a hiding place), but also a potentially violent tool, a hefty weapon for self-defence or physical assault. This moment in the play, brief but prophetic, seems to push at the extremes of the chest’s materiality, circumscribing the ways in which this particular object occupies space, and creates privileged space within itself. It is emphatically three-dimensional, in contrast with a ‘cupboard’, Isabella notes, which is ‘just a door in a wall’. It is an object that can be moved around, although not without considerable physical effort, but it also enables mobility of other things, including human beings. Isabella’s speech draws attention to the chest’s characteristic potential to invite a range of particular actions – what psychologist James Gibson influentially termed the ‘affordances’ of an object or environment. Gibson’s explanation that by this word he means what something ‘provides or furnishes, either for good or ill’ resonates in this theatrical depiction of the chest as a piece of furniture with multiple, and even lethal, possibilities.⁴

Since the 1980s, scholars in psychology and archaeology especially, and in material culture studies more broadly, have gradually expanded upon and modified Gibson’s term.⁵ Thinking about the ‘affordances’ of objects has enriched our understanding of subject–object relations, and offered a

³ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

⁴ James Gibson, *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception* (Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1986), p. 127.

⁵ Carl Knappett provides an overview in ‘The Affordances of Things: A Post-Gibsonian Perspective on the Relationality of Mind and Matter’, in Elizabeth DeMarrais, Chris Gosden, and Colin Renfrew, eds., *Rethinking Materiality: The Engagement of Mind with the Material World* (Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2004), pp. 43–51.

way to articulate the co-dependency of mind and matter. Cognition and materiality, scholars across a wide range of disciplines now acknowledge, are far more intimately connected than has been previously recognised. This opening chapter of *Boxes and Books in Early Modern England* will unpack the particular affordances of the box. As I outlined in the Introduction, quantitative historical studies have demonstrated the extent to which early modern domestic space was characterised by a ‘proliferation’⁶ of boxes, including chests, coffers, trunks, and caskets. At a time of ‘new access to a superfluity of material possessions’⁷ this proliferation of boxes was symptomatic of increasing consumption, and the need for secure places in which to store, protect, and organise other material things. However, as Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson put it, while large-scale quantitative analyses crucially underpin studies of early modern material culture, ‘domestic life is not experienced in such a way, and doing justice to it [. . .] means working at the level of individual experience’.⁸ Drawing here on qualitative evidence from wills, inventories, diaries, and literary sources, the first part of this chapter will offer a detailed picture of a range of early modern environments characterised by many different kinds of boxes, valued for their overlapping and intersecting affordances as containers, spaces, and surfaces.

In his recent re-evaluation of Gibson’s term, archaeologist Carl Knappett asserts that the affordance of an object is neither ‘solely an independent property of the object itself’, nor is it ‘exclusively an intentional state within the mind of the person engaging with it’, but

a relational property shared between object and agent. The situation in which object and agent engage is a dynamic one – and the information specifying where the situation can lead is not entirely within the agent’s head, but is in some way also held within the object (itself within an environment).⁹

Knappett’s images and parenthetical phrasing suggest a particular emphasis on the inherently box-like qualities of all things: on what is ‘within’ the

⁶ David Gaimster, ‘Archaeology of an Age of Print? Everyday Objects in an Age of Transition’, in Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson, eds., *Everyday Objects: Medieval and Early Modern Material Culture and Its Meanings* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010), pp. 133–43 (p. 142). See also Raffaella Sarti, *Europe at Home: Family and Material Culture 1500–1800*, trans. Allan Cameron (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2002), pp. 128–9.

⁷ Lisa Jardine, *Worldly Goods: A New History of the Renaissance* (London: Macmillan, 1996), p. 15 and passim.

⁸ Hamling and Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England*, p. 6.

⁹ Knappett, ‘The Affordances of Things’, p. 46.

mind, 'within' objects, and 'within' environments. The second part of the chapter turns to what I want to call the 'imaginative affordances' of the box. Where scholars working at the interface of early modern literature and material culture might most usefully adopt the notion of the affordance is in considering how particular objects have a characteristic potential to invite certain ways of thinking and imagining. Cabinets and closets, as distinctively early modern spaces associated with distinctively early modern activities, are familiar examples of the blurring of mental and physical activity that happens inside certain kinds of elite box-like spaces, but thinking in broader terms of the category of the box illustrates in greater detail the extent of this interplay between mind and matter. Boxes are polymorphous things with the potential to enclose, conceal, protect, dignify, and furnish. They might also enable transportation, as well as classify, condense, and organise, and all of these things can happen as much in the mind as in our material surroundings. Looking more closely at some 'dynamic' early modern 'situations' (to use Knappett's terminology) located in prayers, meditations, and sermons, in which 'object and agent engage', this chapter reveals that boxes are also immensely useful and versatile things with which to furnish the imagination.

The World in Boxes

'In Whitehall are the following things worthy of observation', wrote Paul Hentzner, a German visitor to England at the end of the sixteenth century:

- I. The Royal Library, well stored with Greek, Latin, Italian and French books.
[. . .] All these books are bound in velvet of different colours, though chiefly red, with clasps of gold and silver; some have pearls, and precious stones, set in their bindings.
- II. Two little silver cabinets of exquisite work, in which the Queen keeps her paper, and which she uses for writing boxes.
- III. The Queen's bed, ingeniously composed of woods of different colours, with quilts of silk, velvet, gold, silver, and embroidery.
- IV. A little chest ornamented all over with pearls, in which the Queen keeps her bracelets, earrings, and other things of extraordinary value.¹⁰

¹⁰ *A Journey into England, by Paul Hentzner, in the Year M.D.XC.VIII*, trans. Richard Bentley, ed. Horace Walpole (London, Strawberry Hill, 1757), K2r–Lr.

Hentzner's descriptive terms – 'exquisite', 'ingeniously', and 'extraordinary' – convey his sense of wonder at the magnificence of this royal setting. He also mentions a collection of portraits, some musical instruments, an elaborate clock, and other features in the palace that a visitor might like to see, but conspicuously, all of the items first in his list are objects that have a containing or enclosing function: a library, two cabinets, a bed, and a little chest. Hentzner's observations prompt us to make visual and material connections between these artefacts, despite their variation in size and scale: the books in the library are bound in velvet, from which the quilts on the bed are made, and the bindings of the books contain pearls, which also ornament the royal jewellery chest. Both the book bindings and the bed are 'of different colours', and the clasps on the books are gold and silver, as are threads in the quilts; silver too are the boxes 'in which the Queen keeps her paper'.

As well as their visually rich and harmonious display of royal splendour, the appeal of these boxes and box-like objects lies in the details of what might be enclosed inside their elaborately ornamented exteriors. While the visitor will be impressed by the lavishness of this elite domestic interior, they will be further intrigued, Hentzner implies, by the knowledge that the Queen herself might read the books in the library, keep her writing papers in the two silver cabinets, sleep inside the bed with its luxurious quilts, and lock away her jewels in the little chest. The Royal Library impresses Hentzner because it contains beautifully bound books in 'Greek, Latin, Italian, and French'. As some of the smallest objects in his list, the books function metonymically for the palace itself: an assortment of lavishly decorated surfaces and exteriors, each of which encloses precious, delightful, or exotic contents. Alongside her jewels and bedclothes, the library is another kind of ornament to the Queen and her palace, its contents witnessing to her good taste and her literacy, just as the writing boxes imply her skill with the pen. The library is 'well stored', a phrase that suggests sufficiency and measured plenitude in several senses; Hentzner is impressed by the external appearance of the books it contains, as well as the classical and continental content of these volumes.

Within the royal palace at Whitehall, the relationship between these objects and what they contain is a sophisticated one. While they each have a practical function in demarcating a space of enclosure for something else, these various boxes, including the palace itself, are in turn ennobled by their precious contents. Their elaborately decorated surfaces outwardly project luxury, reminding the viewer that something valuable may be contained within. The little chest 'ornamented all over with pearls' hints

visually at the jewels it contains, presumably including more pearls, and perhaps lockets – popular items of Elizabethan jewellery, and themselves miniature receptacles. The luxurious materials on the outsides of the cabinets, bed, and books reflect literally and symbolically the richness of what they contain. The material characteristics of these objects construct a kind of tantalising transparency; although they are opaque objects whose contents are hidden, their outer surfaces are ostentatiously suggestive of the riches that are within.

Hentzner's observations reveal how objects, spaces, and rooms can work as comparable kinds of box, despite their diverse sizes and scales. His description begins with small artefacts and culminates with the palace of Whitehall as the ultimate place of containment for the monarch, a particular defined space in the landscape of London that is 'truly Royal; inclosed on one side by the Thames, on the other by a Park, which connects it with St. JAMES's, another royal palace'.¹¹ Such encounters highlight the complex material and rhetorical constructions of privacy around the monarch in the early modern period, a time in which 'the commodity of access became both more rare and more prized'.¹² The social distance of the monarch from his or her subjects was physically emphasised by the arrangement and division of space within royal palaces. Consisting of intricate sequences of lobbies, galleries, rooms, chambers, and closets, the palace was a series of contained spaces of differing degrees of privacy, through which visitors were filtered according to appropriate levels of intimacy with the monarch.¹³ Hentzner's description of the palace at Whitehall, where only the most select visitors are allowed to pass through the outer public rooms to the Queen's private chambers and even fewer are allowed to see what she keeps in her boxes and cabinets, demonstrates how the monarch was contained within a complex sequence of boundaries that were both materially and socially constructed.

This elaborate construction of boundaries around the monarch was at once personal and political. Patricia Fumerton has written about the visit of James Melville, ambassador from Mary Queen of Scots, to Elizabeth I in

¹¹ *Ibid.*, K7; O37–Q7.

¹² Brian Weiser, *Charles II and the Politics of Access* (Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2003), p. 5.

¹³ In *James II: A Study in Kingship* (Hove: Wayland, 1977) John Miller describes Whitehall as a 'great rabbit warren of apartments, cubby holes, and corridors, maybe two thousand rooms in all' (p. 38). See also David Starkey, 'Representation through Intimacy: A Study in the Symbolism of Monarchy and Court Office in Early-Modern England', in Ioan Lewis, ed., *Symbols and Sentiments: Cross-Cultural Studies in Symbolism* (London: Academic Press, 1977), pp. 187–224; Simon Thurley, *The Royal Palaces of Tudor England: Architecture and Court Life 1460–1547* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993).

1564. On this occasion Melville was taken by the Queen to see her collection of miniatures, each of which was ‘wrapt within paper’ and kept inside a cabinet (which Fumerton suggests could well have been one of the cabinets mentioned by Hentzner) in her bedchamber.¹⁴ This encounter underpins Fumerton’s influential discussion of the complex ways in which Elizabethan identity was performed. Arguing for a subjectivity consciously constructed through acts of hiding and revealing, locking and unlocking, enclosing and disclosing, she emphasises the correspondence between literary representations of subjectivity and the material manifestations of that subjectivity, in a culture obsessed with creatively hiding the self ‘behind a series of gorgeously ornate public rooms, cabinets, lockets, frames, paints, metaphors’. As visitors to royal residences discovered, ‘one moved inward, but inwardness could be reached only after running a gauntlet of public outerness’. Fumerton’s account portrays a culture filled with boxes, in which ‘bedrooms displayed closed decorative cabinets; cabinets exhibited closed ivory boxes; boxes showed off covered or encased miniatures’. Royal palaces epitomise this culture of closure through the way in which access to the monarch involved the continual penetration of different layers. And yet even as one was drawn inward through this series of concentric boxes, ‘there never was any ultimate room, cabinet, or other *apartment* of privacy that could be locked away from the public; only a perpetual regress of apartments’.¹⁵

The social construction of the early modern monarchy reveals a complex interplay between different kinds of material and rhetorical enclosures; a mobility of scale in which boxes as small as lockets and as large as palaces could be equally implicated, as well as other elite spaces of containment, such as closets and cabinets.¹⁶ By the mid-seventeenth century, ‘cabinet’, which had hitherto described a discrete piece of furniture, developed more abstract senses, referring in a political context, for example, not just to a room but also to the group of people who meet to conduct business within it. Rooms such as those seen by Hentzner in Whitehall could themselves become boxes of endless further boxes, in a visual and material blurring of

¹⁴ Patricia Fumerton, *Cultural Aesthetics: Renaissance Literature and the Practice of Social Ornament* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 67, 72.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 69–84.

¹⁶ Such artefacts, and the activities they permitted, have been the subject of important historical, art historical, and literary case studies: see Alan Stewart, ‘The Early Modern Closet Discovered’, *Representations*, 50 (1995), 76–100; Richard Rambuss, *Closet Devotions* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998); Sean Silver, *The Mind Is a Collection: Case Studies in Eighteenth-Century Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015).

the distinction between an enclosed box-like space (especially a wood-panelled room) and what it contained. This seems to have underpinned the interchangeable nature of the very words used to describe some of these spaces and things in early modern England: the speaker in John Donne's 'Satyre 1', for instance, desires to be left alone with his books 'in this standing wooden chest', a chamber or study for which 'closet' would also be an appropriate noun. 'Let me lye/ In prison, and here be coffin'd, when I dye' (1–4), he pleads, emphasising the privacy afforded by this particular enclosed space, which reminds him of both a prison cell and a coffin, two more box-like spaces of physical isolation.¹⁷ In a similar vein, when Lady Macbeth's lady-in-waiting reports having seen her 'unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it' in her sleep (5.1.4–6), the New Cambridge editor suggests that Lady Macbeth does not go to a small private room (like Gertrude's closet in *Hamlet*), but opens a smaller object: 'cabinet; lockable chest, or box for valuables' are offered as synonyms in the editorial gloss, with Gloucester's comment that 'I have locked the letter in my closet' (*King Lear*, 3.3.11) and Anthony's discovery of Caesar's will 'in his closet' (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.129) as comparable instances.¹⁸

In this chapter and throughout this book, I embrace this evidently labile nature of early modern terminology for boxes and box-like objects in thinking about the interactions between their material and metaphorical affordances. As furniture historians Victor Chinnery and Penelope Eames have stressed, there is no absolute consistency in the various words used for the many kinds of box that were such a prominent feature of early modern material culture, and many terms, such as coffer, chest, and cabinet were interchangeable.¹⁹ The situation is further complicated by the nineteenth-century tendency to formulate misnomers for some of these pieces of furniture that play on vague monastic, clerical, or historical ideals, such as 'Bible boxes', 'coffin stools', and 'Armada chests'.²⁰ The latter possibly represents an imaginative corruption of 'armarium', reflecting the

¹⁷ John Donne, *Complete English Poems*, ed. C.A. Patrides (New York: Random House, 1991).

¹⁸ William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, ed. A.R. Braunmuller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 233.

¹⁹ Victor Chinnery, 'Names for Things': *A Description of Household Stuff, Furniture and Interiors 1500–1700*, ed. Jan Chinnery (Oblong: n.p., 2016); Penelope Eames, *Furniture in England, France and the Netherlands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (London: Furniture History Society, 1977).

²⁰ Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, pp. 179–87. Chinnery notes that although Bibles may well have been kept in boxes, the term 'Bible box', frequently used to describe flat-lidded boxes kept on tables or shelves, is not early modern.

compelling notions of security associated with this Latin word. Originally referring to a place for the storage of weapons or tools, 'armarium' evolved to refer also to other places or objects for storage, especially book chests.²¹ It is the etymological root of several terms in English (and in many of the Romance languages as well) for other similar places of safekeeping, including 'armoury', 'armoire', and 'aumbry'. As we will see in later chapters, the noun 'box' is not only particularly versatile in its early modern usages, but offers rhetorically useful and sometimes even polemical possibilities.

The slipperiness of the early modern vocabulary of the box is implicit in Lena Cowen Orlin's discussion of the extent to which early modern English households were characterised by variations of the wooden chest, including 'court cupboards, livery cupboards, dole cupboards, clothes presses, book desks, grain arks, and, in its most capacious variant, the closet'.²² Offering a useful contrast with the palace of Whitehall and the other more elite examples mentioned above, Orlin demonstrates that more modest domestic spaces also featured endless variations on the box, some of which were moveable objects, while others were architectural divisions of space that may or may not be distinguished sharply as rooms.²³ Shakespeare shows us how this might have been experienced in a comic sequence in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, when Falstaff, attempting to conceal himself in Master Ford's house, refuses to hide in the buck-basket for a second time, asking if he can 'creep up into the chimney' instead. Mistress Page tells him to 'Creep into the kiln-hole' but Mistress Ford dismisses both of these suggestions, saying of her husband 'He will seek there, on my word. Neither press, coffer, chest, trunk, well, vault, but he hath an abstract for the remembrance of such places and goes to them by his note. There is no hiding you in the house'.²⁴ The Fords' house contains various enclosed spaces, but in this dialogue there is no distinction between those that are moveable pieces of furniture – the 'press',

²¹ For photographs of surviving seventeenth-century book chests still containing copies of John Foxe's *Acts and Monuments*, see John N. King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs and Early Modern Print Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), pp. 6–7, 273, 278.

²² Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 301. See also her earlier work, *Private Matters and Public Culture in Post-Reformation England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), and Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978).

²³ On the subdivision and greater internal segregation of 'middling sort' space, not just elite spaces, see also M. Johnson, 'Rethinking the Great Rebuilding', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 12 (1993), 117–25.

²⁴ *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, 4.2.42–57. This is a play of multiple comic containments: see 3.3 for the buck-basket scene; also 1.4, when Simple gets shut in the closet in which Doctor Caius keeps his papers and other artefacts including 'un boitier veri', a box of ointment.

‘coffer’, ‘chest’, or ‘trunk’, and those that are part of the architectural structure of the house – the ‘chimney’, ‘kiln-hole’, ‘well’, and ‘vault’. Mistress Ford implies that her husband does not discriminate between ‘such places’, whether discrete rooms, objects, or spaces, as sites where a reprobate like Falstaff might be hiding; indeed, he has an inventory of them all to remind himself, in the form of his ‘abstract’ or ‘note’.

Multiple variations on the box were a distinctive feature of ecclesiastical as well as domestic environments. After an injunction was passed by Thomas Cromwell in 1538, parish registers for the recording of baptisms, weddings, and funerals, as well as ‘a strong Chest or box for the Almes of the poore’ were mandatory in every parish church.²⁵ The parish register had to be kept inside a chest, as clergy were regularly reminded:

for the safe keepyng of the same booke, the Paryshe shalbe bounde to provyde of theyr common charges one suer coffer with twoo lockes and keyes, wherof the one to remayne with the Parson, Vicar, or Curate, and thother with the Wardens of every paryshe Church or chappell wherin the sayde booke shalbe layde up, whiche booke they shall every Sundaye take forth, and in the presens of the sayde Wardens or one of them, wryte and recorde in the same al the weddynges, chrystenynges, and buryalles made the whole weke before. And that done, to lay up the booke in the sayde coffer, as afore. And for every tyme that the same shalbe omitted, the partie that shalbe in the faulte thereof, shall forfeit to the sayd Church .iiii. s. .iiii. d. to be employed, the one halfe to the poore mennes boxe of that Paryshe, the other halfe towards the repayre of the Church.²⁶

These official directions reveal that the storing of the book inside the locked coffer was as integral a part of the institutional record-keeping as the weekly ritual of writing in the book. The two bureaucratic acts – to ‘wryte and recorde’ and to ‘lay up the booke’ – had to be observed by a church official, and so in both literal and metaphorical ways the box reinforced the textual record as a secure location for essential details of the parish and its inhabitants.

Surviving parish chests often feature tills (internal boxes or drawers), and secret compartments, as well as impressive ironwork details and

²⁵ Adam Squier, *Articles to be enquired of, by the Church Wardens and Swornemen within the Archdeaconrie of Middlesex* (London: John Wolfe, 1582), A2v. See also William Tate, *The Parish Chest: A Study of the Records of Parochial Administration in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1946).

²⁶ Anon., *Injunctions geven by the Quenes Majestie anno Domini MD.LIX., the fyrst yeare of the raigne of our Sovereigne Lady Quene Elizabeth* (London: Richard Jugg and John Cawood, 1559), Aivr.

intricate locks.²⁷ From the turn of the seventeenth century, England was an important centre for locksmithing, and many chest locks survive today even when their chests do not – themselves often very sophisticated pieces of craftsmanship, both beautiful and functional. In Cambridge, all of the University's books and money were kept from the earliest days inside the 'University Chest'. The six-hundred-year-old chest, protected by multiple locks, which replaced the one destroyed during an attack on the University in 1381, survives today in the office of the University Registry, and the budgeting process at Cambridge is still referred to metaphorically as 'allocations from the Chest'. In a similar blurring of box and bureaucratic activity, in the early modern period the noun 'cofferer' described an office in the royal household (one responsible for strongboxes and their contents), or more generally, a treasurer, as well as one who makes coffers.²⁸

With their visually striking bars, locks, and bolts, many of these chests and boxes leave their identity as places of safekeeping in no doubt. A humble wooden chest might, like a royal palace, be impenetrable. What these examples repeatedly illustrate is that the primary affordance of the box, in all of its many possible permutations, is containment. A box invites us to put things into it, or conversely, to look inside and see what might be taken out of it. But containment is by no means the only affordance of the box, and indeed, containment itself might be nuanced in particular ways, take different forms, and be required for a whole range of purposes. The boxes that populate early modern domestic and institutional spaces are valued for the possibilities of safekeeping, protecting, and organising that they offer (all variations on containment), but boxes might also be valued for aesthetic reasons too, as objects with multiple exterior surfaces for showcasing different materials and decorative techniques. The period 1530–1630 was the 'heyday of carved wooden furniture in England', but wooden boxes could also be decorated with inlay, parquetry, marquetry, paints, stains, or gilding.²⁹ Though the containment offered by a box might appear to privilege its interior space above all else, some of the other affordances of boxes show that interiors are not necessarily more important than exteriors.

We can get a sense of some of these other material affordances from early modern wills and inventories. Such texts often bear witness to the

²⁷ Sherlock, *Suffolk Church Chests*, passim. On the parish chest and its relationship to evolving attitudes towards the past, see Woolf, *The Social Circulation of the Past*, chapter 5.

²⁸ 'cofferer, n.', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, p. 142; pp. 132–54.

personal significance of the multiple boxes that furnished sixteenth- and seventeenth-century English domestic interiors, across a wider social scale. They are clearly valued for the purposes of safekeeping and organisation, as well as for what they look like, but also for more intangible significance, often defined by the personal value of their contents, or the place in which they are kept. In her will of 1620, for example, the widow Anne Tindall bequeathed to her daughter ‘my cipresse box with tilles with such trifles as she shall finde in yt’, adding ‘And I also give her my cabinett which her Father gave me. I give her my greene velvet box with tilles and all such things as be in them at the time of my death’.³⁰ Both of these boxes feature ‘tilles’ but Tindall does not specify what may be inside them, referring to the contents in vague terms as ‘trifles’ and ‘things’, which will be of significance only to her daughter. Nor does she specify any information about the size of these various boxes, identifying them only by the materials from or with which they are made or covered.

Providing a rather more detailed picture of a much more substantial dwelling, the 1597 inventory of the London townhouse of Richard Stonley, one of the four Tellers of the Exchequer of Receipt from 1554 until his death in 1600, depicts a household furnished with many different boxes. We learn that the contents of Stonley’s bedchamber included, alongside a large number of individually listed books, a ‘Case of Boxes of Walnuttree with a Frame’, a ‘litttle case of smalle boxes/In the same case in the boxe P. xj printes for pastery’, and a ‘nest of xv boxes under the Table’. Next to the bedchamber, the Gallery also contained many books, alongside other furnishings including a ‘Joyned Table With a Cupbord’, ‘a greate Case of boxes with gilt lock and keys and a frame’, a ‘Case of boxes with Iron lock and keys ungilt and a frame’, ‘Twoe smale Chestes to cary mony in’, a ‘smalle case of boxes of Joyned worke’, and a ‘case of boxes covered with black lether’. There was also ‘a great bard Flaunders Covered with tand lether’, ‘Another of the same’, a ‘Flaunders Iron Chest’, a ‘chest for lynn covered with black lether’, a ‘waynscot little chest’, a ‘Square standing Combecase with thinges belonging to it, covered with greene velvet’, a ‘faire square standinge combecase with boxes covered with redd lether guylt, and greene velvet in a boxe covered with black lether’, a ‘greate presse for *lettres*’, a ‘nest of boxes of Wainscot

³⁰ Will of Anne Tindall, widow of Great Maplestead, Essex: National Archives, PROB 11/136 (2 November 1620). Anne was the wife of Sir John Tindall, whose murder in November 1616 by John Barterham is recounted in *A true relation of a most desperate murder, committed upon the body of Sir John Tindall Knight one of the maisters of the Chancery* (London: Edward Allde, 1617).

containinge xiiij’, and a ‘boxe of diverse printed portraitures in paper and pastbord’.³¹ Further rooms in Stonley’s well-furnished house featured additional chests, cupboards, presses, and cases containing candles, linen, plate, glasses, and papers, and many other boxes, the contents of which are not specified.³²

Both Stonley’s inventory and Tindall’s will pay attention to some of the specific physical properties of their multitudes of boxes – those bequeathed to Tindall’s daughter are described as ‘cipresse’ and ‘greene velvet’, and the different materials from or with which some of the boxes in Stonley’s house are made or covered are often mentioned, including iron, wood, velvet, and leather. In this respect, such objects participate in the general aesthetic of the early modern domestic interior, in which individual artefacts, furnishings, and surfaces are part of a greater visual, material whole. Decorated leather, for example, was found in abundance in Europe from at least the thirteenth century onwards, used for a multitude of covering purposes including ‘scabbards, boxes, containers and chests, belts, shoes, bookboxes, cases and bookbindings’.³³ Embroidery, one of the great domestic arts of the seventeenth century, covered boxes, caskets, and small cabinets with elaborate designs, executed in many different kinds of stitches and techniques, and other textile arts were used for the embellishment of clothing, book covers, and many other artefacts, as well as walls and floors.³⁴ Linen-fold panels – wood carved to look like creases and folds of cloth – were found on walls, beds, and chests from the fifteenth century onwards, and suggest another dynamic way in which boxes might interact visually and playfully with other objects, materials, and surfaces in early modern domestic space. The slightly earlier technique of parchment-fold-carving is also often found on chests, and was perhaps a playful echo of the

³¹ ‘Wainscot’ refers to foreign timber of superior quality, often used for panelling.

³² The fair copy of this inventory, National Archives E159/412/435, an unpaginated Exchequer Memoranda Roll, has been partly published (books only): see Leslie Hotson, ‘The Library of Elizabeth’s Embezzling Teller’, *Studies in Bibliography*, 2 (1949–50), 49–62. I am grateful to Jason Scott-Warren for many conversations about Richard Stonley’s inventory. Scott-Warren’s *Shakespeare’s First Reader: The Paper Trails of Richard Stonley* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019) explores the material and other relationships between early modern books, people, and things, with detailed exploration of this inventory and other documents relating to Richard Stonley.

³³ Mirjam Foot, *The History of Bookbinding as a Mirror of Society* (London: British Library, 1998), pp. 4–5.

³⁴ See, for example, Patricia Wardle, *Guide to English Embroidery* (London: Victoria & Albert Museum, 1970); Liz Arthur, *Embroidery 1600–1700 at the Burrell Collection* (London: John Murray, 1995). I discuss embroidered caskets in more detail in Chapter 3.

parchment sheets that might have been pasted onto wooden panels for painting, but which often peeled off over time.³⁵

The inventory of Richard Stonley's house portrays a dwelling place liberally furnished with material things, among which are a great many boxes. Some of these chests, cases, boxes, and presses are designated for the storage of particular things such as money, pastry prints, linen, combs, and letters; some do not have any specified content; and many of the itemised objects comprise sets of further consecutively nested boxes. Some of these are small, others large; some are singular items, and others come in pairs. Some stand alone, as sizeable pieces of furniture, and others are much smaller accessories. They serve as useful orientation points in the inventory, allowing material possessions (especially small objects of which there might be many at once, like books) to be conveniently gathered together, so that the sheer multiplicity of material things might be more easily navigated, both on paper and in the specific space that is being described.

As such documents suggest, the possible correspondences between the geography of the home and narrative description in an early modern will or inventory allows readers the possibility of partially reconstructing the house it documents – not only a sense of its overall architecture, but also the incidental nooks and crannies that may have held special significance for its inhabitants.³⁶ When the writer and biographer Izaak Walton bequeathed to his son in 1683 'a trunk of linen', he specified as well 'a deske of prints and pickters; also a cabinet nere my beds head, in which are som littell thngs that he will vlew, tho of noe great worth'.³⁷ Walton's phrasing demonstrates the necessary convenience of trunks and cabinets as a way of furnishing a room, but also how the act of storing other things within one such object might signal personal 'vlew' even if not general 'worth'. We are not privy to the precise details of the 'littell thngs' he kept by his bed, but their literal and rhetorical shutting-away inscribes their subjective importance. Such wills and inventories each offer us a picture of, as Jason Scott-Warren puts it in his discussion of early modern account books, 'life in a box'.³⁸

While in the context of a will, people implicitly or explicitly articulate the enduring value of boxes and their contents as they contemplate leaving the earthly life, boxes may often be particularly dynastic pieces of furniture

³⁵ Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, p. 378.

³⁶ There are also, of course, many limitations to inventories as historical sources, not least in what they do *not* include, as Jason Scott-Warren discusses in *Shakespeare's First Reader*, pp. 78–9.

³⁷ *Izaak Walton: Selected Writings*, ed. Jessica Martin (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), p. 168.

³⁸ Scott-Warren, *Shakespeare's First Reader*, pp. 101–9.

in themselves. They often seem to come into special focus at life's beginnings and endings, as objects that are particularly rich in symbolic value. When Walton married his first wife Rachel Floud on 27 December 1626, a chest was made to commemorate their union. The front panel of the chest features a carved scene of Adam and Eve fleeing the garden of Eden, with the serpent uncoiling from a branch above them (perhaps a surprising image, albeit one depicting the first biblical marriage), above and beneath which are inscribed the names of the two now 'joined together in ye Holie Bonde of Wedlocke', as well as a neat couplet: 'WE ONCE WERE TWO, WE TWO MADE ONE,/WE NO MORE TWO, THROUGH LIFE BEE ONE'. Marriage chests are symbolically loaded objects, but Walton's chest embeds its meaning even more closely in its materiality through its possible pun on 'joined': the couple are 'joined' in marriage, and have been 'made one', just as the chest itself is a singular object, the product of skilled joinery.³⁹

Rachel Floud died in 1640 and Walton later remarried, marking his second marriage with a similarly monumental piece of furniture, a cupboard carved with a scene of the day of judgement, which bears the name of his second wife, Anne Ken, and the date 1656.⁴⁰ Inscribed furnishings like these are documentary objects even without being opened, memorialising in matter a particular life event and bearing on their outsides some of the same textual evidence that appears in the formal records that may well be stored within, such as parish registers. In the most reflexive interplay between the material and bureaucratic spheres of the household, wills and other important documents might also be stored in the very boxes they themselves refer to. The dramatic potential of this is realised in Thomas Middleton's *A Mad World, My Masters*, where Sir Bounteous reveals that he keeps his will 'above in an outlandish box' (2.1.150), while in Ben Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*, a marriage licence (and thus the inheritance of a significant dowry) moves through the play with appropriately comic clumsiness in a 'black box'. In his will signed in

³⁹ For a picture of Walton's chest and brief discussion, see Catherine Belsey, *Shakespeare and the Loss of Eden: The Construction of Family Values in Early Modern Culture* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), pp. 60–70. Patricia Parker discusses some of the early modern literary associations between the craft of joinery and 'joining' in matrimony: see 'Rude Mechanicals', in Margreta de Grazia, Maureen Quilligan, and Peter Stallybrass, eds., *Subject and Object in Renaissance Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 43–82 (pp. 48–50).

⁴⁰ Tara Hamling briefly discusses these two objects in "'An Arelome To This Hous For Ever": Monumental Fixtures and Furnishings in the English Domestic Interior, c. 1560–1660", in Andrew Gordon and Thomas Rist, eds., *The Arts of Remembrance in Early Modern England: Memorial Cultures of the Post Reformation* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013), pp. 59–83 (pp. 67–70).

1632, the poet William Austin requested that ‘my Executors shall cause to be printed those my poore meditations in the black box of Chyna worke which for the exercise of my soule by Gods assistance and I hope to his glory I have writt on diverse texts of Scripture’, with details of those in his literary circle who should receive presentation copies, including Ben Jonson and John Selden.⁴¹ His wife subsequently published these ‘poore meditations’, located so specifically in their ‘black box’ (possibly a lacquered box), an appropriately mournful-looking reliquary for the elegies for his first wife and deceased children that were found there too. The infamous ‘Casket letters’ of Mary Queen of Scots, which were used as evidence of her involvement in the murder of her husband Lord Darnley, were so called because they were purportedly found in a silver box, which survives today.⁴²

Such real and imagined households are of course relatively privileged ones in early modern England, and the boxes they feature are generally valuable objects with valuable contents. As a Teller in the Exchequer of Receipt, Richard Stonley would presumably have needed some of his chests and boxes for the storage of money and important state documents.⁴³ Other wills attest to the importance of chests in humbler households, too, even those much further down the social scale. In 1617 John Rand, a yeoman of Holton in Suffolk, bequeathed to his daughter Susan ‘One Brasse pott foure of my best peeces of pewter standing in my Parler and my best hutch in my chamber with all the goodes which shalbe therein at my deathe’.⁴⁴ John Bugden, a weaver of Wiltshire, bequeathed in 1613 to his daughter Helen, in addition to a bedstead with feather bolster, pillows, coverlet, and blankets, ‘my great new Chest’ and ‘the Cubbord in the hall’.⁴⁵ Further still towards the bottom of the social scale, as Catherine Richardson and others have pointed out, even if you did not own a bed, you probably owned a box of some kind, for storing and protecting whatever other humble possessions you did have – a kind of miniature portable house.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Will of William Austin, National Archives, PROB 11/165/14 (19 May 1632). I am grateful to Jason Scott-Warren for this reference.

⁴² For an image of the casket, now in Lennoxlove House, East Lothian, see Rosalind K. Marshall, *Mary, Queen of Scots: ‘In my end is my beginning’* (Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland, 2014), p. 54. The original letters have not survived and their authorship has been much debated.

⁴³ Scott-Warren, *Shakespeare’s First Reader*, pp. 126–7.

⁴⁴ Will of John Rand, Yeoman of Holton, Suffolk: National Archives, PROB/11/136 (19 December 1620).

⁴⁵ Will of John Bugden, Woollen Weaver of Donhead St Mary, Wiltshire: National Archives, PROB 11/126 (7 November 1615).

⁴⁶ Catherine Richardson, *Shakespeare and Material Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 18; Flather, *Gender and Space in Early Modern England*, p. 47.

300	Nomenclatura	Sect. 16.	Sect. 16.	Clericalis.	301
<i>A Waist Chair</i>		Cathedra Pannellata.	<i>A Chair Cover</i>	Cathedrarium, n.	
<i>A Turned Chair</i>		Cathedra Tomata.	<i>A Stool Cover</i>	Epistulum, n.	
<i>A Canoe-Chair</i>		Cathedra Cannea.	<i>The Girls-Webb of Stools and Chairs</i>	Lorum, n.	
<i>A Leather Chair</i>		Cathedra Follita.	<i>A Chair-Frame</i>	Fulcrum Cathedra-	
<i>A Turkey-work Chair</i>		Cathedra Opere Turci-		um.	
		co contexta.	<i>A Little Chest</i>	Cistula, f.	
<i>A Sowed Chair</i>		Cathedra Panno Acu-	<i>A Chest to keep Books in</i>	Librarium, n.	
		picile Cooperta.	<i>A Chest or Press to keep Ap-</i>	Vestiarium, n.	
<i>A Green Chair</i>		Cathedra Viridis.	<i>pared in</i>	Nidus, m.	
<i>A Rush Chair</i>		Cathedra Juncea.	<i>A Chest wherein Mercers</i>	Tabularium, n.	
<i>A Folding Chair</i>		Cathedra Plicatilis.	<i>put their Wares, A Shop-</i>		
<i>A Covered Chair</i>		Cathedra Cooperta.	<i>Chest</i>		
<i>A Childs Chair</i>		Cathedra Infantilis.	<i>A Chest where Evidencee</i>		
<i>A Chair made with loose</i>		Trochum, n.	<i>or such like Writings are</i>		
<i>Joyns which may be</i>			<i>kept</i>		
<i>turned every way</i>			<i>A Box</i>	Pyxis, f.	
<i>A Compass Chair</i>		Hemicyclus, m.	<i>A Spice-Box</i>	Narthecium, n.	
<i>A Privy Chair, or Close-</i>		Sella Familiatis.	<i>A Jewel Box</i>	Annularium, n.	
<i>stool</i>			<i>A Board in the Kitchen to</i>	Urnarium.	
<i>A Trunk</i>		Rificus.	<i>set Vissels of Water, or</i>		
<i>A Male Trunk, or Port-</i>		Rificus Itinerarius.	<i>Pots and Pans on</i>		
<i>mantle-trunk</i>			<i>A Dresser or Board</i>	Abacus Culinarius.	
<i>A Chest</i>		Cista, f.	<i>A Tristle for a Table,</i>	Tripus Mensarius.	
<i>A Pannel Chest</i>		Cista Pannellata.	<i>A Table-Frame</i>	Fulcrum Mensarium.	
<i>A Cabinet, Cabinet, or</i>		Capfula, f.	<i>A Table</i>	Mensa, f.	
<i>Little Coffer</i>			<i>A Little Table</i>	Mensula, f.	
<i>A Desk</i>		Pluteus, m.	<i>A Long side Table</i>	Mensa Perpetua.	
<i>Drawers or Boxes in a Ca-</i>		Locelli in Scrinio.	<i>A Table like an Half-Moon</i>	Sigma, n.	
<i>binet</i>			<i>A Round Table</i>	Cibilla, f.	
<i>A Case-Box, or Nest of</i>		Arca Loculata.		R 2	An
<i>Drawers</i>					

Figure 2 George Meriton, *Nomenclatura clericalis, or The young clerk's vocabulary in English and Latine* (London: Richard Lambert, 1685), Rv–R2r. The Wellcome Library, London

In early modern England, boxes of many different kinds were important for safekeeping on small and large scales, but also as large pieces of free-standing furniture, things that filled space and provided horizontal and vertical surfaces for ornamentation and display, in both two and three dimensions. George Meriton's 1685 legal handbook, *Nomenclatura clericalis*, provides Latin terms for many different kinds of boxes under the heading 'Of House-hold Goods, and Implements of Household-Stuff', differentiating by appearance between 'A Chest', 'A Pannel Chest', and 'A Little Chest', but also by specific contents, providing different names for chests to keep books, clothes, shopkeeper's wares, or 'Writings' in, as well as different names for several varieties of box, trunk, and different configurations of nested box (Figure 2).⁴⁷ According to Johann Comenius's mid-seventeenth-century English–Latin school textbook (Figure 3), a 'Box-maker' ('Scrinarius' or 'Arcularius') made 'Tables', 'Boards', and

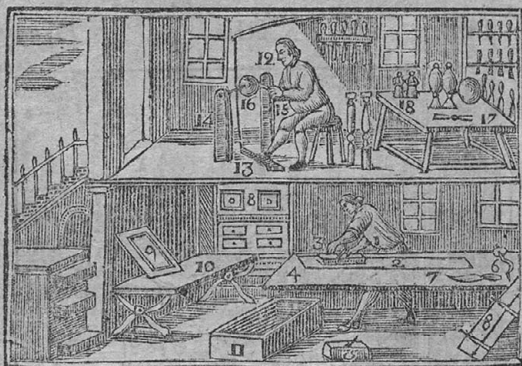
⁴⁷ George Meriton, *Nomenclatura clericalis, or The young clerk's vocabulary in English and Latine* (London: Richard Lambert, 1685), Rv–R2r.

(89)

LXXII.

The Box-maker and
the Turner.

Scriniarius & Tor-
nator.



The Box-maker, 1.
smootheth hewn Boards, 2.
with a Plain, 3.
upon a Work-board, 4.
he maketh them very smooth
with a Little-plain, 5.
he boreth them thorough
with an Augre, 6.
carveth them with a Knife, 7.
fasteneth them together
with Glue and Cramp Irons, 8.
and maketh Tables, 9.
Boards, 10.
Chests, 11. &c.

The Turner, 12.
sitting over the Treddle, 13.
turneth with a Throw, 15.

Arcularius, 1.
edolat Asseres, 2.
Runcina, 3.
in Tabula, 4.
deplanat
Planula, 5.
perforat (terebrat)
Terebra, 6.
sculpit Culiro, 7.
combinat
Glutine & Subscudibus, 8.
& facit Tabulas, 9.
Mensas, 10.
Arcas (Cistas) 11. &c.
Tornio, 12.
sedens in Insili, 13.
tornat Torno, 15.

upon

Figure 3 Johann Amos Comenius, *Hoc est, Omnium fundamentalium in mundo rerum, & in vita actionum, pictura & nomenclatura* (London: J. Kirton, 1659), K7v-K8r. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University

'Chests' ('Arcas' or 'Cistas'), while a 'Turner' or 'Tornator', as the name suggests, produced rounded wooden objects such as 'Bowls' and 'Tops', and also small round boxes.⁴⁸ Carpentry and joinery were historically different woodworking trades with separate guilds; the carpenters were the first to establish a guild in London, but the techniques permitted to them were restricted – only joiners were allowed to use glue and joints, whereas carpenters worked with boards and nails. Despite this distinction, box-makers (who generally made boarded boxes) were incorporated into the Joiners' Company in London, possibly because of the high quality of carving they could also produce. Carpenters' furniture is heavier, and has a tendency to warp and split, whereas joined objects can be made from thinner boards, joined by techniques that allow the wood to shift without changing the object's overall structure. The material properties of different kinds of box therefore can signal not only who made them, and how, but also those who bought and used them – joined furniture was the preserve only of the wealthiest in the early sixteenth century, while the middle classes bought better-quality boarded pieces, but by the seventeenth century joined objects, including boxes, were more widely accessible.⁴⁹

The material affordances of the box, I have shown so far, are many. The ubiquitous wooden chest might be used for sitting on, as well for storage, and a small desk or writing box provides a solid surface for writing or resting a book on, as well as a storage place for writing materials. With exteriors that can be decorated, such boxes attract, engage, and detain the eye, and seem to draw attention to themselves as boxes. The early modern period saw the development of significant elaborations on the basic form of the box. While the cupboard is now an object that shuts its contents away, it was originally a table (a 'board') used to display cups and other vessels; its transformation (it is now practically synonymous with 'closet') was a gradual process across the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁵⁰ The chest of drawers, a subdivided box offering more convenient and more practical kinds of storage (an ordinary chest is only accessible from the top) was a sixteenth-century invention, in a material culture of increasingly multiple containments, where people also stored things inside enclosed and enclosing nests of boxes.⁵¹ Tara Hamling and Catherine Richardson note that in the context of middling commercial activity, the capacity to divide and

⁴⁸ Johann Amos Comenius, *Hoc est, Omnium fundamentalium in mundo rerum, & in vita actionum, pictura & nomenclatura* (London: J. Kirton, 1659), K7v–K8r.

⁴⁹ Chinnery, *Oak Furniture*, pp. 31–3, 80–90, 315–21. ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 238–93.

⁵¹ In *Production and Consumption*, Overton et al. note an increasing number of more elaborate variations on the box, in the form of cupboards, chests of drawers, and cabinets in their range of

organise objects into smaller categories of thing was essential, requiring multiple containers and receptacles.⁵² As the sources I have surveyed so far in this chapter have revealed, their rich and varied affordances mean that in all of their permutations, boxes played a major part in the construction, arrangement, and utilisation of space in the material culture of the early modern period.

Thinking Inside the Box in Early Modern England

This abundance of boxes readily supported not only the practical tasks of storing, organising, and displaying material things, as we have seen, but also the significant cognitive challenges of picturing and using the memory, of thinking about spiritual encounter, and of envisaging one's place in the divinely created universe. Boxes, even when present only in the mind, afforded the imaginative possibility of bringing a sense of order and scale to the almost inconceivable. They belong to a major category of metaphor, spatial metaphors, which have since ancient times been associated with modelling the mind, and more specifically, the memory. In her study of the arts of memory, Mary Carruthers summarised the two governing types of memory metaphor in ancient and medieval thought as the flat tablet and the three-dimensional *thesaurus* ('treasure-house'). Memory is consistently conceived of in the latter category as an enclosed place; if not a treasure-house or storeroom, then a cell, chest, or purse.⁵³ In her influential work on artificial memory systems, Frances A. Yates examined how the classical memory techniques of impressing places and images on the mind were revisited in the Renaissance, evolving into ideas of elaborate memory theatres, which worked on principles of mental subdivision, placing things into mental boxes from which they could be easily retrieved.⁵⁴ More generally, the enclosed space of a box is an ideal image for the mind as a private storage space – as when Shakespeare's Ophelia tells Laertes that his advice to her about Hamlet is 'in my memory locked'. Her further comment that 'you yourself shall keep the key of it' reinforces this image of a secure box that can be opened and closed (even if by someone else).⁵⁵

Kent inventories. Such items were listed in 30 percent of inventories in the early seventeenth century, compared with 80 percent by the middle of the eighteenth (p. 90).

⁵² Hamling and Richardson, *A Day at Home in Early Modern England*, p. 153.

⁵³ Mary Carruthers, *The Book of Memory: A Study of Memory in Medieval Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990; 2nd ed., 2008), pp. 40–51.

⁵⁴ Frances A. Yates, *The Art of Memory* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1966), pp. 135–62 (p. 136).

⁵⁵ *Hamlet*, 1.3.85–6.

These vividly imagined mental storage places are often found in complex interplay with material equivalents in the early modern period, such as the cabinets of curiosities I described earlier, which allowed principles of organisation and categorisation to be explored in tangible ways, and closets, which provided concrete places of privacy inside which further mental or spiritual retreat could take place. The sixteenth-century Italian philosopher Giulio Camillo performed an ambitious materialisation of the ancient mnemonic conceit of the memory theatre, famously constructing a wooden version which, ‘full of little boxes’, purported to be a model of the mind containing all human knowledge. Mary Carruthers explores how books were drawn into this interplay between the material and the mental, reminding readers that they ‘contain matter to be laid down and called again from their memorial store-houses, shrines, fiscal pouches, chests, vases, coops, pens, cells, and bins’.⁵⁶ She singles out the chest as the most common of these, associated with the scriptural Ark of the Covenant, as well as the chests in which books were kept in monastic libraries. One of her major case studies is the twelfth-century Hugh of St Victor (who was heavily influenced by St Augustine), for whom memory is ‘not just any strongbox or storage-chest – it is particularly one in which books are kept, a powerful portable library’.⁵⁷ There is a crucially reflexive relationship between books and boxes in such articulations of memory: the book is one kind of container, whose contents can be transferred to an alternative storage place, the memory, which may in turn be modelled on a book, or indeed a chest filled with multiple books.

Such a multiplicity of imaginary storage places is found in a prayer to be used ‘a lytle before your communion’ included by Richard Whitford in his 1530s printed devotional manual, which contains the following supplication:

Be thou (good lorde) alone the hoole booke of all my study and lernyng/
and the table of all my fode or fedynge: The bed also/ or the couche of all my
rest and slepyng. And be thou (good lord) the closet/arke/chest/coffer/ and
casket of all my Juels/treasure/and ryches.⁵⁸

God is imagined as a series of locations and sources of different kinds of sustenance: the ‘booke of all my study and lernyng’, and then a ‘table’,

⁵⁶ Carruthers, *The Book of Memory*, p. 323. ⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 51, and chapter 1 *passim*.

⁵⁸ Richard Whitford, *A werke of preparacion, or of ordinaunce unto communion* (London: Robert Redman, 1537), Fiiiii–v. For Jennifer Summit’s discussion of this book as a ‘proto-Protestant’ volume, see her *Memory’s Library: Medieval Books in Early Modern England* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), p. 70.

'bed', or 'couche', each noun followed by 'of all my' and a corresponding verb in a repeated echo of the first image. Finally, in two emphatic lists of nouns – 'closet/arke/chest/coffer/ and casket' and 'juels/treasure/and ryches' – God is implored through a verbal piling-up of objects to become the ultimate place of security for the individual's faith. The metaphors in this intercession are all based on familiar things from the domestic sphere, the furnishings of daily life for the propertied classes. They also condense all the essential physical, intellectual, and spiritual activities – studying, eating, sleeping, and praying – into one imagined domestic space. There is a physical and visual harmony between the material artefacts here, despite their differences in scale – a casket, bed, and table in this period were all likely to have been made from wood, and a book might have been bound between two wooden boards. An early modern bed may be enclosed in panelling or curtains, while a book might be covered in leather, boiled sheets of which were also commonly used to cover wooden chests and other boxes.

Each object in Whitford's prayer involves surfaces on or inside which other significant things, including people, might be located. The largest of these, the bed, which may have had a canopy and hangings that could be pulled around to create a completely enclosed space, is associated with intimacy and important rites of passage, while the smallest casket inside which papers might be stored may be associated with personal devotional activities of reading and writing. The Latin noun for 'bed', *cubile*, also meaning 'lair', 'den', or 'hive', reinforces the function of the bed as a containing, enclosing space. Whitford's litany of images resonates with Christ's famous instruction in Matthew 6:6: 'when thou prayest, entre into thy chamber, and shutt thy dore to the, and praye to thy father which ys in secret: and thy father which seith in secret, shal rewarde the openly'.⁵⁹ The objects are all also associated with the comfort, nourishment, or satisfaction of body and mind, and in the enclosure of his prayer, the intimacy of which is further emphasised by the use of the imperative voice, Whitford collapses them together into a place for a spiritual union with God, which becomes ultimately unimaginable in its exaggerated materiality.

These images are symptomatic of a religious culture increasingly marked by an emphasis on the interiority of the individual, and on spiritual encounter as something experienced privately. Whitford's prayer anticipates the growing importance of the closet in the sixteenth century as a

⁵⁹ Text from Tyndale's 1526 New Testament; the King James Version later rendered this verse 'enter into thy closet'.

locus for many private devotional activities, including reading the Bible, reciting prayers, or writing a diary. The later seventeenth century saw an emerging (mainly) Protestant literature of the closet, which explicitly emphasised the spiritual significance of such enclosed spaces.⁶⁰ A comparable modelling of individual spiritual contemplation takes place in the 1595 will of an Oxfordshire man named Sir Christopher Edmonde. Edmonde begins with a customary declaration of hope for redemption, and after wishing for a ‘Sermon by some learned man’ to be given at his funeral, which will encourage those present to strive towards ‘repentance and amendement of their lyves’, Edmonde returns again to the hope for his own redemption:

through the Merrittes death and passion of my Lorde and Savyour Jhesus Christe I truste to be amoung the number of them that shalbe saved. To whome he will not impute their synnes, but take them to everlastynge lief. This my faith and hope I laye upp in my Breste, the Cheste of my mynde there to remaine and not to be opened before the daie that all fleshe shall ryse againe in the which I beleve.

In writing a will Edmonde is able to ‘laye upp’ his ‘household stuffe’ for his family, friends, and servants, but it is important also to ‘laye upp’ for the sake of his own soul his ‘faith and hope’. While the written document of the will legally safeguards his property, Edmonde thinks in terms of another crucial piece of ‘household stuffe’, using the metaphor of the ‘Cheste of my mynde’ to create an equivalent locus of security for his hope in a heavenly inheritance. The will may well be stored in a real chest, but Edmonde’s ‘faith and hope’ are embodied in him, secured for the duration of his earthly life and ‘not to be opened before the daie that all fleshe shall ryse againe’.

Edmonde’s anticipation of corporeal resurrection emphasises the material importance of the body: alluding to Job 19:26–7, he hopes that when

⁶⁰ For example, Edward Wettenhall, *Enter into thy Closet: or, a Method and Order for Private Devotion* (London: John Martyn, 1666); Oliver Heywood, *Closet-Prayer, a Christian Duty* (London: A.M. for Thomas Parkhurst, 1671). See also Rambuss, *Closet Devotions*; Sasha Roberts, “Shakespeare creeps into the womens closets about bedtime’: Women Reading in a Room of Their Own”, in Gordon McMullan, ed., *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces, 1580–1690* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), pp. 30–63; Orlin, *Locating Privacy*, chapter 8. Alan Stewart argues for the closet as ‘a politically crucial transactive space’ in which the individual was never alone, in ‘The Early Modern Closet Discovered’, *Representations*, 50 (1995), 76–100. The landmark queer theory discussion of the closet is Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1990; updated with a new preface, 2008).

'all flesh shall ryse againe' it will be 'with these eyes and not others I shall see my Savyour and Redeemer'. His imagery reminds us that there is a striking physical resemblance between the anatomy of a human chest with its enclosing structure formed by ribcage and breast bone, and the frames of iron bars that often strengthen and protect wooden chests. As I explore in more detail in Chapter 5, there is a sort of visual resemblance, too, between the human body's tightly packed entrails, and the complicated systems of locks found inside the lids of some chests, which appear almost anatomical. The same kind of visually echoic imagery is at work in Edmund Spenser's *House of Mammon*, where Sir Guyon finds an appropriately macabre, moralising juxtaposition of the two kinds of chest: there is 'nothing to be seene' inside but 'huge great yron chests and coffers strong,/ All bard with double bends' alongside 'dead mens bones, which round about were flong' and 'vile carcasses now left unburied'.⁶¹

While the origins of 'chest' as a noun for the thoracic cavity are early modern (around 1530, according to the OED), the sense of 'chest' as a box or coffer predates this in Old English, probably from the Latin *cista*, by eight hundred years.⁶² When in the opening scene of *Richard II*, Mowbray remarks that 'A jewel in a ten-times-barred-up chest/Is a bold spirit in a loyal breast' (1.1.180–1), Shakespeare draws on the convenient rhyming of the nouns 'chest' and 'breast', but also on the three-dimensional similarity between a human breast enclosed by ribs (and perhaps further encased in the leather and metal of protective armour) and a securely barred chest as analogous places of safety for precious things. Similar imagery occurs in his *Sonnet 48*, where the speaker anxiously compares the security of his earthly possessions with the vulnerability of the addressee, 'best of dearest, and mine only care' (7) who is 'not locked up in any chest,/Save where thou art not, though I feel thou art,/Within the gentle closure of my breast' (9–11). For Shakespeare's various speakers, as for Christopher Edmonde, these boxes are greatly ennobled by the contents they protect.

These examples illustrate the ready imaginative slippage between different kinds of literal and metaphorical box that are implied by the various senses of 'chest'.⁶³ Christopher Edmonde's words draw on the image of security that both kinds of 'chest' imply to figure the transcendent durability of the soul. The spiritual archive of his 'Breste, the Cheste of my

⁶¹ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, ed. Thomas P. Roche (London: Penguin, 1978), II.VII.30.

⁶² See 'chest, *n.*': 1a and 9a', *OED Online*, Oxford University Press.

⁶³ The relationship between the chest and language is especially rich in Old English poetry, as explored by Eric Jager in 'Speech and the Chest in Old English Poetry: Orality or Pectorality?', *Speculum* 65 (1990), 845–59. I am grateful to Francesca Brooks for bringing this to my attention.

mynde' is at once material and immaterial; while he hopes his soul will survive, he knows that his body will not endure in the same way that his material possessions will last for future generations, and yet at the same time he states his belief that 'all fleshe shall ryse againe'. Both Edmonde and Whitford at first seem to offer quite straightforward images of boxes functioning as models of interiority, but in each instance, these boxes fluctuate between the tangible and the intangible, so that in the end we are not quite sure what exactly we are supposed to be imagining.

Such early modern 'chests of the mind' are focused on the individual and the intimacy of spiritual encounter, but the kinds of chests and cabinets that allowed subdivision, organisation, and classification of the material world also offered rich imaginative affordances for thinking on a macrocosmic scale, about the ordering of the universe. Even the most solid wooden box had the flexibility to expand to contain not just the individual mind or memory, but the entirety of creation. In the mid-twentieth century, E.M.W. Tillyard asserted that

it was a serious matter not a mere fancy if an Elizabethan writer compared Elizabeth to the *primum* mobile, the master-sphere of the physical universe, and every activity within the realm to the varied motions of the other spheres governed to the last fraction by the influence of their container.⁶⁴

Tillyard's articulation of the relationship between different spheres in terms of consecutive containment is a useful reminder of the imaginative importance of resemblance (even though *The Elizabethan World Picture* is now seen as partly problematic for the way that it homogenises a singular view).

Michel Foucault subsequently argued that in this period

it was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man.⁶⁵

Foucault defines four essential and interconnected modes of resemblance: *convenientia*, whereby things are spatially close to one another – 'their edges touch, their fringes intermingle, the extremity of the one also

⁶⁴ E.M.W. Tillyard, *The Elizabethan World Picture* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1960), p. 17.

⁶⁵ Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 1989), p. 19.

denotes the beginning of the other'; *aemulatio*, a mode of imitation or echo, whereby 'things scattered across the universe can answer one another'; *analogia*, a mode that blends the previous two – 'the similitudes of which it treats are not the visible, substantial ones between things themselves; they need only be the more subtle resemblances of relations'; and finally *sympathia*, in which things are drawn together over distance, 'an instance of the *Same* so strong and so insistent that it will not rest content to be merely one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another'.⁶⁶ According to Foucault, at the turn of the seventeenth century resemblance in these terms was about to 'relinquish its relation with knowledge and disappear, in part at least, from the sphere of cognition'. The early modern period was a time of major ontological overhaul, when the workings of resemblance in the imagination were becoming more and more complex.

The Foucauldian 'world picture', like Tillyard's, has its limitations.⁶⁷ Nonetheless, what both critics richly evoke is the enduring obsession with the universal relationships between things. The early modern period witnessed revolutionary changes in the understanding of the relationships between terrestrial and celestial bodies, as natural philosophers challenged the Ptolemaic system that had placed the Earth at the centre of the cosmos.⁶⁸ The notions of macrocosm and microcosm permeated political, religious, philosophical, and scientific thought.⁶⁹ In this context, the box provided versatile possibilities for thinking in such terms of correspondence and resemblance, for mentally organising, arranging, and compartmentalising a universe that was ultimately only known fully by its creator. As one seventeenth-century preacher put it, in terms that evoke the inventories we saw earlier, 'No Master of a familie is so well acquainted with every corner of his house; or can so readily fetch any Casket or Boxe he pleaseth: as the Master of *the whole familie in Heaven and Earth*, knowes all the Angles and Vaults of the World'.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 20–6.

⁶⁷ For one critique, see Ian Maclean, 'Foucault's Renaissance Episteme Reassessed: An Aristotelian Counterblast', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 59 (1998), 149–66.

⁶⁸ For an overview, see Steven Shapin, *The Scientific Revolution* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996), chapter 1.

⁶⁹ There is a vast critical literature on early modern macrocosms/microcosms. See Reid Barbour, *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), especially chapter 7; Don Parry Norford, 'Microcosm and Macrocosm in Seventeenth-Century Literature', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 38 (1977), 409–28.

⁷⁰ Thomas Adams, *The devills banquet described in foure sermons* (London: Thomas Snodham for Ralph Mab, 1614), Rr.

In the prose writing of another preacher, John Donne, we find a convenient overview of the some of the typical ways in which chests, cabinets, and boxes assist in the mental and spiritual tasks of bringing order to creation, at both an individual and universal level. Twenty-four of Donne's surviving printed sermons feature at least one appearance of the word 'cabinet', employed variously as a metaphor for the human body, the soul, and divine mystery or secrecy. As objects associated with the accumulation of material riches, cabinets and chests also appear in passages that expound on covetousness and earthly greed, and the virtues of material generosity. In an undated sermon on the penitential psalms, for example, Donne proclaims

He is a poor man, whose wealth can be writ in an Inventorie; That hath lockt all in such an iron Chest, in such a Cabinet, and hath sent up nothing to meet him in Heaven. As all the wealth of the wicked is but counterfeit, so is all the joy that they have in it counterfeit too.⁷¹

Elaborating further on this idea in a Whitehall sermon preached in 1620, he writes:

it is truly all one, whether a covetous mans wealth do perish, or no, for so much, as he hoards up, and hides, and puts to no use; it is all one whether that thousand pound be in his chest or no, if he never see it; yet since he hath made his gold his God, he hath so much devilish Religion in him as to be loath that his God should perish. And this, that is threatned here is an absolute perishing, an absolute annihilation.⁷²

In these moments Donne negates the ultimate value of material things that can be secured in chests, even as he brings these evocative places of security to his listeners' minds, in a rhetorical gesture that casts the proliferation of chests and boxes in early modern wills and inventories in a moralising and eschatological light.

At the opening of the tenth 'Meditation' in his *Devotions Upon Emergent Occasions*, Donne demonstrates an even more expansive set of correspondences, and a further interest in the effects of 'annihilation':

This is *Natures nest of Boxes*; The Heavens containe the *Earth*, the *Earth*, *Cities*, *Cities*, *Men*. And all these are *Concentrique*; the common *center* to them all, is *decay*, *ruine*; only that is *Eccentrique*, which was never made; only that place, or garment rather, which we can *imagine*, but not *demonstrate*, That light, which is the very emanation of the light of *God*, in which

⁷¹ John Donne, *LXXX sermons* (London: Miles Flesher for Richard Royston, 1640), 31r.

⁷² John Donne, *XXVI sermons* (London: Thomas Newcomb, 1661), T4r.

the *Saints* shall dwell, with which the Saints shall be appareld, only that bends not to this *Center*, to *Ruine*; that which was not made of *Nothing*, is not threatned with this annihilation. All other things are; even *Angels*, even our *soules*; they move upon the same *poles*, they bend to the same *Center*; and if they were not made immortall by *preservation*, their *Nature* could not keep them from sinking to this *center*, *Annihilation*. In all these (the *frame of the heavens*, the *States upon earth*, and *Men in them*, comprehend all) Those are the greatest mischifs, which are least discerned, the most insensible in their *wayes* come to bee the most sensible in their *ends*.⁷³

The illness experienced by Donne in 1623 was the foundation of the *Devotions*, a neatly intersecting collection of meditations, expostulations, and prayers, in which he explores the physical and spiritual significance of his symptoms, and is particularly concerned about the relationship between internals and externals, and between the human and the divine. Here, his opening metaphor draws on the affordances of some of the kinds of objects we saw earlier: like the ‘nest of xv boxes under the Table’ in Richard Stonley’s bedchamber (to name just one of several similar examples from that inventory), or Paul Hentzner’s experience of Whitehall, where every box-like thing seems to contain something further, ‘*Natures nest of Boxes*’ fascinates, intrigues, and intensifies everything. The compactness of a ‘*nest of Boxes*’ contrasts dramatically with the immeasurable scale of the cosmos, yet Donne’s image of a ‘*Concentrique*’ nest of heavens, earth, cities, and men brings a comprehensible order to the vastness of creation.

Nested boxes are the work of a skilled craftsman, and may well be small enough to fit in one hand.⁷⁴ Margaret Cavendish, who was fascinated by the idea of atomic structures, similarly uses ‘a *Nest of Boxes* round’ to model the concentricity of the universe in her short poem ‘*Of many Worlds in this World*’: ‘So in this *World*, may many *Worlds* more be, / Thinner, and lesse, and lesse still by degree’ (ll. 1–4). For Donne, the image of ‘*Natures nest of Boxes*’ points to the careful work of God (who, after all, took human form in the family of a Nazarene carpenter) in the creation of all things. However, ‘the common *center* to them all, is *decay*, *ruine*’, Donne insists, undermining the neat optimism of such an ordered analogy; all that is created is ultimately as material and base as a wooden box, and will inevitably perish. The whole of creation ‘bends’ to this apocalyptic

⁷³ John Donne, *Devotions upon emergent occasions, and severall steps in my sicknes* (London: A.M. for Thomas Jones, 1624), L5v–L7r.

⁷⁴ Hamling and Richardson note that nests of boxes tend to appear in the inventories of middling sorts from the 1580s onwards: see *A Day at Home in Early Modern England*, p. 155.

centre, 'men' are innermost and closest to corruption, while the outer spheres of the heavens are nearer to God, but still contain this void of destruction. Only 'that which was not made of *Nothing* is not threatened with this annihilation', only 'that is *Eccentrique*, which was never made'. God alone was not created, and therefore cannot be fitted into the emblem of carefully crafted materiality that is the '*nest of Boxes*'.

Donne draws the reader inwards through many '*Concentrique*' boxes, to the 'same *Center*' shared by them all. The concentricity emphasises their common core, which becomes metaphysically loaded. This centre turns out to be a vacuum that explodes all material things, '*Annihilation*', and thus challenges the apparent orderliness of the construction. Although he appears to be using the material world as but an argumentative convenience, Donne's imbrication in the material is the very condition of his conception of the divine: God alone is '*Eccentrique*', outside any possibility of containment in a box. While his analogy here is quite conservative, illustrating the kinds of ontologies evoked by Tillyard and Foucault, at the same time Donne demonstrates the extreme imaginative flexibility of the box as something that can render infinite concepts in finite terms.

Donne's fascination with the rhetorical possibilities of boxes within boxes is also evident in a sermon preached at Whitehall on Easter Eve 1621/2, in which he constructs the following extended metaphor:

Let the whole world be in thy consideration as one house; and then consider in that, in the peacefull harmony of creatures, in the peaceful succession, and connexion of causes, and effects, the peace of Nature. Let this Kingdome, where God hath blessed thee with a being, be the Gallery, the best roome of that house, and consider in the two walls of that Gallery, the Church and the State, the peace of a royall, and a religious Wisedome; Let thine owne family be a Cabinet in this Gallery, and finde in all the boxes thereof, in the severall duties of Wife, and Children, and Servants, the peace of vertue, and of the father and mother of all vertues, active discretion, passive obedience; and then lastly, let thine owne bosome be the secret box, and reserve in this Cabinet, and find there the peace of conscience, and truelie thou hast the best Jewell in the best Cabinet, and that in the best Gallery of the best house that can be had, peace with the Creature, peace in the Church, peace in the State, peace in thy house, peace in thy heart, is a faire Modell, and a lovely designe even of the heavenly Jerusalem which is *Visio pacis*, where there is no object but peace.⁷⁵

Donne takes his listeners on a journey inwards through an imagined domestic space, beginning with 'one house' and moving gradually towards

⁷⁵ Donne, *LXXX sermons*, O2v.

the centre through its harmoniously arranged rooms, spaces, and furnishings to the 'best Jewell', hidden in a 'secret box', before moving back outwards through the 'best Gallery of the best house that can be had' to reveal the analogy of perfect peace as 'a faire Modell, and a lovely designe even of the heavenly Jerusalem'. Delivering this sermon at Whitehall not long after having been made Dean of St Paul's, Donne was almost certainly preaching in the chapel royal, where his surroundings would have resonated powerfully with the image he constructs in this passage. The chapel was situated within a series of enclosures in the palace (one of the largest and most complex palaces in seventeenth-century Europe) and the space of the chapel itself was arranged to reinforce hierarchical distinctions: members of the congregation were seated in pews according to rank, and the monarch sat above them in an enclosed gallery, known as the 'closet'. Beneath the monarch and amidst the courtiers, the court pulpit was at 'the very heart of political power' and, contained within this innermost wooden box, the preacher found himself 'in the midst of an elaborate iconographic scene of architectural, artistic, liturgical, and even living human components that made assertive claims about church, commonwealth, and monarchy'.⁷⁶

Preaching in such a formally structured setting, Donne depicts a dwelling place of elevated social status: a richly furnished 'Gallery' was a fashionable feature of elite and gentry households in this period, and in an analogy appropriate for his Whitehall congregation, he compacts the social and political structures of family, church, and state into a house with all the latest furnishings.⁷⁷ In this 'one house', the relationship of parts to the whole is harmonious; the consecutive containers fit neatly within one another in a model of 'peaceful succession' that is politically reassuring for a courtly audience. This portrayal of a perfectly subdivided creation is reminiscent of a gospel image used by Christ, speaking to the disciples: 'In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you' (John 14:2), a favourite preaching image for Donne. The divinely ordered universe is imagined in this sermon, as in the words of God's own Son, in terms of a house in which all creation may find a 'place'.

⁷⁶ Peter McCullough, *Sermons at Court: Politics and Religion in Elizabethan and Jacobean Preaching* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 1, 11, 15.

⁷⁷ On the development of galleries as fashionable domestic spaces in this period, see Tara Hamling, *Decorating the 'Godly' Household: Religious Art in Post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2010).

While Donne's house with its consecutively nested rooms and furnishings is a way of systematising earthly existence, by the end of the passage we are directed towards a 'faire Modell, and a lovely designe' of 'the heavenly Jerusalem', the city that epitomises the true peace and harmony that ultimately cannot be contained within any manmade structure. Donne's 'Modell' is evocative of the wooden architectural models of buildings such as cathedrals, which survive in large numbers from this period. As scale-versions of real buildings, these models materialise a specific relationship between the large and the small.⁷⁸ In the same way, Donne's 'Modell' serves a condensing function, bringing the heavenly city down to size. A model is something that is crucially in proportion to the greater structure it represents, retaining its identity across differences of scale. Donne provides his congregation with a way to comprehend God's universe that gives proportionate, material form to something that is incomprehensible, and ultimately beyond the bounds of the material.

Donne demonstrates how a box, or a nest of boxes, might be an earthly springboard to the divine, driving through to a climactic displacement of the material even as the very metaphor itself depends on the particular material affordances of the box. As the other sources discussed in this chapter have illustrated, early modern boxes of all kinds were valued for the rich material and imaginative affordances they offered, and these two kinds of affordances were often intertwined with each other. In early modern writing, a box might enclose the material or the immaterial, or both. The material solidity of the wooden chest contrasts with its metaphorical fluidity: even the smallest casket might turn out to contain the entire universe. Such figurations expose the complex interweaving of physical and imaginative apprehension in literary engagements with the material world, and the identity of the box as a particular material and metaphorical confluence.

⁷⁸ For more on miniaturisation, especially of buildings, see John Mack, *The Art of Small Things* (London: British Museum Press, 2007), pp. 69–75. On early modern models, see Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood, *Anachronic Renaissance* (New York: Zone Books, 2010), chapter 6.