

2019 Seminar Abstracts: The Unthinkable Renaissance
Erica Fudge (University of Strathclyde)

“Unthink your speaking”:

Witchcraft, Treason, Conscience, and Women’s Brains in *All is True* and *Winter’s Tale*

Mary Adams (Western Carolina University)

When, on the King’s behalf, Cardinal Wolsey silkily asks Katherine of Aragon to “unthink [her] speaking,” he teeters on the edge of several questions: What thoughts are thinkable (permissible) for women? Once they are thought, how can they be unthought? Do women think like men, and can they “think” or “unthink” things into and out of being? In Samuel Johnson’s 1775 dictionary, he defined to “unthink” as to retract or reconsider thought, using Wolsey’s coinage as an illustration. But linguist Whorf’s cryptogram illustrates why “unthink,” like “unshout” in *Coriolanus*, deliberately violates a host of unspoken grammatical rules and was therefore designed to call attention to the difficulty of removing thoughts from existence once they have already been engendered and articulated.

My paper will make some forays into 17th c. thinking about treason, thinking, brains, witchcraft, and political conscience as they pertain to Katherine in *All is True* and the sources it used—as well as some well-known sources it didn’t use. Along the way I will make a detour into *Winter’s Tale* to talk about what Hermione and Paulina can tell us about what Shakespeare thought about Katherine of Aragon.

Work and the Unthinkable

Rebecca Ann Bach (University of Alabama at Birmingham)

In my paper, using Julius Caesar’s opening scene and my students’ reactions to it as an example, I discuss whose work was thinkable in the English Renaissance and whose work has become unthinkable today. Following Bruno Latour’s lead, the paper argues that the scale of American and British life in modernity has rendered the work of people who make our technologies unthinkable. That same scale has made words related to work in Shakespeare puzzling to my students. In the paper, I discuss changed meanings of the words “mechanical,” “profession,” and “hand-made.” These words, or words related to them, all appear in that Shakespeare scene. I show that my students’ reaction to the scene demonstrate how foreign work in Shakespeare is today. The paper also discusses how nonhuman animals figured in work in the Renaissance and today.

Be absolute for death:

Reflections on Shakespearean Immanence

Andrew Barnaby (University of Vermont)

In his *The Rest is Silence: Death as Annihilation in the English Renaissance*, Robert Watson writes of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: “The motives projected onto the ghost in the opening scene reflect all the conventional fantasies of overcoming mortality.... Hopes of resurrection—whether by sons, symbols, or saviors—are timeless functions of human culture; but they are terrifying

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when they threaten to malfunction” (78). In addressing the possibility of “malfunction” threatening the period’s “conventional fantasies of overcoming mortality,” Watson does not explicitly focus on the Christian “hope of resurrection” as such hope might appear in the play, in Shakespeare’s work as a whole, or in his culture more broadly. This paper aims to look more closely at how Shakespeare rather shockingly refuses the standard Christian hope (resurrection specifically, a heavenly afterlife more generally) not just in *Hamlet* but in other plays (e.g. *Measure for Measure*). To the extent Shakespeare is consistent in this refusal, his plays raise the question of whether what we might think was unthinkable in early-modern England was an almost commonplace idea.

Unthinking the Thinkable

Cyndia Susan Clegg (Pepperdine University)

In *How Shakespeare Put Politics on the Stage* Peter Lake argues that drama, especially Shakespeare’s history plays, self-consciously constituted attempts to affect audiences’ political judgments and engender political action. The Essex Rebellion serves as the nexus for his argument. A little more than a generation ago such a position would have been unthinkable. This paper first examines how Shakespeare’s unthinkable politics became thinkable. It then considers, based on my recent work on the Elizabethan Reformation, how the recent “turn to religion” in Shakespeare studies (once likewise unthinkable) might need to be unthought. In the twenty-first century, studies of Shakespeare and religion have relied on assumptions about conformist religion during the reign of Elizabeth I in such a way that the theatre has been seen to participate in a discourse of resistance (for example, “irreligious piety” in *Titus Andronicus*’s is seen to resonate with Prayer-Book Anglicanism’s hollow ritual.) This paper asks what kinds of scholarly approaches to Elizabethan religion and Shakespeare might once again become unthinkable in light of my findings that the Elizabethan Reformation (including the Queen’s own beliefs) had a serious evangelical agenda.

Where Were They Thinking?:

Trying and Failing to Understand the Apprentice Riots through London Geography

Eric Dunnun (Campbell University)

On March 4th, 1617 a group of apprentices forced their way into the newly constructed Cockpit theater on Drurie Lane, and while avoiding the gunfire of those defending the playhouse, defaced the building, tore up the costumes and (gasp) the playbooks. This seems to have been the most brutal Shrove Tuesday riot in the early modern era. Indeed, Bentley calls it the most “sensational events in the history of the Jacobean theatre,” but it wasn’t the first or last apprentice riot that targeted the theaters. Apprentices would riot and often attack the theaters more or less every Shrove Tuesday from 1606 through 1641. Theater historians have always struggled to understand the motives of these riots because the apprentices’ seeming (but temporary) antipathy for the theaters tends not to fit within any broader narratives we have about early modern London or the theaters’ place within the city. Critics who want to read the theaters as a site of subversion and carnivalesque energy, struggle to explain how that revolutionary energy could rebound onto

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the theaters. Those that follow Valeria Pearl's "Stable London" thesis, fail to take seriously how dangerous and politically powerful these riots could be. Beyond the political ramifications of these disturbances, they also have the potential to tell us a great deal about the relationship between audience and playhouse, since the apprentices were also often playgoers themselves. But again, critics have struggled to fit these riots into our assumptions about audience behavior and character. Furthermore, these riots resist ahistorical judgments and assumptions about rambunctious young men – call it the "boys will be boys" theory. Through careful analysis of the geography and local politics of the city, this paper will attempt to show how all of the attempts to understand the riots do not fully explain them, while tentatively suggesting that some of the riots had nothing to do with the theaters at all, and probably shouldn't be called riots in the first place; "jail breaks" better describes some of these events. And by showing how we can't fully conceptualize the apprentices' motives, we may also have to reconceptualize the place and space of Shakespeare's theaters in early modern London or at least confront the blank spaces of our knowledge and maps of early modern London.

Avian Adoption in *Titus Andronicus*

Erin Ellerbeck (University of Victoria)

Given that *Titus Andronicus* is Shakespeare's most brutal, bloody tragedy, it might seem unexpected that the play includes a conversation about adoption—about creating families instead of destroying them. In a critical moment, Lavinia begs to be spared from Chiron and Demetrius, who seek to rape her. Lavinia insists to Tamora, the men's mother, that "ravens foster forlorn children" (2.3.153), by which she means that ravens, although they were commonly thought to be ill omens, care for distressed young people. Lavinia's implication is clear: Tamora, in the role of the compassionate raven, should treat Lavinia as her child and take pity on her. The word *foster* links the social practice of adoption to the animal world—or more precisely the avian realm—and suggests that the birds can teach their observers virtue. Lavinia's plea, and her particular turn of phrase, emphasize the fickleness of the family: kin may be selected, and kind disregarded.

Although editors of *Titus* often note the provenance of Lavinia's proverbs and sometimes cite the affinity between her ravens and the Biblical story of Elijah, her plea has received little attention from critics. Several scholars, in fact, dismiss it as baffling and ineffectual.¹ I believe, however, that the passage is significant: Lavinia asserts the role of human agency in the construction of the family in the specific terms of animal caregiving. She figures Tamora as a bird, and herself as the forlorn child, to suggest that whatever gulf separates the two women could be bridged, just as the species divide between bird and person can be spanned by the considerate raven. Although she has been reduced to begging, Lavinia retains the power to reimagine her fate. In a play that concerns warring families of different nationalities, such power—and in particular the ability to

¹ S. Clark Hulse calls it "babble," for instance, and claims that "it is the wrong argument, directed to the wrong audience" ("Wresting the Alphabet: Oratory and Action in 'Titus Andronicus,'" *Criticism* 21.2 [1979]: 106-18. 109.).

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redefine kinship and the boundaries separating individuals and describing families—is of signal importance.

In *Titus Andronicus*, it is the natural world, seemingly beyond culture, that illustrates the changeability of the family structure—a changeability that can be emulated by human watchers. Lavinia’s appeal to Tamora depends on the belief that ravens have the capacity to create new families when the occasion arises; as natural adoptive parents, the birds cross the species boundary to forge new bonds based not on blood ties but on compassion. Avian exemplars, the ravens belong to the early modern convention of seeing in animal behaviour guides to human political and social life. It is in the context of this convention, or discourse, that I will examine *Titus*, which by alluding to corvine adoption suggests its broader concern with the matter of how people understand themselves in relation to others: as the ravens might show Tamora how to act, so animals more generally might show us how to be more humane. In *Titus* as in other plays, Shakespeare envisions a human world characterized by individual and social fluidity; adoption provides the language with which he depicts the instability of the human subject.

What Edward Topsell Saw

Erica Fudge (University of Strathclyde)

Edward Topsell, the author of, among other works, *The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607), *The Historie of Serpents* (1608) and the unfinished *Fowles of Heaven* (c.1613), was a Protestant minister. For him, the link between natural history and theology was simple: writing about animals, he wrote, ‘teacheth the meaninge of textes of Scripture.’ Topsell’s work can thus be placed firmly within the spiritual world of his ministry, but the material world location of his church in London asks interesting questions. St Botolph’s Aldersgate, where Topsell was the perpetual curate during the time he wrote his natural history texts, was within a short walk of Smithfield Market, London’s largest live animal market; close to St Paul’s Cathedral, from which it was separated by St Nicholas Shambles, the largest dead-animal market; near the Butchers’ Hall where the Worshipful Company of Butchers met; and on a key drovers’ route into the City. If the relationship between Christian ministry and natural history is an obvious one, what was the connection between Topsell’s natural histories and his church’s location? How did the emblematic worldview that his work epitomises sit alongside the reality of his life in early seventeenth-century London?

The possible answers to this question are the focus of this paper. Histories of or written with the emblematic worldview too often present it as an idea that is transferred through the written word – from bestiary to Gesner, from Gesner to Topsell – with the reality of life with animals (killing, eating, using) present and yet strangely absent. The location of Topsell’s ministry, for me, opens up a new way of approaching things that might tell us something about how we engage with the past – how we think it. In this paper I will argue that Topsell’s location asks us questions about anachronism and writing historically, about the disciplines he thought within, and that we think within, and the professional limits he had to write within, and the professional limits we have to write within. This paper will be the beginnings (the very messy beginnings) of thinking about the

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unthinkability of Topsell looking or not looking out of his window into the world he was writing for.

**Beyond the Thinkable:
 Belief and Insanity in *The Winter's Tale***

Gillian Murray Kendall (Smith College)

The climactic statue scene of *The Winter's Tale* inhabits the liminal space between the real and the imaginary, life and death, sanity and madness. The play moves outward from a Leontes who thinks what he should not—although it is, as he points out, a common enough thought circulating in the play—to a Leontes who must cross the line from the unthinkable to belief. In so doing, he must move from away from reason, from “settled sense” into a perhaps “unlawful” world of insanity, where he can believe the unthinkable—believe in a miracle that will redeem him. He is more than ready to embrace imagination, death, insanity if it will bring Hermione back to him. This play moves from the madness in Hamlet (“a document in madness” IV.v.178), the madness of Lear (“O, that way madness lies, let me shun that!” III.iv.21) and that of Macbeth (“These deeds must not be thought / After these ways; so, it will make us mad” II.ii.30-31) to an insanity of redemption. In *The Winter's Tale*, “madness” becomes “pleasure” (V.iii.73). It opens a place in the mind that the unthinkable can inhabit, where Hermione can live and breathe again.

**Ungovernable States:
 When does a king become a tyrant in *Macbeth*?**

Sophie Shorland (University of Warwick)

In asking when a king becomes a tyrant, *Macbeth* poses an almost unthinkable question, the distinction defying clear categorisation across Jacobean dictionaries and political tracts, most settling on the vague idea that a tyrant is ‘cruel’ whereas a king is not. Where is the exact, legal moment at which a king becomes a tyrant? Who defines this point of transition? This paper will begin to grapple, in its reading of *Macbeth*, with the unthinkably unclear nature of tyranny. Rendering stable, apparently fixed government instable and emotional, *Macbeth* questions the unemotional and impartial nature of the law: who decides when rule becomes illegal, and when a king becomes a tyrant? Within the play, kingship balances on a fine edge of public acclaim that can slip into shame, public condemnation and, finally, tyranny.

Thinking with the Baby in *Titus Andronicus*

Anna-Claire Simpson (University of Massachusetts, Amherst)

If the “unthinkable” implies both the impossibility of thinking and the desire not to think on, I argue that the baby in *Titus Andronicus* challenges us on both fronts. Centering the character the play paradoxically includes in a condition of exclusion—both as a black baby and as the character always already unable to speak, gesture, or “act”—this paper considers the special performance status of the infant in relation to his position within the apparatus of the play’s

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politics. The uncertain fate of Aaron and Tamora's baby, whose role is affixed to the primal fear of miscegenation and whose function is to convict his parents by existing at all, is already shaped by the plays' rehearsals of child sacrifice, its rehearsals of family vengeance, and its racist and xenophobic logics. That fate is ultimately offered over to the audience to consider: we inherit the authority to decide the status of his life after the play charges him with inheriting his father's guilt; a charge he cannot refute without a future. My paper isolates the child/baby as both a dramatic and epistemological device, as a device that reconfigures power from the seat of Rome to the seats of the theater while challenging the audience to think about his future.

What did Charles Butler hear?

Deanna Smid (Brandon University)

Sometime in or before 1623, Charles Butler put his ear against a beehive and listened. Like other apiarists before him, Butler heard a change in the sound of buzzing as a group of bees prepared to leave the hive in a swarm. But unlike other apiarists and authors—before and after—Butler describes such a change in sound as a four-part madrigal, complete with a solo passage for the queen. That madrigal, “Melissomelos,” spans multiple pages in the 1623 and 1634 editions of Butler's *The Feminine Monarchy*, and is laid out to invite readers to perform the madrigal along with the bees. Of the few modern readers of the madrigal, some have dismissed it as “tongue-in-cheek,” “an oddity,” or “amusing,” but there is little in *The Feminine Monarchy* to suggest that Butler was anything but completely serious. He admits, for instance, that the buzzing bees created such a racket that “my dul hearing coolde not perfectly apprehend.” Yet he continues, “But I are sure, if I mis, I mis but a little.” Indeed, “Melissomelos” certainly did not stop later apiarists from consistently praising Butler as an authority on beekeeping, not as a mere writer of “musical fanc[ies].” So, if the song is neither joke nor delusion, what did Charles Butler hear? The question is unanswerable, of course, but speculating about Butler's experiences by the hive will offer all sorts of sweet rewards. “Melissomelos” suggests, for instance, that the natural world could be realized as musical notation, and could be contained and understood in song. The existence of the song also provides insight into the relationship between early modern beekeepers and their bees, and even more elusively, insight into the lived experience of bees in the seventeenth century.

***Coriolanus* and Renaissance Self-unfashioning**

Robert D. Stefanek (United States Air Force Academy)

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* undertakes a project that imagines the unthinkable: what lays on the other side of the eradication of identity and the bounded self? In his final revolt, he does not self-fashion an identity in opposition to Rome in a Greeblattian sense. Rather, he undertakes a much more radical project: he seeks not only the destruction of Rome and his own family (especially his mother), but also every marker of the familial, social, political, linguistic, and sexual order upon which his identity had been based. Most importantly for my purposes, he pursues in moments of extreme violence and visions of sado-masochistic sexuality what Georges Bataille, Maurice Blanchot, and Michel Foucault conceived as limit-experiences: moments of maximal

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intensity and impossibility that tear the subject from itself in such a way as to arrive at its annihilation or dissociation by breaking down the established patterns of the regulated social order upon which our experience as discrete individuals is based.

A Cat, a Toad and an Owl

Verena Theile (North Dakota State University)

The spirit familiar is a predominately English witchcraft belief that is only seldom found in continental European demonological accounts. We find stagings of this belief in *The Late Lancashire Witches*, *The Witch of Edmonton*, and, of course, in *Doctor Faustus*. Shakespeare explores the belief in familiars as agents of magic or companions to witches in several of his plays, most prominently perhaps in *Macbeth*'s Weird Sisters. Unlike familiars we find in other early modern witchcraft plays, however, Graymalkin, Paddock, and Harpier do not participate in the action of the play. They do not speak, and they have no lines. Their words translated for us by the Sisters, suggesting perhaps that the witch is the only one who sees, hears, and understands her own, unique familiar.

First Witch: I come, Graymalkin!
 Second Witch: Paddock calls. (1.1)

First Witch: Thrice the brinded cat hath mew'd.
 Second Witch: Thrice and once the hedge-pig whined.
 Third Witch: Harpier cries 'Tis time, 'tis time. (4.1)

They beckon and hurry the Sisters along, reminding them of the passage of time, but they do not direct or execute the magic their witch keepers conjure. This paper will analyze Shakespeare's staging of a cat, a toad, and an owl (or bird-like creature) as familiars in *Macbeth* against the backdrop of early modern witchcraft beliefs.

**“The More I give to Thee, The More I Have”:
 The Unthinkable Economy of Infinity in Hobbes and Shakespeare**

Kemal Onur Toker (Brandeis University)

The idea that certain goods do not diminish or dwindle but grow all the more abundant when they are shared – “The more I give to thee, / The more I have” (*Romeo and Juliet* 2. 2. 34-5; cf. *Antony and Cleopatra* 5. 2. 86-8; *Edward III* 2. 1. 225; *The Winter's Tale* 5. 1. 53-4) – is a recurrent motif in the Shakespearean corpus. This idea is, of course, an old commonplace of European literature, which we also encounter not only in the New Testament and the Arthurian legend of the Holy Grail but also in the works of Cicero (*De Officiis*, 1. 50-52) and Dante (*Purgatorio* XV. 61-75) among many others. Nevertheless, in Shakespeare's work, the trope of infinitely shareable value does not possess the reassuring self-evidence of an old truism. On the contrary, especially in *Romeo and Juliet*, this trope comes to the fore as a bold challenge to

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quantitative rationality that exposes the limits of what is thinkable in both Shakespeare's world and our own.

Unthinkable Delights:
The Orange-Fond Warder, the Lieutenant, and the Jesuit

Julian Yates (University of Delaware)

This is not a book of history. The selection found here was guided by nothing more substantial than my taste, my pleasure, an emotion, laughter, surprise, a certain dread, or some other feeling whose intensity I might have trouble justifying, now that the first moment of discovery has passed.

--Michel Foucault, "Lives of Infamous Men"

I am not sure I can summon any greater justification for the subject of this essay than Foucault offers when he explains the selection of fragments that make up "Lives of Infamous Men." My subject is one man's liking, though it is not entirely clear that the man nor his liking in fact ever existed as such. Here very briefly are the two pieces of evidence that I attempt to think this man and his liking with and through. They are both generated as part of the archive that grew up in response to a prison escape from the Tower of London in 1597.

A Letter from Sir John Peyton to the Privy Council, dated October 5, 1597:

This night there are escaped two prisoners out of the Tower: viz., John Arden and John Garret [Gerard]. Their escape was made very little before day, for on going to Arden's chamber in the morning, I found the ink in his pen very fresh. The manner of their escape was thus. The gaoler, one Bonner, conveyed Garret into Arden's chamber when he brought up the keys, and out of Arden's chamber by a long rope tied over the ditch to a post they slid down upon the Tower wharf. This Bonner is also gone this morning at the opening of the gates. Mr. Beling, the attendant in the council chamber, is his brother and assured me of his honesty. One Chambers, a gaoler at my coming, finding him negligent in his office and knowing Anies (whom he kept) to be a dangerous prisoner, after the recovery of my sickness I displaced. But not having time to discern the condition of this Bonner, being generally commended, I let him continue. I have sent hue and cry to Gravesend and to the Mayor of London for a search to be made in London and in all the liberties.²

Excerpt from "Narratio Patris Joannis Gerardi":

² Sir John Peyton to the Privy Council, letter dated October 5, 1597. *Historical Manuscript Commission, Calendar of Manuscripts of the most Ho. The Marquis of Salisbury, K.G., etc. preserved at Hatfield House* (London: HMSO, 1883), vol. 8, 417–418.

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Then I asked my warder to buy some large oranges [*poma aurea magna*]. As he was particularly fond of this fruit [*quorum esu videbatur delectari*], I presented him with them, but I was thinking of another use I could put them to in time.³

Rationale: The mysterious “other use” to which Gerard shall put the oranges or golden apples he gifts to his un-named warder shall be invisible ink—the substance he uses to write letters that enable him to make good on a waterborne escape. The only text to name the warder is the Lieutenant of the Tower, John Peyton. The only text that speaks of the warder’s liking is Gerard’s memoir. Caught in the impress of these two texts, “Bonner” or the warder with a fondness or liking for oranges or golden apples flickers in and out of existence. How do we render such an existence, the existence of a person who manifests either as the culprit responsible for the escape or as the unwitting accessory whose liking for oranges (or golden apples) made him a Jesuit’s go-between? My sense is that the only way to do so is to preserve the archival density to our encounter with this man and his remains.

³ John Gerard, *The Autobiography of an Elizabethan*, trans. Philip Caraman (New York and London: Longmans, Green and Co.: 1951) 116 and Stonyhurst MS A. v. 22, 158.