

Abstracts for “Absence and Omission in Shakespeare, Part 1”

Convened by Darlene Farabee (South Dakota) and Brett Gamboa (Dartmouth)
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TechnOphelia: Remediating responsibility in Jo Wonder’s “6 Days Goodbye Poems of Ophelia”

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This paper is concerned with a bioart work by Jo Wonder, in collaboration with bacteriologist Simon Park, which remediates the fraught ethics and the tensions between presence and absence, voice and silence, public and private, and life and death which, in Shakespeare’s Hamlet, are articulated prominently through the figure of Ophelia. If, in Gertrude’s ekphrasis, Ophelia’s death is described as her becoming one with the nature that absorbs her body, in present-day art and performance, that disappearance into the natural environment is coupled in this artwork with digital technologies that enable spectators to become implicated in creating and Ophelia to whom they can respond and, in so doing, are empowered to experience, through the media used, some of the anxieties and dilemmas explored in Shakespeare’s play.

Writing *Measure for Measure*: Shakespeare and the Two-Part Play Problem

Carla Baricz, Yale University

This paper considers Shakespeare’s composition practices in light of the playwright’s interest in rewriting older “two-part” drama. I discuss the cuts that Shakespeare made to transform George Peele’s 1 and 2 *The Troublesome Raigne of King John* into *The Life and Death of King John*, comparing his method in the early 1590s with his work some years later, when he adapted George Whetstone’s 1 and 2 *Promos and Cassandra* as *Measure for Measure*. By examining what Shakespeare chose to include and leave out in each case, I try to show that Shakespeare was a canny playwright who understood that a commercial play’s success was never guaranteed, so that the possibility of staging a sequel play was also never guaranteed. I argue that while Shakespeare’s *King John* takes the form it does because Shakespeare consciously rejects the possibility of turning Peele’s printed two-part play into a play and sequel, *Measure for Measure* omits certain dramatic material perhaps so as to leave itself open to that possibility.

***Timon of Athens* and the Absent Mercer**

David Bergeron, University of Kansas

The opening Folio stage direction of *Timon* is quite straightforward: “*Enter Poet, Painter, Jeweller, Merchant, and Mercer, at severall doores.*” We soon notice that this “Mercer” does not speak in the scene. Thus, since Samuel Johnson in the 18th century, various editors have chosen to delete the Mercer from the play. He vanishes. The beginning of the 21st century, for example, gives us the Oxford *Timon* (2004), which retains the Mercer and offers an explanation; the RSC *Complete Shakespeare* (2007), which lists him but places the name in parentheses; and the Arden *Timon* (2008), which completely removes the Mercer from the play.

My paper will focus on the absence of the Mercer and what this may mean. I will explore this omission in terms of *text*, *theater*, and *theme*. I will raise questions about the grounds on which an

editor might remove this character, clearly called for in the authoritative text. I ask: does this make any difference in the theater? Further, how might this Mercer contribute to the play's theme even by his mute presence? I will also ponder whether the Mercer's presence may offer further evidence of Thomas Middleton's involvement in the text.

“Maid's garments”: The Absence of Viola in the Conclusion of *Twelfth Night*

Lacey Ann Conley, DeVry University

Twelfth Night's conclusion is one that leaves the reader with a number of questions. This paper addresses the absence of the Captain, who, we are told, “upon some action / Is now in durance, at Malvolio's suit” (5.1.278-9) at the play's end. The problem here is that this Captain is in possession of Viola's “maid's garments” (278), and Orsino states that she will remain Cesario until her clothing is retrieved (388-91). Taken in isolation, this may seem a minor setback delaying the promised marriage of Orsino and Viola. However, a broader investigation of the Captain's place in relation to the play's action – his association with the unpredictable nature of the ship and the sea, and his unique knowledge of Viola's secret identity – suggests that his role carries significance beyond causing petty inconvenience. As the captain of a wrecked ship and as a prisoner unable to be summoned, this man is never where he is meant to be; and since his first inability to make his destination (the shipwreck) is central to the action of the play, it is likely that his failure to appear in the final scene is as well. By analyzing this character in the context of his play and connecting his role to other thematically-linked works in the Shakespeare canon, it will become clear that the Captain's role in *Twelfth Night*, particularly his conspicuous absence, problematizes the play's conclusion perhaps even more than does Malvolio's promise to “be revenged on the whole pack of you” (381).

Between Space and Time: On Situating Character in *Hamlet*

Emily Coyle, Rutgers University

This paper uses extended moments of description in *Hamlet* as a case study for analysing the interaction between character and dramaturgy. Turning to Ophelia's recollection of Hamlet in act 2, scene 1, and to her reported death in act 5, scene 1, the first part of the paper considers the ways in which description secures verisimilitude by sidestepping the threat of theatricality, and how doing so encourages a confusion between actor and character. In the second part, the paper asks how naturalism, when it appeals to the mind's eye, moves attention away from the theatre and towards discussions of visual culture and rhetoric. However, it argues that by omitting the material bodies of Hamlet and Ophelia from the stage, these moments offer an opportunity to think more about the discrete nature of theatre and not less. As such, their absence encourages discovering how characters are taken in, read, and understood in performance. The paper's total suggestion is that the relationship between character and dramaturgy is constitutive, and that absence, when it is staged, reveals how inquiries into the nature of subjectivity tend to operate as theatrical distraction.

Speechless Shakespeare

Gwilym Jones, University of Westminster

What happens when a character in a Shakespeare play is rendered speechless? How is speechlessness represented on stage? There are notable such moments – Lavinia, Coriolanus and Isabella, for example – but there are numerous others where speechlessness is less obvious.

Take, for example, the long asides Macbeth gives in response to hearing that the first of the Witches' prophecies has proved true. In this passage, Macbeth is silent to the onstage audience, Banquo, Angus and Ross. Silence, that is, is represented as speech – our participation in the dramatic illusion allows us to believe that we can hear Macbeth whilst the other characters cannot. Contrast that with what happens when the Witches make the prophecy earlier in the scene. Macbeth only really starts to speak as the Witches are vanishing. The reaction to their prophecy is all Banquo's. Macbeth remains silent, and we don't get the kind of interior monologue that we have later in the scene. We do have Banquo's description of Macbeth, we know that he starts and seems to fear the words of the Witches, but that's all. The rest is up for the audience's interpretation, and the actor's interpretation, of Macbeth's interiority.

Drawing on recent literary theory (in particular the work of Nicholas Royle), this paper will examine such moments, and make a theoretical case for Shakespeare's employment of silence to represent – or encourage the audience to dwell on – the interior lives of his characters.

Missing Pieces: Visual Art and Middleton's *Game At Chess*

Melissa J. Jones, Eastern Michigan University

There's something rather obvious and yet at the same time very subtle missing from Thomas Middleton's *A Game At Chess* (and it's not just relatable character names): it's the White Bishop's Pawn's genitalia. In Middleton's political allegory of the Stuart court, the pawn's castration suggests the cutting effects of state censorship. And yet, this character's queer movement throughout the play also suggests more positive values like erotic titillation and social protest, particularly if we find in him (as I do) a visual resonance with the defaced *bermai* that frame Pietro Aretino's notoriously pornographic "Posture 1" from the *Sonetti Lussuriosi* (1527). Reading the castrated Pawn as a simultaneous provocation *to* as well as warning *against* illicit libidinal action not only rethinks Middleton's commentary on the Stuart court, it forcibly rewrites popular fantasies of gender and sexual violence. My essay thus explores what happens to sex, gender, and politics when we use the body of a castrated man rather than that of a raped woman to serve as an emblem of just war *and* erotic representation.

"A Drop of Water": Anxieties of Corporeal Dissolution in *The Comedy of Errors*

Gillian Murray Kendall, Smith College

The Comedy of Errors was written in the maelstrom of the Tudor obsession with the Apocalypse—an obsession that extended to anxieties about the fate of the body at the Last Judgment. According to the dominant framework of Aristotelian physics, bodies decay, turn to dust and eventually disappear after death. Furthermore, after battle or epidemic disease, dead bodies could be co-mingled. Bodies lose their integrity after death: they may be consumed, turned to dust, blown away by the wind. How, theologians wondered, could absent, fragmented or mixed bodies be reintegrated into the body of a particular soul at the Last Judgment? How did that **work**? These questions and their possible answers lie at the core of *The Comedy of Errors*. For example, Antipholus of Syracuse pictures himself and his twin as drops of water—drops that, in the ocean, lose themselves because they lack boundary and definition. This paper explores these questions, which are evident throughout the

play, and argues that Shakespeare finally engages with such issues by providing a deity-figure, Solinus, Duke of Ephesus, who, like God at the Last Judgment, sorts out the bodies, applies justice and restores integrity. The play, however, raises more questions about discrete bodily identity than it answers. No wonder the characters exit so quickly.

Absent or Omitted “Shakspearianisms” in *1 Henry VI* Performance

Kevin A. Quarmby, Oxford College of Emory University

1 Henry VI is oft neglected and rarely performed. When it does reach the commercial stage, *Part 1* often stands as an early morning prelude to *Parts 2* and *3*. Rarely, if ever, is it performed on its own. A fast-paced, over-edited, and foreshortened version might introduce certain key characters and historical contexts, but it also leads to an uncompromising dramatic selectivity that attempts to bring order into perceived chaos. Absence and omission both justify and perpetuate this chaos. Such dramatic intervention is evident in the 1960 BBC television adaptation in *The Age of Kings*, which removes Talbot from its narrative and focuses solely on the sexuality of Joan la Pucelle. The result of this mediation is a far shorter televisual experience, with only two half-hour episodes dedicated to *Part 1*, as opposed to fourteen hours for its remaining seven plays. More recently, the 2013 Shakespeare’s Globe production was edited down to two hours’ playing time, with the removal of all reference to Talbot’s encounter with the Countess of Auvergne, or of Sir John Falstaff/Fastolfe. Similarly, the 2015 Staunton Blackfriars production retitled its near-complete textual offering *Shakespeare’s Joan of Arc*, to counter the opinion of “elitist folks” who are “snobbish about the ‘baseness’” of the play’s histrionic historicity. The traditional neglect, excessive editing, and/or foreshortening of *1 Henry VI* performances are symptomatic, however, of a far broader critical response, which can be traced back to Edmond Malone’s famous yearning for absent or omitted ‘Shakspearianisms’. This paper interrogates how absence and omission in *1 Henry VI* and the perpetuation of such absences and omissions in modern performances of the play, continue to alter our opinion of its value, most especially because of Shakespeare’s perceived lack of substantive involvement in its original creation.

Viola’s Missing Clothes: The Eunuch, Antitheatricalism, and *Twelfth Night*’s Incomplete Ending

Christina M. Squitieri, New York University

This paper examines the incomplete ending of Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* created by the absence of Viola’s female clothing and its relation to the antitheatrical and cultural fear that an actor could become the role he played. When Viola lands in Illyria, she tells the captain that she will disguise herself as a eunuch and seek protection. Yet scholars have been at a loss as to what happens to Viola’s plan; her eunuch disguise is often dismissed as an abandoned idea whose first mention was never amended. A dismissal of Viola’s castrated identity, however, glosses over the troublesome rejection of the female Viola at the play’s closure: the denial of her “woman’s weeds”—strangely held by the captain in Act 1 who is strangely imprisoned by Malvolio—inhibits the genre’s ritualized removal of disguise and return to the world beyond (metatheatrical) performance: Viola, instead of marrying Orsino, leaves the stage called “boy” and “Cesario,” continuing to bear the performed identity of the eunuch who is able to feel desire but never able to consummate it, her name and femaleness denied until a hypothetical “golden time” beyond the play’s end. Working with early

modern antitheatrical texts, studies of the body, and essays such as Montaigne's "Not to Counterfeit Being Sick" that express the danger of the actor transforming into the role he played, I argue that Viola's continued performance of the eunuch theatrically presents the antitheatrical possibility that an actor's adopted role is difficult, if not impossible, to strip away.

'Bear hence his body': The Dead Body Problem in *1 Henry VI*

Kate Welch, University of Oxford

Bedford's opening line in *1 Henry VI*, 'Hung be the heavens with black!' gestures towards the 'heavens' of the playhouse. These words (accompanied by an upturned head or outstretched arm or not) draw the eye upwards, making spectators take into account the whole vertical space of the stage from below the boards up to the balcony space and the turrets. This paper examines the upwards kinetic energy and extended presence 'above' of the *Henry VI* cycle, with particular focus on *Part 1*. From the opening funeral on, mourning in these plays is repeatedly abandoned in favour of revenge. Ironically, in this attempt to honour the fallen through martial revenge, the dead are forgotten as the living climb to new political and literal heights. The presence of the action above thus leaves a notable absence below, one underscored by repeated textual omissions and difficulties in getting the dead bodies offstage.

Whispering, Prophecy, and *King Lear*'s "one word in private"

Michael West, Columbia University

My paper addresses early modern stage whispering, in which audiences witnessed one character speaking visibly, but inaudibly, to another. Most plays eventually reveal the content of what was whispered: for example, when Prospero whispers to Ariel in *The Tempest*, instructing him to "Hark in thine ear," playgoers soon find out what Prospero's instructions were when Ariel returns, singing to Ferdinand. Yet in some plays, important conversations are whispered but never subsequently explained or expanded, often when the subject is implied to be sexual, political, or otherwise unmentionable. These whispered conversations thus leave all playgoers in an outsider position with only a hazy understanding of what is happening onstage, inducing a sense of anticipation through the revelation that something secret is under discussion. With these associations in mind, I focus on an unrevealed whisper in *King Lear*, when Edgar (disguised as Poor Tom) and Lear share "one word in private," just after Lear has asked a portentous-sounding question: "What is the cause of thunder?" Edgar's answer, whatever it is, remains "private" for the rest of the play. I argue that by calling particular attention to its stance of mute unrevelation, this baffling moment with the form of prophetic speech generates a communally-felt experience of ignorance to form a single community of playgoers, one rendered open to a future revelation – even if this Godot-like arrival never occurs.

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