

Reading the Astor Place Riots through Shakespeare

Edel Lamb, Queen's University Belfast (e.lamb@qub.ac.uk)

Abstract

In 1849, approximately 31 were killed and over 100 injured when mobs gathered and riots broke out in the Astor Place Theatre, and on the streets outside, at a performance of *Macbeth*. The Astor Place Riots have been well documented by historical scholarship, critical commentaries and even theatrical representations. The issues underpinning these riots have been debated, with some suggesting that the rivalry between two Shakespearean actors, William Charles Macready and Edwin Forrest, was crucial, and others arguing that local class and national warfare were the key drivers. This paper will ask what role Shakespeare and *Macbeth* play in the instigation, development and conclusion of these riots to re-read the Astor Place riots through Shakespeare.

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Paramjeet Kaur
University of Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand
SAA Abstract

“Show you sweet Caesar's wounds”: Staging Spectacular Displays of Violence Under an
Anatomical Gaze

In Act III Scene II of William Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*, when Mark Antony says, “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears”, he seems to ask for nothing other than the uninterrupted auditory attention of the citizens gathered on the street of Rome (3.2.73). However, a closer look at the stage directions of the play reveals that he was also accompanied by Caesar's mangled corpse at this instance. As the scene progresses, Antony repeatedly refers to Caesar's wounds, marking out the “place ran Cassius' dagger through”, “a rent the envious Casca made” and how “he [Brutus] pluck'd his cursed steel away” (3.2.174-6). Such rhetoric, when seen in conjunction with the corpse that would have perhaps been lying next to the pulpit, clearly indicates that the import of the scene is dependent not only on words that detail Caesar's brutal assassination to a frenzied crowd that believed that the killing a potential dictator was completely justified but also on an elaborate display of corporeality that fosters a reevaluation of Caesar's character. By catering to a scrutinizing gaze of the masses, this prolonged spectacle, I argue, calls into play the same viewing habits that were nurtured by the overtly theatrical anatomical dissections popular during the day. This paper aims to examine how this tradition of ocular probing that was developed with the rise of anatomical theatres becomes a crucial part of Antony's emotional appeal, that eventually manages to refashion the mob's response from that of absolute hostility towards Caesar to one that allows the people to see their deceased leader as a magnanimous and great figure.

Andrea Van Nort, Professor, USAF Academy

SAA 2018: "Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights"

Machiavelli's Mobs in *Julius Caesar*?

Abstract

Although we often read the Roman rabble's murder of Cinna the poet as an unambiguous construction of ambient Machiavellian political thought, Biblical underpinnings may indeed present a different reading of the frenzied workings of the group. Unique to the Book of Mark, the brief story of the nameless youth in the Garden of Gethsemane escaping the Roman soldiers establishes a foreboding that from a structural viewpoint shifts to intensified aftershock in *Caesar*. In Mark, the garden passage where Christ is kissed but not named precedes Christ's death; the laying of hands on the youth who was a follower of Christ therefore functions as a distorted precursor of the violence to follow. In *Caesar*, however, Cinna, a follower of Caesar, is murdered in a violent parody where names lose significance: "Brutus and Caesar: what should be in that 'Caesar'?" by Act 3 degenerates into, "It is no matter, his name's Cinna." In *Caesar*, Shakespeare's shaping of Plutarch's and others' depictions of the event provokes a nexus between the individual and vast historical consequences

Eric Dannum

Shakespeare's Complaints to the

Playhouse Riots and the Fear of Closure in Shakespeare's London

15th-16th C.

We know that early modern playgoers would sometimes riot in and around the theater. We have evidence of dozens of early modern playhouse riots or disturbances. However, theater historians have tended to downplay the significance of these events. For instance, after reviewing some of these disturbances, Andrew Gurr remarks, "But considering the alarm so regularly voiced by the civil authorities ... the number of affrays that actually engaged audiences inside the playhouse was almost nil." Gurr is probably right in noting that the early modern playhouse was not nearly as disruptive as hysterical anti-theatrical writers and order loving London authorities feared; however, this paper will argue that the anxiety over playhouse riots was much more acute than modern critics and historians allow because when audiences rioted, playhouses were often closed. Thus, riots posed an existential threat to the playhouses, which relied on the good will of authorities; if their audiences created too many disturbances, the theaters could be closed and their livelihood destroyed. Indeed, the possibility of playhouse closure as the result of riots hang over numerous (and perhaps all of) early modern plays. This paper will seek to establish, or re-establish, the importance of riots in the history of early modern theater and use Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* and *Julius Caesar* to show how some plays register this anxiety over crowds, riots and disturbances.

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Christi Spain-Savage
Siena College
SAA 2018

Abstract for "Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare"

Working Title: "'Brave Captain Courageous': Gender, Nationalism, and Violence in *Sir Thomas More*"

Abstract:

In *Sir Thomas More* Doll Williamson calls herself an "honest, plain carpenter's wife," who maintains devotion to her English husband. She fiercely defends her chastity from the sexual violence of foreigners and even precedes her husband on the scaffold. Yet this "true breeder" is figured as a female warrior who incites violence against "strangers" in the May Day insurrection, appearing "*in a shirt of mail, a headpiece, sword and buckler.*" Clown Betts mockingly rhymes about Doll: "Use no more swords, / Nor no more words, / But fire the houses, / Brave Captain Courageous" (4.33-36). The Clown's allusion is to a popular virago, Mary Ambree, who appeared in a ballad "The Valorous Acts performed at Gaunt By the brave Bonny Lass Mary Ambree" and is mentioned in several plays of the period. My essay for our seminar will consider Doll's role in the play in conjunction with the Mary Ambree ballad and other references to this woman warrior. My preliminary argument is that Doll is aligned with Mary Ambree, a woman who is valorized for her courage and patriotism, in order to highlight Doll's subversion of loyalty and English nationalism. *Sir Thomas More* dramatizes Doll's story as a cautionary tale, demonstrating the ways in which English patriotism can easily morph into jingoism.

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Sandra Logan
Michigan State University
SAA Seminar 2018
Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare
Preliminary Abstract

Henry VI, Ineffective Monarchy, and the Commonwealth

In the *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos*, a Protestant argument for the right of the people to correct or overthrow an incompetent or abusive ruler, the author situates the commonwealth as the provenance of the people as a whole. As the body politic, they are responsible to preserve and protect the commonwealth from incompetence, corruption, or neglect. "It is commonly said that masters establish their servants, and kings their officers. In like manner, also, the people establish the king as administrator of the commonwealth." Sovereignty lies with the people, not with the king, and the duty of sovereignty is "to preserve the rights and privileges of the people, and to hinder the ruler so that he neither omit the things that are advantageous to the state, nor commit anything that may cause damage to the public" (39). Thus the people, according to this political theorist, have the obligation to protect the commonwealth and the commonweal by rejecting the authority of a sovereign who proves deleterious. The arguments echo parts of Sir Thomas Smith's model of mixed government, but extend far beyond what Smith justifies. At the other end of the spectrum, Jean Bodin, one of the most influential political theorists of the late Elizabethan and early Jacobean period, relegated subjects to the role of unquestioning obedience, except in certain exceptional circumstances. For Bodin, only if sovereignty was claimed by one with no legitimate right could the subjects justifiably rebel against him. Otherwise, the only appropriate responses to a tyrant were (1) submission to sovereign will, (2) disobedience and justly applied punishment, or (3) flight.

2 Henry VI offers an interesting perspective on these theoretical positions, given that the sitting monarch is not corrupt, is not apparently neglectful, has defensible if not absolute legitimacy, but seems potentially guilty of incompetence. Here, I take up two issues relating to sovereignty, competency, and the commoners' response in this play. First, I challenge the idea that Henry VI is incapable of sovereignty; second, I take up the dynamic between King and commons, in order to think about how 'commoning' – the care of the commonwealth and commonweal – are central to *one* representation of commoners in the play, while an opposing representation figures commoners as an unruly and unthinking mob. The notions of legitimate and illegitimate resistance to sovereign authority are embedded in this play, with legitimate resistance taking the form of care for the commonwealth and commonweal, and indeed, even of the king himself. In other words, even as it overrides hierarchy, legitimate resistance aims to stabilize and reestablish a hierarchical structure that has been destabilized. Illegitimate resistance takes the form of an overthrow of hierarchy and the unleashing of unbridled self-indulgence in a 'Land of Cockaigne'.

Re: Fw: Abstracts

Jessica Apolloni <jessica.apolloni@cnu.edu>

Mon 11/13/2017 3:41 PM

To: David George <david.george@urbana.edu>;

Good afternoon,

Please find my abstract for our SAA seminar below.

Looking forward to it!

All best wishes,
Jessica

Loving Monarchs and Legal Power in Shakespeare's Rome

Jessica Apolloni

Christopher Newport University

This paper approaches the political dynamics of *Julius Caesar* and *Coriolanus* from a legal perspective. I first demonstrate that Shakespeare deviates from his classical sources to portray political turmoil within legal discourse: the plebeians fomenting civic unrest in *Coriolanus* cite legal statutes in their demand for political representation; and commoners weigh evidence and conflicting testimonies within their public judgement of Caesar's assassination as well as Coriolanus's treason. By connecting the political questions of Shakespeare's Rome to legal concepts, the essay details how Roman sources provide a comparative viewpoint for writers like Shakespeare to interpret the political forces behind legal power.

I specifically argue that the tension between Republic and Absolutist forms of government dramatized in these two plays became a useful lens to understand and represent the Monarch's expanding legal authority within English common law. As England shifted from local justice centered on the jury to a centralized legal system, the Monarch gained unparalleled power over legal doctrine. This essay consequently examines Shakespeare's emphasis on the impact of a ruler's perceived love of the people on the crowd's participatory judgements in each play. In dialogue with classical sources and political analyses, I illustrate the ways in which the rhetoric of love and paternal care that dominated Renaissance political discourse bolstered Monarchic legal influence and diminished local authority in English law.

On Mon, Oct 30, 2017 at 11:30 PM, David George <david.george@urbana.edu> wrote:

Dear Seminar #14 members, It's almost Nov. 1 and so the deadline I gave you for abstracts was probably too short. Please take your time and try for Wednesday, 15 Nov. at latest.

Preliminary Paper Abstract
Seminar 14. Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare
2018 SAA Convention
Stuart M. Kurland
Duquesne University

Tentative Title: "What work's, my countrymen, in hand?":
Political Violence and Shakespeare's Commoners

My primary interest in the topic of our seminar is the political dimensions of popular action on stage: where the potential energy of a group of citizens with similar interests, responding to a particular situation, becomes kinetic and is transformed into overt and potentially violent political action or expression.

Obvious instances include the plebeians in *Julius Caesar*, whose holiday celebrations of Caesar's triumph over Pompey's sons become something darker and more openly and self-consciously political: they cheer (off-stage) Caesar's three refusals of a crown; they listen, and occasionally interject, as Brutus and then Antony plead their cases in the Forum after Caesar's assassination; and they rise as a violent mob to burn the conspirators' homes and chase them from Rome, in the process killing Cinna the poet for no reason other than his name (and his bad verses) as civil war consumes Rome.

Similarly, in *Coriolanus*, which opens with a riot of "mutinous Citizens" who oppose with staves and clubs the patricians, and particularly Caius Marcius, whom they blame for hoarding food, the plebeians become a powerful political force in first supporting, and then opposing, Coriolanus's candidacy for the consulship. Manipulated by the tribunes of the people, their opposition again turns violent, and Coriolanus is forced into exile.

But what of groups of citizens whose political potential is successfully channeled, or coopted, so their passions never break out into open riot or revolt? Here I am thinking of examples from the English history plays, in particular: the mayor and citizens of *Richard III*, who are persuaded by Buckingham's maneuvers and Richard's affected piety to acquiesce in Richard's usurpation of the throne; the London citizens in *Richard II*, whose shifting allegiances, from King Richard to Bolingbroke, are reported rather than staged, whose latent power never breaks out into overt action, much less violence; the Elizabethan citizens invoked by the Chorus of *Henry V* who gather, similarly, to salute the popular favorite (who would soon lose royal favor and lead an unsuccessful revolt in the streets of Shakespeare's London); or the celebratory throng attending the christening of the infant Elizabeth in *Henry VIII*, whose unruliness is met with violence by the Porter and his man charged with keeping order. All represent the potential for ordinary citizens, banded together, and threatening violence (or being perceived as potentially threatening violence), to exercise political power, whether through acquiescence or determined action. One topic this paper will explore is the conditions that encourage, or undercut, this potential for action—and the role violence and its potential plays in establishing political significance or propelling political action.

Other examples could be cited, including Laertes' rash followers, who burst through Claudius's Switzers and into the presence of the King, embodying the potential for private grievances to become public and political. What unites them, at least according to my reading, is the sense that stage violence (or potential violence) in Shakespeare has potential political significance that goes beyond the threat of disruption to the state. In these cases, the very legitimacy and stability of rule, and particular rulers, is linked to the degree and nature of support, active or passive, exhibited by the common people.

Bio

Eric Dunnum is an Assistant Professor of English at Campbell University. He has published on Massinger, Beaumont, Shakespeare, Jonson, Marlowe and Milton. His most recent work can be found in *The Ben Jonson Journal*. He is currently finishing a manuscript to be published with Rutledge on riots and Early Modern drama tentatively entitled, "The Unruly Playgoer in Early Modern English Drama." He is generally interested in Renaissance playwright's attitudes towards their own work as revealed through metadrama.

Abstract,

While there is no external, definitive way to date William Rowley, Thomas Middleton, and Thomas Heywood's *The Old Law*, there is extensive circumstantial, internal evidence that points to a first performance sometime between 1618 and 1619. This article attempts to further fix the first performance of *The Old Law* at 1619 by elucidating a joke that could only work in 1619. Beyond dating the play, I will also suggest that this joke shows that the authors did not think of their play as a universal piece of art that was destined for posterity but as an ephemeral text since the joke would have had a shelf life of less than one year.

SAA SEMINAR description and abstracts (Seminar: Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare)

SAA <shakespeare@georgetown.edu>

Wed 3/14/2018 2:30 PM

From: David George <david.george@urbana.edu>;

Dear Professor George,

Our 46th Annual Meeting in Los Angeles is approaching, and we hope your session "Seminar: Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare" is going on well. To help conference participants to choose what to audit, we are asking you to provide a short description of your session along with an abstract for each paper. You have submitted a session description for the June 2017 Bulletin, but there may be some adjustments since then. Please review your original description [here](#). If you are still fine with it, please tell us so. Otherwise, please submit an updated description (no longer than 500 characters including spaces) which better reflects your current group and focus.

We also need a merged file of all the abstracts in your session. If you run double sessions, please give us two separate files. Please include

- The title of the seminar
- The name(s) and affiliation(s) of the seminar leader(s)
- Individual paper title
- Individual author and affiliation
- Individual paper abstract

You may choose to include an email for the leader(s) and/or the participants, but it is not required.

Please send us an MS Word document instead of a PDF, so we can format them for consistency.

Please submit your abstracts by March 20. *Tuesday*

Thank you for your hard work. We look forward to seeing you in Los Angeles.

Best,

Beatrice

Bi-qi Beatrice Lei
Assistant Director

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Glenn Clark
University of Manitoba
SAA 2018 Los Angeles: "Mobs, Protests, and Street Fights in Shakespeare"

Protest, Friendship, and Localism on Shakespeare's Stage

Mid-way through *Coriolanus*, the people's tribune Sicinius asks why those citizens who have overlooked Coriolanus' contempt were "of such childish friendliness/To yield your voices." Sicinius here uses "friendliness" with bitter irony; he has no doubt that little is meaningfully friendly in the relationship between the citizens and Coriolanus, and he implies that a more mature and developed friendship could not thrive in a relationship marked by contempt and exploitation. Sicinius, of course, wants the citizens to recognize their own self-interest, and so to resist their subordination to Coriolanus and the patricians, in a way that seems to anticipate class consciousness. Laurie Shannon's examination of early-modern English discourses of friendship helps us understand why Sicinius (and Shakespeare) might think of friendship at such a moment. For Shannon, Elizabethan friendship discourse imports classical ideals of elite masculinity into the English context, offering subordinates in relationships of horizontally-sustained affect an opportunity to imagine themselves as equals, and so as something other than subordinates. Critics including Phyllis Rackin and Annabel Patterson have attended to the connotations of what historian Keith Wrightson calls "restrained and purposefully directed" collective protest, yet little critical attention has been directed toward the affective bonds which sustain consciously self-interested resistance among protestors on the Shakespearean stage. Such moments of affectively sustained protest are envisioned in several plays, including *Richard III*, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Julius Caesar*. Resistance generated and sustained by these horizontal affective bonds is sometimes distributed throughout the play. The friendship of Samson and Gregory, whose semi-conscious hostility to their masters has been noted by Chris Fitter, is echoed in more positive terms by the First Citizen's unhesitating appropriation of "the Prince's name," as well as by Juliet's Nurse's shocking disobedience to Old Capulet, for which she is sarcastically nominated "Lady Wisdom." While for Ian Munro, the imagined crowd of bodies in early-modern London tends to become the supplementary "double" of the city, a double which "unbuild[s] not simply the political order but the meaning of the city itself," I would argue that the friendly subordinate protestors in Shakespeare's theatrically-doubled Londons double their superiors, and so destabilize the authority of vertical distinction. However, because representations of friendship among protestors also reflect the conflicting English localisms recently studied by Buchanan Sharp, the scope of this destabilization is limited. Shakespeare's friendly protestors do not exhibit class consciousness.

Provisional Bibliography

Ian Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London*

SAA Conference 2018, T. N. de Saillan abstract Nodin de Saillan

"Rats, wolves, and cormorants: reading the verminous elements of *Coriolanus*."

In this paper, I will explore the element of the mob in the text of *Coriolanus* in order to consider how this group of revolting citizens reflects an atmosphere of increased unrest surrounding the rural, agrarian laborer in the changing social, environmental, and political climate of the 16th and early 17th century as well as an increased anxiety concerning the threat that that unrest poses to the order and security of the commonwealth. I will argue that the anxiety produced by the Citizens in *Coriolanus*, as well as general peasant unrest of the period, manifests as a displaced animality onto the Citizens and plebeians whose actions are compared to the behaviors of animal species identified as vermin. Further, I will contend that the vocabulary used to describe the Citizens of *Coriolanus*, which mirrors similar language used in reference to the numerous peasant revolts of this period including Kett's Rebellion of 1549 and The Midland Revolt of 1607, originates in pseudo-taxonomic and legal texts of the period specifically in reference to verminous animals. For example, John Foxe writes about the suppression of the peasant uprising during Kett's Rebellion in terms that echo the successful extermination of an animal infestation: the "Rude and confused rabble was there ouerthrowne and slaine" (Foxe 1308). Similarly, the verminous vocabulary used to describe the Citizens in *Coriolanus* displaces the perceived deleterious actions of the Citizens onto the animals to which they are likened while also attributing the pestiferous behaviors of the animals to the Citizens. The Citizens are referred to as both "rats" and "wolves," verminous and threatening animals of which Caius Martius wishes to make a "quarry," or pile of carrion (1.1.240, 2.1.5-9; 1.1.187). Constructing the Citizens as vermin enforces the perception that their actions are against the order of the commonwealth and justifies their destruction in terms of the threat that their collective numbers pose.

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