

Boundaries of Violence Part 1 Abstracts

Benson, Sean

“Lend me your [f]ears”: Donald Trump as an American Caesar

The essay analyzes Paul Herbig’s pre-election short film, *Never Caesar* (2016), as a call-to-arms against a Trump presidency, and the Delacorte Theatre’s 2017 production of *Julius Caesar*, the tragic protagonist of which looked unmistakably like the Donald. His assassination on stage occasioned vocal disruptions of the performance, and came shortly after other imagined assassinations of Trump as well as an attempted assassination of congressional Republicans. Both Herbig’s short and the free Shakespeare in the Park performance speak with uncanny prescience to the contemporary political landscape, as Brutus and his co-conspirators voice anxieties about the man whom they worry might usher in the end of the republic.

Shakespeare’s Caesar is precisely the sort of ruthless populist and converted politician who, in the person of Trump, likewise stoked fear among American progressives, and enough promise among conservatives and the disaffected of both parties for them to overlook the man’s deep and abiding flaws. Yet Shakespeare’s exploration of the fragility of republican governance provides less an indictment of Trump as a potential American Caesar (though I do examine at length James Shapiro’s case for this) than a cautionary tale that people on both sides of the political divide “may construe things after their fashion” (1.3.34). Cicero’s insight is there for us, even as the divisiveness and pronounced incivility that now characterizes American political discourse shows disturbing signs of giving way to civic violence.

Bowling, Joseph:

Samuel Rowlands’s Vengeful Stab

On 1 June 1599 Archbishop Whitgift and Bishop of London Richard Bancroft signed the so-called Bishops Ban, which pronounced that “noe *Satyres* or *Epigrams* be printed hereafter.” A year later, on 26 October 1600, an order from Stationer’s Hall called for the burning of two satirical and epigrammatic works by the pamphleteer Samuel Rowlands: “Yt is orderd, that the next courtday two bookes lately printed, thone called *The Letting of Humors Blood in the Head Vayne*; thother, *A Mery Metinge, or tis Mery when Knaves Mete*; shal be publiquely burnt for that they conteyne matters unfytt to be published; then to be burnd in the hall kytchen.” Following Whitgift’s death in 1604, Rowlands published a work remarkably similar to the epigrams in his proscribed *Letting* and christened the work with the penetrating title *Looke to it: for Ile stabbe ye*, a collection of verse satirical characters—e.g., “Curious Divine,” “Miserable Merchant,” “Wealthye Cittizens”—all voiced by Death, who ends each poem with the threatening refrain, “I’ll stab you!” Imagining this work as Rowlands’s defiant response to Whitgift’s death, I propose that *Looke to it: for Ile stabbe ye* indulges in fantasies of class-based violence against social superiors, sanctioned by its *momento mori* framing. I read *Ile stabbe you* as a Rowlands’s play on the dance of death motif and situate these violent fantasies in the context of early modern England’s destabilizing and immiserating economic expansions.

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Brano, Anthony:

Insidious Trauma and the Violence of Scarcity in Ben Jonson's Every Man Out of His Humour

In Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, the miserly farmer Sordido ponders the precarity of poverty and implies a form of violence that knows no boundaries—population control through famine. During years of abundant harvest, according to Sordido, poor people are “Bred (by the sloth of a fat plenteous year) / Like snakes in heat of summer out of dung” (1.3.9-10). In contrast, he points out that “a wholesome and penurious dearth / Purges the soil of such vile excrements, / And kills the vipers up” (1.3.111-113). Sordido's mixed metaphor sounds silly, but it animates questions about scarcity. My paper examines the ways in which art imitates life in *Every Man Out* and argues that the threat of starvation was a form of insidious trauma that Jonson satirizes in the play.

Sordido sees the poor as animals, whom he reduces to common livestock that can be bred and exterminated at will. Given that the privy council published a *Book of Orders* to prevent scarcity, which was reissued six times between 1587 and 1630, Sordido is contemptible to the point of absurdity. His own financial position depends in part on grain prices that were under strict government control. Obscuring grain stores, hoarding them, and inflating prices constituted forms of violence against people who were unable to protect themselves and were thus under frequent threats of violence through starvation. My paper tracks these allusions in Jonson's play and compares them to the rules found within *The Book of Orders*.

Crosbie, Christopher:

Intention and the Discursive

Intention is a curious thing, its relation to mapping the boundaries of violence even moreso. By its nature a feature of embodied existence and thus intertwined with the physical processes of impulse, desire, and affect, intention nonetheless often finds description in early modern discourse as a kind of immaterial, internal presence. On the one hand, the influence of this interior disposition on the material contours of violence remains negligible: physical trauma is still physical trauma and the dead remain dead, whatever intentions the bringer of violence held. And yet intention features so centrally in the era's legal and religious adjudications of transgression precisely because of its capacity to re-map the affective boundaries of violence – for individuals as well as communities. Discovering and articulating the intention subtending realized acts of violence could intensify or assuage the grief of victims, the guilt of perpetrators, and the passions of the broader community within which such transgressions occurred. This paper, part of my book project on the ethics of intention in Shakespearean drama, will examine a range of non-dramatic early modern texts to reveal how individual and communal affect shaped – and, in turn, became shaped by – legal and religious adjudications of violent acts. Drawing on work by Luke Wilson (on “the fictionalization of intent”), Julia Lupton (on micro-communities), and Kevin Curran (on early modern theories of “judgment”), I will argue that the era's developing concern with establishing precedent coincided with, and was actively fueled by, the

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more distinctly local and immediate concerns of securing satisfactory affective boundaries to violence within communities.

Faircloth, Adam:

“Let Rome herself be bane unto herself”: Shakespeare, Lucan, and National Self-Wounding in *Titus Andronicus*

Shakespeare’s modern editors have long sought to reconcile the conflicting speaker allocations of the “Let Rome herself be bane unto herself” speech across the various early quarto and folio editions of *Titus Andronicus* (5.3.72). In this paper, I offer a new approach to the editorial problems associated with the passage in question. Here, I argue that the “Let Rome...” speech constitutes one of Shakespeare’s earliest intertextual engagements with the Neronian poet, Lucan and his Roman Civil War epic, the *Pharsalia*. In light of Lucan’s influence on *Titus*, we are able to resolve the apparent contradictions of the speech as intrinsic features of Shakespeare’s allusive poetics. Drawing from the *Pharsalia* directly, Shakespeare here reproduces Lucan’s meditation on civil violence as a form of national self-wounding. While Lucan’s influence on Shakespeare tells us very little about the trajectory of the changes witnessed by the quarto and folio editions of *Titus*, it does provide an explanatory context for evaluating the changes we see.

Finch, Amanda:

Weaponized laughter: comedy, gender, violence and the politics of contemporary cross-gender Shakespearean performance

Laughter is powerful, at least partly because ‘it feels good’ (Weitz, 2009). This paper looks at what we are being asked to ‘feel good’ about when we laugh at cross-gender Shakespeare comedies, with analysis of several twenty-first century productions.

In Shakespeare’s comedies, those who differ from the norm are often othered for comic purposes, invoking tropes that are often sexist, racist, homophobic and ableist. Various degrees of violence are used in this process and the plays invite laughter at this othering. In the twenty-first century, the staging of these plays can repeat and reproduce these regressive politics or attempt to intervene and convey different political meanings. This paper argues that the ways laughter is mobilized in production reveals the politics that underpin that production. Cross-gender productions are often considered to particularly subvert the gendered norms of the plays, but they can, in fact, weaponize laughter against the other along heavily gendered lines. A kind of ‘willful ignorance’ (Tuana, 2006) often accompanies this weaponization, obscuring the violence that we are encouraged to laugh at and ‘feel good’ about.

There is another kind of laughter, however, as Sara Ahmed (2017) highlights: laughter as a form of ‘feminist snap’, a ‘willful and rebellious noise’ that ‘becomes a lead’ to expose underlying violence. Productions that recognize this have the potential to wield this weaponized laughter

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against the politics of the texts themselves, perhaps opening up space for others to feel good, or at least feel better, perhaps even pay better attention, as we laugh.

González, José Manuel:

Violence, honour and revenge in early modern England and Spain

Early modern England and Spain have long been viewed as having a culture obsessed with violence and revenge, when the family's or women's honour was threatened, especially through sexual disgrace. English and Spanish plays of the period offer countless examples of characters whose passion for sensational revenge and spectacular violence emerges when their honour has been affronted. This paper argues that the way people behaved in both countries was not very different from the way they were depicted in duelling manuals, law books and plays, as seen in shocking scenes that were staged with considerable realism. Thus, playwrights who brought violence onto the stage were not only melodramatic, but they were also drawing on their experience to satisfy the appetite of their audiences for bloody deeds. This is why revenge tragedy and honour plays became so popular and successful, showing how if violent action might be dangerous, inaction and impotence might be worse and have a more devastating effect on people, the family and society in general.

Hegland, Anna:

'Villains, all three': Object-led Violence in The Revenger's Tragedy

In Act 3 of Thomas Middleton's 1606 play, *The Revenger's Tragedy*, Vindice reveals his dead fiancée's skull, which he insists "shall bear a part / E'en in it[s] own revenge" (3.5.100-101). This skull is more than a stage prop, it is an efficacious thing that prompts and enacts revenge. In imagining the skull as an object that can exert influence and act upon the characters around it, I argue that Middleton disrupts our expectation of the boundaries of violence, allowing for the possibility of violent action led not by a human subject but by a non-human object.

This essay considers the permeable boundary Middleton establishes between subject- and object-led violence through analysis of a practice-based workshop in an undergraduate classroom setting. By reflecting on the uses of and responses to stage violence by modern student-practitioners, the essay discusses early modern enactments of violence in a manner that is attentive to the materiality of the objects used to commit those acts of violence, as well as to textual and performance practices.

Lee, Tohni:

Against Wild Justice: Sir Thomas More and the Tragedy of Citizenship

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This paper traces in the multi-authored *Sir Thomas More* (1593-4; c. 1600), a counter-tradition in English Renaissance tragedy which foregrounds the question of civility and citizenship over that of subjecthood and sovereignty. The first part of *Sir Thomas More* reimagines the events of the Ill May Day Riot of 1517 so that the undersheriff Thomas More successfully prevents an outbreak of popular violence akin to the Massacre of St. Bartholomew's in Paris (1572). As a tragedy about the *avoidance* of extra-legal violence, I argue, *Sir Thomas More* corresponds more closely with the model of Greek drama—especially, the *Oresteia*—produced in the democratic city-state of Athens, than Seneca's tragedies produced under the Roman emperor. What emerges is a charter myth, not of the emerging nation-state, but of London and its civic institutions: a tragic meditation on the place of the City and its citizens in the early modern world.

Lodine-Chaffey, Jennifer L:

Edward May's Rhetorical Anatomization of a Woman Burned at the Stake

Long recognized by scholars as a literary form of anatomy, the early modern blazon exhibits and metaphorically dissects the body of the other, typically a woman. Edward May's 1633 poem "On a Woman Burned in Smithfield the 20 of April 1632," eerily catalogues a condemned woman's body parts as she is burned at the stake, expressing interest not in her crime of husband murder and the horror of her execution, but rather on her death as an erotic moment. Despite his interest in the woman's body and its potential as an object of lustful fantasies, May cannot leave his readers only with his musings as a voyeur and blazoner. Instead, to sanctify and sanitize his poem, May ends by evoking symbols of spiritual unity. In his effort to resolve the paradox of a beautiful woman who killed her spouse and suffers for her crime May ultimately repositions the woman as a sacrificial victim, thus providing her with spiritual, if not physical unity. In the end, the juxtaposition of May's eroticization of the female execution victim's body and his decision to transform her into a symbol of spiritual renewal suggests that this literary anatomization, although it metaphorically fragments and exploits the female body, could be combined with religious rhetoric to assuage male guilt and sanctify sexually violent fantasies.

Ray, Sid:

"A x to her, slaps her face—she kneels": Violence between the Lines in Measure for Measure

Examining the performance history of 2.4 of *Measure for Measure* recorded by promptbooks, theatre reviews, performance notes, and other theatrical ephemera from over 30 UK and US productions of the last hundred years, this essay identifies the violence enacted *between* the lines. The essay posits that the lack of stage directions from the Folio coupled with the scene's dense textual dialogue drives the common performance decision to add Angelo's unscripted on-stage assault on the often-habited Isabella. This violence is now so commonplace that it has become inextricable from audiences' understanding of the scene. The essay examines the implications of this violent performance tradition: what it means for editors, scholars and other close-readers

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who must contend with extra-textual stage action, for director/managers who must choose whether or not to enscript this additive physicality, for actors directed to perform violence with their actual raced and gendered bodies, and for audiences who respond to it. The essay explores the gendered and racial aspects of the violence and underscores the critical importance of intimacy direction in contemporary theatrical production. Most germane to this seminar, the essay attempts to locate the boundaries between implied and active violence, between discursive and physical violence, between harassment and assault and, by extension, between comedy and “problem play.”

Sargent, Gregory:

Sovereignty, Stage, and Prison: Royal Authority and Social Space

This paper is an introductory exploration of the confluence of sovereignty, social space, and dramatized violence. Spaces like jail cells and other places of incarceration are the settings for an interrogation of the ways that Shakespeare deploys concepts of sovereignty and succession to test political stability. I will look to *Richard II* and perhaps moments from the *Measure for Measure* to examine dramatic materializations of the violence of boundaries. As spaces of incarceration became a more prevalent part of Londoners’ daily lives, the method by which monarchical succession generates sovereign state stability turns into a question of some urgency. As I present these inquiries, violence—especially political and overtly physical—becomes the thread that ties these ideas together and acts as a lens through which I view the tenuous balance between sovereign state and social institutions. Particularly, how the plays stage violence invites this paper to think about the theater’s role as a social institution that artistically adjudicates the boundaries between the sovereign and polis.