

SAA 2016  
Shakespeare and Riot

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### Shakespeare and Riot: Abstracts

**Lisa M. Barksdale-Shaw, Michigan State University**

**“To stir a mutiny in the mildest thoughts / And arm the minds of infants to exclaim”: Staging Riot, Rebellion, and Conspiracy in Shakespeare’s Rome’**

This paper submits that in Shakespeare’s tragedy *Coriolanus* (1605-1610) riots and conspiracies at the outset of the play foreshadow the fates of Rome and the title character, Coriolanus, which fall, and thereby illustrates how the seemingly disorganized rabble functions to cloak the more sinister collusions found in several intrigues and by their conspirators not only at the play’s commencement, but its denouement as well. Because this Jacobean drama bears strong earmarks of Shakespeare’s earlier Elizabethan tragedy, *Julius Caesar* (1599), I investigate some of their similarities, but also how the bard complicates the representation of the early modern riots and conspiracies. In *Coriolanus*, Sicinius Velutus and Junius Brutus, tribunes of the people, initially collude against Caius Martius, later Coriolanus, and form a private, but depraved treachery to see his fall in Rome’s war with the Volsces. Set against this impending war, this essay looks at how these collaborative, but treasonous seditions confront concepts like the practice of plotting, the appearance of disloyalty, and the place of the conspirator to evaluate the source, sustenance, and exacerbation of the early modern riot; at the same time, these concepts seem to circumvent the legal process. While grappling with the manner in which *Coriolanus* may be distinguished from *Julius Caesar*, the paper both draws on and builds upon the this dramatic portrayal of the riot within Shakespeare’s depiction of Rome. In her monograph *Shakespeare’s Troy*, Heather James provides a critical treatment through Shakespeare’s Trojan dramas, yet I would like to reconsider Robert Miola’s discussion of *Shakespeare’s Rome* by reviewing the classical staging of riots and conspiracies by this early modern playwright. My analysis examines how the plays, in particular *Coriolanus*, manipulate the presentation of the riot for darker schemes performed at a time where the early modern courts dismissed the meaning nature of the riot, and minimized how lawlessness intervenes in this Jacobean society as vital vehicles of constructed chaos when compared to the Elizabethan era.

**John C. Higgins, Case Western Reserve University**

**‘The death of Dr. John Lambe and the emergence of the theatrical public sphere in early modern England’**

On Friday, 13 June 1628, Dr. John Lambe – a man who was probably in his early eighties, and who had spent the previous four years serving George Villiers, 1<sup>st</sup> Duke of Buckingham, as a physician (and reportedly as a witch) – made a trip to St. Giles without Cripplegate to take in a play at the Fortune theater. While at the

playhouse, Lambe was recognized by a group of young men who first heckled and threw stones at him when the play was finished, and then proceeded to follow him throughout the city, gathering a larger crowd of men who eventually bludgeoned Lambe to death in the street shortly after dinnertime. The mob justice enacted upon Dr. Lambe has drawn the attention of historians like Alistair Bellany and Malcolm Gaskill related to the history of popular politics and early modern understandings of witchcraft. So far, however, little attention has been paid to the role that the theater played in this event, and this is surprising. Not only was Lambe killed after visiting the Fortune, but he had also been alluded to by Ben Jonson in *The Staple of News* and the collaborative *The Fair Maid of the Inn*. In the wake of his death, Lambe continued to be depicted and alluded to on the stage in plays like *Doctor Lambe and his witches* and the revival (and reprinting) of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*.

My paper will thus explore the role that the theater played in turning a group of London men from spectators at an unknown play into a violent mob, capable of beating an elderly man to death. I will explore the interaction between the theater's role as a public space – where members of the court occasionally came to be seen and influence the perceptions of the crowd – and as a circulator of a moralized discourse about politics, witchcraft, and other contested ideas in London of the turbulent 1620s.

**Amy Kenny, University of California, Riverside**  
**“Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!”: Staging riots in Shakespeare'**

Not long after Antony takes the stage promising to praise Brutus as an honorable man, the plebeians in *Julius Caesar* are incensed at the death of their leader and ready to revolt. Their battle cry, “Revenge! About! Seek! Burn! Fire! Kill! Slay!” highlights their fickle and unruly nature by oscillating in allegiance so rapidly (3.2.205). The scene also offers a glimpse of how Shakespeare and his fellow actors staged riots and explored political unrest. Since acting companies were typically only comprised of 12 to 15 players, dramatizing a riotous crowd utilized the audience for dramatic effect. Playgoers could only witness a handful of people fighting on either side of a tumult on stage, prompting the audience to fill the role of angry mob.

In this paper, I will explore how crowd psychology of audiences at the Globe contributed to the theatricality of riots, and the social disorder they often produced. My work will probe contemporary accounts of riots, modern actors' reflections on working in a reconstructed space, and the play-texts themselves as sources in exploring the staging and reception of riots in Shakespeare's plays. Outdoor, purpose built playhouses enhanced the agency of the audience through elements such as architecture and shared lighting. Thus, the audience was endowed with a substantial role in the interpretation and success of the play, particularly during these mob scenes. This paper will consider the reciprocity between actor and audience, and study how this relationship is emphasized, yet tenuous during moments of anarchy represented on stage.

**Alysia Kolentsis, St. Jerome's University, University of Waterloo**

### **'The Mob's Voice: Riot and Language in *Coriolanus*'**

This paper will explore the linguistic features of mob scenes in Shakespeare's final tragedy, *Coriolanus*. Analysis of the "language" of riot tends to focus on the paralinguistic (features such as tone and force of voice). Yet in *Coriolanus*, a play preoccupied with questions of language, even the mob scenes that bracket the action feature a heavy emphasis on the linguistic. The first scene provides a fitting initiation into a dramatic environment that is saturated with competing representations of language. The "company of mutinous Citizens" introduces a disparity between linguistic registers that will be maintained and exploited over the course of the play. On one hand, the dominant noise belongs to the starving and querulous mob, whose chanted words seem unhinged from their typical interactive and communicative functions. Yet out of the din rises the articulate and enlivening voice of the First Citizen, clarifying and directing the sound of the multitude. The result is a curious confluence of verbal styles; the mob's chanting is offset by a discrete voice, so that two systems of language – the frenzied babble of a group, and the exhortative voice of an orator – collide. The pattern of competing voices that is established here is repeated throughout the play, and the various associations of "voice" provide a potent subtext. In my paper, I argue that *Coriolanus* accents the linguistic – and the power inherent even in the smallest units of language – even in moments when it appears that language is implicitly or explicitly rejected. How can an analysis of the language of riot in *Coriolanus* contribute to ideas about communication, interaction, and conflict in the play? What are the political and aesthetic consequences of representing riot as a linguistic event? These are some of the questions I will consider.

### **Maya Mathur, University of Mary Washington 'Riotous Genres'**

Although they appear towards the end of *Henry VI, Part 2* and remain onstage for approximately one act, Jack Cade and his rebels engender a trail of destruction that culminates in their parading the heads of Lord Saye and Sir James Cromer through the streets of London. The comic violence they generate has been carefully scrutinized by literary critics, whose views on the rebels fall into two distinct camps. While twentieth-century scholars tended to follow E.M.W. Tillyard's lead and present Cade as symptomatic of the factionalism that was beginning to trickle down from Henry VI's court, twenty-first century critics have often viewed the rebels within the framework of festive misrule. For the first group, the comedy associated with Cade and his companions was designed to ensure that their protests could not be taken seriously. In contrast, the second group suggested that comedy could be used to legitimize their questioning of the established order. In this paper, I draw on the second vein of thought in order to explore the role of comedy as a vehicle for resistance. Accordingly, I will examine representations of Cade's revolt in a variety of genres, from chronicle sources and official documents to records of popular protest. By situating Shakespeare's rebels within this matrix, I wish to consider the ways in which they both draw on and resist contemporary articulations of protest.

### **Hillary M. Nunn, University of Akron**

### **‘Envisioning Justice: *The Atheist's Tragedy* and the Baltimore Riots’**

Discussions of *The Atheist's Tragedy* (1611), when they occur, often grind to a halt over D'Amville's mysterious but very public death: how could he have missed so terribly with the executioner's ax, "strik[ing] out his own brains" rather than those of the condemned but innocent Charlemont? What would that look like, and what does it mean? If we read D'Amville's dying words as a confession of God's existence, the play effectively erases D'Amville's identity as the atheist and creates a startling scene of divine justice.

Such unsubtle staging strikes many as old-fashioned and draconian, but, as Rebecca Schneider argues, this sort of judgmental violence is anything but obsolete. Instead, following Foucault, she concludes that it is embedded in the culture so deeply that we shudder with embarrassment at its abrupt reappearance, driving us to ask, "Aren't we passed this?"

Instead of looking obsolete, *The Atheist's Tragedy* has come into eerie interplay with recent events that seem to revive the past, namely protests regarding racial injustice. In April 2014, Freddie Gray suffered mysterious neurological injuries while in the custody of Baltimore police. Like a modern-day D'Amville, Gray suffered an unexplained but publicly significant death. In Baltimore, the lack of clarity surrounding his fatal injuries resulted in street violence and condemnations of city institutions rather than a renewal of faith in the powers that be.

The play and the riots both call on visible but inscrutable deaths to expose the inner workings of cultural authority. My paper explores how the enigmatic scene of Freddie Gray's arrest resonates with *The Atheist's Tragedy's* ending, examining how the images associated with both serve to stir up images of dissent and even riot that had come to seem culturally outdated.

### **James Purkis, University of Western Ontario**

#### **‘Rioting Hospitably’**

According to modern attribution studies, the riot in *Sir Thomas More* (BL MS Harley 7368) is written by Anthony Munday, perhaps Henry Chettle, and probably Thomas Heywood. It is briefly perpetuated and then quelled by Shakespeare. Critics have commonly, and often delightedly, separated Shakespeare's contribution to the riot scenes from the rest of the play, giving to Shakespeare's part what Robert Miola calls a sense of ‘civilized hospitality and, dare we breathe the word, toleration of others’ assumed lacking in the rest of the supposedly populist and xenophobic text. There may indeed be some discontinuities between the collaborators' work, but (I'll argue) senses of hospitality – proffered, requested, flouted, inverted, and mocked – run through the scenes of the riot's depiction across the hands of the different agents. Tracing these continuities through a focus on hospitality offers a way of thinking about riots in terms of the rioting subjects' individuality – and here, I invoke the duplicity of individuality in its early-modern senses as both two or more things that cannot be divided and the more familiar meaning of the discreet subject. More specifically, the play offers a series of representations in which the individuality (in the modern sense) of the rioters is compromised, while More's final appeal to the rioting Londoners also calls on them to recognize their individuality – their connectedness – with the ‘strangers’, the objects of their

rage. *More's* rioting is specifically focused on the removal of 'strangers', but I expand this investigation of riot and the individual to a couple of other plays with riotish action less centred on nationalism and foreignness: Chettle's *Tragedy of Hoffmann* and Peele's(?) *Jack Straw*.

**Shiladitya Sen, Montclair State University**  
**'Renaissance Metatheater, Positioning the Audience and Plausible Deniability'**

From before the construction of the Red Lion (1567) and the Theatre (1576) until the closing of the theaters in 1642, the Renaissance stage was overtly criticized and suspiciously watched by monarchs and censors, city fathers and antitheatrical pamphleteers, who viewed it as a site and source of riot and disorder. Theatrical spaces were viewed as not only creating physical noise and helping to spread the plague, but functioning similarly as moral corruption, infecting the minds of the surrounding society and potentially breeding seditious ideas against God or monarch. As Henry Cross railed, "a Play is like a sincke in a Towne, whereunto all the filth doth runne: or a byle in the body, that draweth all the ill humours unto it" (*Vertues Commonwealth*).

Playwrights and players had to either answer or evade such criticisms, while simultaneously engaging their spectatorship and eliciting the desired emotional responses and financial rewards. A popular method that the acting companies applied to these ends was to rhetorically position audiences (those in the theaters and the social/political audience beyond) in ways that shifted the onus for appropriate judgment and response to the spectators, potentially absolving performers from blame for performances which hinted at—or led to—social or political disorder. My paper examines how Renaissance playwrights (from as early as Preston, Sackville and Norton, through Shakespeare and Jonson, to the Caroline writers) habitually utilized metatheatrical techniques—fictional spectators on stage, direct references to the theater audience, mentions of past performances, prologues that (mis)represented what was to come—to thus situate their spectatorship as was most expedient, theoretically allowing the troupes to safely (and profitably) perform their craft.

**Daniel Timbrell, University of Southern Queensland**  
**"Passions overflowing in a trice": Backgammon and Societal Disorder in *Arden of Faversham***

It is in Daniel Bellamy's 'tragi-comic' poem from 1737, *Back-Gammon, or, The Battle of the Friars*, that he delivers an explicit warning that no player can be assured of their immunity from "Passions overflowing in a Trice, / And all the dreadful tyranny of dice", a cautionary note that (unconsciously or not) drew upon the early modern fears that the resulting disorder may expand beyond just the individual participant. In the anonymous work *Arden of Faversham* (c.1587), a game at tables is used to stage a murder of which the victim's wife Alice is as much the cunning architect as her lover Mosby. It is my contention that it is the backgammon game that provides the key to understanding a play in which the disruption within an individual can serve to place the state itself at risk. Not only is *Arden's* death the culmination of a scheme that has been played out within the play as a human game of backgammon, Alice implies that it was a previous

encounter with the dice where her overwhelming desire for Mosby was first kindled. Through a discussion of the dangers that such excess posed to the community itself as well as further explanation about backgammon in this period, it will be argued that the result can be an active subversion of social boundaries. More than just one's judgment being too clouded to make decisions that assist in solidifying the current system, there is a danger that one may utilise their abilities to work for ends that lead to the breakdown of the same. Indeed, material evidence itself is deemed inadequate for establishing Alice's guilt; only through the phenomenon of 'cruentation' can her crimes be understood having shaken the foundations of society itself.

**Jennifer C. Vaught, University of Louisiana at Lafayette**  
**'The Intemperate Body as a Ruined City in *Coriolanus*'**

Spenser and Shakespeare represent the body and mind in figurative terms of a castle or house; a city vulnerable to ruin; or as another dwelling surrounded by the elements of earth, air, fire, or water. The figure of the body as a walled structure offers insights about how early modern people conceptualized and gave material form to inwardness. Such architectural rhetoric underscores the extension of mind into the world and the grounding of cognition in the body with its fundamental link to the senses and affections. Built environments that emphasize the dynamic interchange between the interior facets of the body and its exterior situation are expressive of the profound link between self and surroundings that leads to ethical considerations of dwelling. Failure to acknowledge life-sustaining ties between himself and other people, places, or things leads to tragedy for Coriolanus. The figure of a ruined city stands for this fallen warrior. Examining Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* in conjunction with castles and houses in Books I and II of Spenser's allegory *The Faerie Queene* demonstrates how the rhetoric of inwardness is profoundly tied to architectural surroundings. The very language early modern subjects use to talk about interior worlds is dependent upon their connection not only to a human community but also to the elemental environment.

Both Spenser's episode of the Castle of Alma in Book II of *The Faerie Queene* (1590) and Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (1609) depict the intemperate body as an estate subject to ruin. Riots directly impacted the lives of Spenser living in Kilcolman Castle in Ireland until it was burned to the ground by native Irish forces in 1598 and Shakespeare at his house New Place in Stratford-upon-Avon not far from the Midland Rising in 1607. Critics frequently compare the Castle of Alma in the Legend of Temperance to *Hamlet* in which the Prince bemoans that intemperate men like Claudius break down the "forts of reason" (I.iv.28). In the Preface to *Microcosmographia* (1615) Helkiah Crooke describes the geometrical framing of the soul in relation to the Castle of Alma, indicating that Shakespeare's contemporaries and most likely the dramatist himself were widely familiar with this allegorical episode.

No one has yet explored in detail the parallel between Spenser's Alma and Shakespeare's Coriolanus in terms of architectural figuration for the intemperate body. Like Spenser's Castle of Alma, which is analogous to the body subject to unruly passions, illness, and death, the body politic in Rome is prone to deadly infection; Shakespeare's city state is ultimately cured by popular discontent with

an autocrat. Ironically, proud Coriolanus is not only a defender of Rome from outside invaders but also a monster threatening it from within. He recalls Lucifera at the House of Pride and the apocalyptic dragon besieging Una's parents' castle in Book I of *The Faerie Queene*. At the end of the play he defends Rome from ruin by attempting to sacrifice himself. Refiguring Antony's botched suicide in Shakespeare's Roman play *Antony and Cleopatra*, Coriolanus fails to enact a ritual sacrifice when he dies ignobly among the Volscians at the treacherous hand of Aufidius.

**Matthew Williamson, Queen's University, Belfast**  
**“Cry Clubs for Prentices”: (Not) Performing Riot in *The Shoemaker's Holiday***

My paper will situate Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) in the context of late sixteenth century urban rioting. Although the text refrains from depicting a fully-fledged apprentice riot, critics such as David Scott Kastan and Marta Straznicky have long emphasized the significance of rioting as a primary context for the play. By contrast with these critics, however, I will argue that Dekker's work presents not a romanticised image of contemporary London, but rather of its historical past, functioning in a manner more akin to a chronicle play than the later genre of city comedy. In doing so he aims to critique both the degeneration of traditional guild structures and the urban violence which their collapse has unleashed. Dekker's play offers to explain both the causes of and solution to apprentice rioting in the period, and does so through enacting a politics of nostalgia.

Moreover, I will argue that existing readings are hampered by their tendency to assume that festive Shrove Tuesday rioting constituted the primary form of apprentice disorder in this period. In fact, as the historian Roger Manning has noted, there is no evidence that this form of riot existed before 1606, and the forms of disorder which existed at the time of the play's original performance were characterised by a far more radical emphasis upon attacking the gentry and judiciary. I will argue not only that the play exhibits a marked distrust of this more militant form of rioting, but that in re-inscribing the riot within the festive context these critics have described, it may even have been instrumental in effecting a similar shift within the contemporary practice of riot itself.