

Abstracts for “Absence and Omission in Shakespeare, Part 2”

Convened by Darlene Farabee (South Dakota) and Brett Gamboa (Dartmouth)
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Raping Lucrece: Elided Sexual Violence and the Problems of the Metaphoric Hunt

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A stage direction alerts us to Lavinia’s rape at the beginning of *Titus Andronicus* 2.4: “Enter DEMETRIUS and CHIRON with LAVINIA, ravished; her hands cut off, and her tongue cut out.” Elizabethan stage convention, as scholars like Alan Dessen have noted, would mark Lavinia’s ravishment with a change of wigs. The rape itself remains unseen. Likewise, the actual rape in *Rape of Lucrece* is elided, marked by a change in tense, moving from the present tense—“He pens her piteous clamours in her head” (681)—to the present perfect “she hath lost a dearer thing than life” (687). In this elision, Shakespeare follows a familiar poetic pattern, one that refuses to deal head-on with rape and instead turns to rhetorical flourish, metaphor, or omission.

This paper will explore the problematics of texts like Shakespeare’s *Rape of Lucrece* that take rape as their subject and then dance around its actual depiction. I will pay particular attention to deconstructing the all-too common metaphor that casts the rapist as a predatory animal and his victim as prey. Predators hunt to kill, kill to eat, and eat to live; when poets speak of rape in terms of the lion and the lamb, they naturalize an act that is, at its core, unnatural.

“Clubs, clubs!”: Absent Labor in *Titus Andronicus*”

Michelle M. Dowd, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

My paper for the seminar is connected to my current book project, in which I investigate how Shakespeare’s plays deploy what we might think of as a poetics or philology of work. The project shifts focus away from a mimetic approach to labor in Shakespeare (i.e. in which we consider plays explicitly about labor or individual scenes of labor or characters who labor) toward a consideration of the ways in which Shakespeare’s texts use a poetic language of labor to explore what may otherwise be absent from the stage. I thus analyze details such as imagery, structure, speech patterns, and references to material objects (such as tools) that do not appear directly onstage but that can tell us a great deal about how ephemeral forms of work and networks of labor were understood in the period. For my seminar paper, I will use a brief moment in *Titus Andronicus* (in which Aaron comments on the bellicose behavior of Chiron and Demetrius with the cry of “Clubs, clubs” [2.1.37]—a phrase associated with apprentice riots in the period) as a miniature case study in order to model some of the way in which attending to the (often elusive) language of work in the drama—what is suggested rather than what is seen or staged—can help elucidate how the theater reflected and shaped emerging capitalist modes of production during this crucial period in England’s social and economic history.

The Story of O

Jeremy Lopez, University of Toronto

This paper to develop a way of thinking about the relation between Shakespeare’s life and his art that falls somewhere between, on the one hand, simply avoiding an urgent question (“the

playwright's work is independent of his life"), on the other, indulging in application ("Hamlet is about deaths of Hamnet and John Shakespeare"), and on yet a third hand, relying on thick contextual description ("Shakespeare was a man of the theatre of his time"). I try to think around and through the circle of Shakespeare's life we can so easily trace in his journey from Stratford back to Stratford, and his artistic progression from a formalistic and precocious imitation to a transcendent retrospection. To think about Shakespeare's life and art this way is to make the playwright resemble his own characters, who so frequently become the thing they have always been—whose cipher-like biographies allow us to imagine that the whole of their lives can be encompassed within any single moment. If I manage to provide an antidote to this identificatory habit of biographical criticism it, it is only through a kind of homeopathy. In an attempt to perceive and describe biographical contingency in Shakespeare's plays, and in his life as it might be reflected in the plays, I supply what most of us are trained to treat as a vital absence in the plays: portraits of the artist himself.

'Actors in this massacre': Massacre in *Henry V*

Georgina Lucas, The Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham

My paper focuses on the on-stage reaction to the off-stage massacres of prisoners of war, and of the boys guarding the baggage train during the battle of Agincourt, in *Henry V*. It is concerned with the dramatic, as well as the rhetorical payoff, of performing important moments of violence off-stage, and questions why the play as a whole is reluctant to bring forth the dead bodies it so readily narrates. In so doing, it collocates a wide range of just war theories with ideas of acting and participation to offer a number of different readings of the massacres, and asks what the ethical implications might be for the audience/reader piecing together what has happened off-stage.

Courting the Fool: The Creation of Authoritative Space in *King Lear*

Scott O'Neil, University of Rochester

When considering issues of absence and omission in Shakespeare, the Fool in *King Lear* seems to be particularly fertile ground. The character is perhaps best known for his vanishing act mid-way through *Lear*, and scholars have long speculated potential reasons for that disappearance, ranging from censorship to the possibility that the part was doubled due to an over-large cast. In addition to being absent from the second half of the play, *Lear's* Fool was absent from the play altogether from 1681—when Nahum Tate removed both the tragic ending and the Fool—until 1838, when William Macready restored the original text. Thus the Fool was absent for more than two full acts of *King Lear*, and omitted for nearly 160 years.

My paper, an excerpt from my in-progress dissertation on license and physical space, intends to offer an alternate reading of the Fool's disappearance. Building on the work of Theodore Leinwand on conservative fools, and incorporating performance history and spatial theory, I intend to argue that the disappearance of the Fool was not only intentional, but a crucial element in the tragic structure of *King Lear*. Using a close reading of spatial elements in the play, I will make two claims. The first is that the Fool's disappearance is due to the spatial nature of his license rather than performance elements like doubling. The second claim is that the Fool's presence and ultimate disappearance is absolutely necessary for the tragic ending. The Fool's disappearance, also the moment where the play becomes spatially indistinct, is the point of no return. There can be no other alternative but tragedy from that point forward.

The Performance of Presence and Absence in *Coriolanus*

Mark B. Owen, Loyola University of Chicago

With its numerous references to theatrical performance, to playing parts and delivering lines, *Coriolanus* forces the audience to be aware of the inherent duality of theatrical performance, the palimpsestic absent-presence of the player presenting and the character represented. This paper argues that contrary to critics' near consensus that Caius Martius lacks interiority, or that he is an "empty" character, the interiority of Caius Martius is constructed both within theatrical space and experienced by an audience that must derive meaning and sense from the shifting relations between diegetic space and the performing body. Through description, rumor, report, narration, and interpretation, a concatenation of voices forms and re-forms Caius Martius' character, often in the player's physical absence from the stage. The spatial dynamics of the play also give presence to unseen and immaterial elements such as Caius Martius' concealed wounds and his offstage place of banishment "T' th' city of kites and crows" (4.5.41). Tracking Caius Martius' presence and absence in theatrical space can help us to better understand how *Coriolanus* represents Caius Martius' interiority, as well as its apparent lack.

Creating Catherines: Catherine of Aragon versus Shakespeare (and Fletcher's) Katherine"

Maria Prendergast, The College of Wooster

My paper considers how Shakespeare's (and Fletcher's) *Henry VIII* is haunted by the absence of Catherine of Aragon's own writings. I focus here on one particular trove of absent documents--Catherine of Aragon's self-representation in her letters before the annulment proceedings against her marriage. Despite Shakespeare's lack of access to these letters, and despite his dependence on men like Holinshed who ventriloquize her voice in their documents, Shakespeare's Katherine shares key traits with Catherine of Aragon's own letter writing style. While Shakespeare does not fully capture Catherine's direct, affective voice, he nonetheless endows her with the reputation by which she wished to be remembered--as a pious, loyal wife and as mother to the English people. Much as she remains the most memorable female character in the play, despite the fact that she is no longer even mentioned after Act Four, so, despite *Henry's VIII's* success at hiding Catherine from public view, her death gave birth to a new identity for her as the beneficent and saintly mother to the English people, eventually shaping the quasi-canonization of Catherine at the end of Act Four of *Henry VIII*, even as the ending--with its emphasis on Queen Elizabeth--predicts Catherine's displacement as a center of English attention by Elizabeth and her mother, Catherine's arch-rival, Anne Boleyn.

"Omittance is no quittance": The Absent-Presence of Shakespeare's Writing Women

Lauren Shook, University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Taking this seminar's title literally, my paper focuses on an absence in Shakespeare scholarship yet a very real presence in Shakespeare's plays: women writers. While much scholarship considers how women writers, such as Mary Wroth, engaged with Shakespeare and vice versa, we have yet to consider Shakespeare as a writer and a stager of women writers even though his corpus contains plenty of them. This paper opens with Phoebe (*As You Like It*) as a prime example of staged women writers in Shakespeare. While Rosalind takes the spotlight in various interpretations, Phoebe is remembered for falling prey to bad Petrarchanism; she writes comically rote love poetry to

Ganymede similar to that of Orlando's for which Rosalind reprimands him. Yet the fact remains: Phoebe is a poet. *AYLI* aside, the paper's main interest resides in the absent conversation that might be had about the staging of women writers and the appearance and/or talk of women's writing on stage: Phoebe's "giant-rude invention," Beatrice's love poems, Maria's forged "epistles of love," Cleopatra's love letters to Antony, and Lady Macbeth's somnambulant letters. These powerful instances of writing, I propose, occur at pivotal moments of the plays, sometimes serving as plot linchpins. Finally, I ask how these staged, fictional representations of writing expand our knowledge of early modern women's writing while also inquiring about how these present, yet fictional, women writers have been omitted from both discussions of early modern women's writing and Shakespeare studies.

"Time Is Come Round": Absent Days and Calendar Debates in *Julius Caesar*

Dorothy Todd, University of Georgia

My paper takes as its starting point the absence of days in Shakespeare's Roman tragedy *Julius Caesar*. As many scholars have discussed, an unwieldy telescoping of time occurs in the play's first two acts. The dramatic events of the play open on the Lupercal, a festival day believed to occur on February 15. The events of Caesar's assassination occur on the Ides of March, March 15. Yet in Shakespeare's play, only one night passes between the Lupercal and the Ides of March. To further complicate the timeline of the play, when Cassius has a letter thrown into Brutus's window and Lucius discovers it, Brutus asks Lucius "Is not tomorrow, boy, the first of March?" (2.1.40). After checking the calendar, Lucius reports to Brutus, "Sir, March is wasted fifteen days" (2.1.59).

My paper seeks to demonstrate how this absence of days in the drama's timeline both reveals the play's interest in the calendar controversies of the sixteenth century and recreates the cognitive dislocation that undoubtedly occurred when two competing calendar systems vied for adherence in Europe. When Pope Gregory XIII issued a papal bull declaring the adoption of a more accurate calendar in 1582, the day after October 4 of that year was declared October 15, not unlike the night of the Lupercal becoming the eve of the Ides in *Julius Caesar*. Yet while the Catholic world experienced the loss of 10 days in 1582, England and other Protestant areas in Europe did not adopt the Gregorian calendar and thus experienced no such compression of time. By examining the absence of days in *Julius Caesar* in conjunction with the calendar debates that continued well into the last decade of the sixteenth century, I hope to demonstrate how the absence or omission of days in Shakespeare's play underscores the presence of deep concerns about the management of time, history, and memory in early modern England.

Early Modern Drama and the Unstaging of Labor Pains

Helen M. Whall, College of the Holy Cross

Medieval Christianity branded woman's labor pains as Eve's penalty for sinning. The midwives who oversaw the birthing chambers, however, exploited the growing cult of Mary to afford women some relief. They had laboring mothers clutch relics of "Mary's girdle" and urged them into meditative union with the Virgin Mother. Church Fathers had declared as doctrine that Mary suffered no pain in delivering Jesus. Nativity plays even staged Mary's miraculous delivery of Jesus, emphasizing her freedom from pain. That alienation—as well as women's pain—actually intensified after the Reformation. Midwives were then required to remove all relics from the birth chamber and to lead

women into meditation on the pain Christ endured on the cross. In shutting down the Catholic mystery and morality plays, the Reformation also rendered birth itself something that must occur off-stage, something that was literally “obscene.” Elizabeth, self-styled Virgin Queen yet Mother to her nation, may well have intensified the stigma attached to childbirth. Under Elizabeth, Shakespeare, like his contemporaries, avoided not only stage depictions of childbirth but also any allusion to an exclusively female experience. He makes that omission a marked one, however, in his last plays when he draws attention to but does not stage a woman’s labor twice, first in *Pericles* then *The Winter’s Tale*. The act of staging labor for all to see—men and women—would be played out soon by the defiant John Webster. When he stages the labor of his equally defiant Duchess, Webster rejects both the myth of Elizabeth, the myth of Mary, and the myth of Eve. His Duchess of Malfi enjoys apricots, enjoys sex and delivers three children to prove it, even while ruling her nation. Though we see her go into labor, Webster makes clear that men who cannot tolerate her challenging identity inflict her truest and bleakest pain. This paper will explore the cultural and theatrical anxieties that led to the unstaging of labor pains and show how Shakespeare’s actual dramatization of that unstaging prepares for Webster’s radical breaking of a long established taboo.

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