

Boundaries of Violence Part 2 Abstracts

Hardy, Jennifer:

"I'll hew thy flesh to shreds": Violence Against the Pregnant Body on the Early Modern Stage

Perhaps more than any other play of the period, John Ford's *'Tis Pity She's A Whore* depicts the most extreme violence towards the pregnant body. Scrutinised for its ability to conceal and reveal sexual and reproductive knowledge, the opacity of the pregnant body is often utilised to explore and frustrate questions of paternity, chastity, and legitimacy. Although early modern medicine reinforced the need for women to take care of their spiritual, emotional, and physical health during pregnancy, in order to protect their unborn child, evidence suggests that not all pregnant women were treated with social or medical concern; in fact, some suffered deliberate abuse. Drawing upon *'Tis Pity*, early modern medical texts, personal writing, and other plays of the period, this paper explores the significance of the violence enacted upon pregnant bodies onstage, interrogates the limits placed upon violence towards the pregnant body and questions why the physicality of the dilated pregnant body is so often utilised as a dramaturgical lightning-rod for violence.

MacConochie, Alex:

Shakespeare's Constables

This essay considers two Shakespearean constables, Elbow (*Measure for Measure*) and Dogberry (*Much Ado about Nothing*). Bumbling, pompous, verbally challenged, these characters are often exhibit A in arguments that Shakespeare advocated reform through his portrayals of ineffective law enforcement, or that his plays evince an elitist disdain for the ordinary citizens entrusted with keeping the king's peace. In this essay, I take a different approach, arguing that Shakespeare's comic constables highlight the slippages in a system of volunteer law enforcement, in which the emergent modern state increasingly lays claim to its monopoly on legal violence, yet that monopoly is exercised by volunteer citizen officers. Constables are mediating figures, responsible to the state for enforcement of its laws, equally responsible to their communities for the maintenance of order. Through Dogberry's and Elbow's failures to speak coherently across this divide, Shakespeare's comedies indicate—indeed, expand—the conceptual distance between two terms that would later become a single phrase: law and order. Rather than advocate for more effective enforcement of the law, *Measure for Measure* and *Much Ado* set the authority of the citizen officer, derived from community election and support, against the interests of the centralized, or centralizing, state.

O'Neil, Scott:

Foolish Survival, Madness, and Disguise in Marston's Antonio Plays

One of the few unbreakable rules of a Renaissance revenge tragedy is that the revenger cannot survive his bloody act. One notable exception to this rule is John Marston's *Antonio's Revenge*. In Marston's play, the titular revenger survives, despite following through with his

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revenge plot and announcing to the audience his awareness of what should have been his fate. The critical history of *Antonio's Revenge* is generally focused on explaining this apparent flaw in the generic structure of the play. Charles and Elaine Hallett sum up the critical consensus when they argue that “certainly it has not startled readers of this essay to hear again that the last act of *Antonio's Revenge* does not work” (180).

My paper looks at the more problematic elements of *Antonio's Revenge* by reading the two Antonio plays as a contiguous work. I will suggest that Antonio's decision to disguise himself as a fool in the revenge tragedy was merely the latest—and most effective—in a series of disguises going back to the earlier play, all deployed in an ongoing attempt by the title character to contain the excess passion that marks him as a mad revenger. In so doing, I will ultimately argue that the play's conclusion, rather than being an error, actually reflects Marston's moralistic streak, allowing him to emphasize the doom of the surviving revengers by removing the spectacle of their deaths from the stage and replacing it with a pledge of religious devotion in “holy verge of some religious order.”

Parker, Courtney:

“Witchy Woman”: Reading Women and Occult Power in Popular Literature of Early Modern England

The goal of this essay is to understand how the association of criminal women with occult phenomena is reflected in popular literature of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Using the well-known story of Alice Arden as a case-study, I examine the ways that different genres of popular writing demonstrate the pervasiveness of the belief that women who committed crimes, especially such serious crimes as murder and petty treason, must have been “witchy” in some way. In other words, these literary representations are not isolation or representative of a single author's point of view; rather, they indicate that real women's lives were impacted by ideas present in popular culture at large. Alice Arden, a housewife from Kent, who was executed in 1551 after plotting with several others to murder her husband in their home, appears in a variety of textual artifacts including Holinshed's *Chronicles*, a broadside ballad, and a dramatization, *Arden of Faversham*. Each version of Alice's infamous crime offers a subtly different set of emotional complexities and motivations for her actions. But they all point to the insidious and pervasive assumption that disobedient and deviant women represented a uniquely powerful threat to civic and social order.

Preeshl, Artemis:

“Measuring Consent: Women's Agency in Measure for Measure”

“Measure for Measure” offers an Anglicized window into 16th-century French and Italia tales of *Epitia*. How do the women in *Measure for Measure*, especially Isabella, compare and contrast with the continental representations of *Epitia*? Women of higher classes typically have greater opportunities to speak. Outspoken women were frequently punished as shrews in Shakespearean

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England. However, the beautiful, young Isabella and Epitia passionately argue for the release of their brothers from a death sentence. When the authority figures use their beauty against them, Isabella and Epitia face the peril of a sexual quid pro quo. Despite the similarities between the women's arguments, Shakespeare's outcome differs profoundly from those in the new translations of Giraldo Cinthio's *Hecatommithi* and Gabriel Chappuys's translation in his *Notables Nouvelles*. Indeed, Shakespeare includes a coterie of women who contribute to shifting the plot from a deadly tragedy to a problematic tragicomedy. This study draws from the #MeToo Movement and the resulting consent-based teaching and performance practices. #MeToo has expanded a women's right to speak even as consent to intimacy has changed how we interpret events. Further, in light of the diversity of women in *Measure for Measure*, this paper will also consider the intersectionality of class and rank as well as preferences for beauty and youth. By understanding distinctions between the efficacy of consent in *Measure for Measure* and *Epitia*, students, scholars, and performers may view *Measure for Measure* from a novel perspective.

Pullara, Melissa:

Gender Wars: The Warrior and the Witch in 1 Henry VI

In her introduction to the Norton edition of *1 Henry VI*, Jean E. Howard astutely observes that, "Talbot may have been defeated, but Joan is not allowed to win the war or even to live." In a play that revolves around war and masculine violence, Joan la Pucelle becomes a notable outsider. While the play treats war as a socially acceptable form of patriarchal violence because it is a means towards upholding male-dominated order, Joan is a warrior woman who violates that order, and so she is excluded from any codes of honour or dignity in the somewhat restrained killing masculine war entails. Instead, she is subject to an unrestrained violence, both verbal and physical, which goes largely unchecked even by her male allies on account of her position as a woman acting outside of her prescribed gender role. The play seems to dismiss the violence against Joan (she is demonized from the start without evidence and her execution is held offstage) because she is a female warrior—a concept so unnatural that it becomes associated with witchcraft. However, in this paper I argue that the violence Joan experiences, particularly the accusations of witchcraft and her subsequent burning, exposes an underlying male fear of female power for its potential to challenge the structure and justification of the gender hierarchy which impacted much of the socio-political dynamic in the early modern world.

Strier, Richard:

Notes on a Blinding

My paper will address what I believe to be the most extreme piece of actually staged violence on the Elizabethan/Jacobean stage: the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear* (3.7).

I will take up a number of issues: why does Cornwall not execute Gloucester? why blinding rather than some other torture? why stage the blinding at all? Why in the way that it is (eye-by-eye, and announced as such)? What make of servant's intervention?; Is there a positive

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dimension to it ("insight" vs outer sight)?; What difference does the omission in F of the Q ending of the scene make? Finally, why have a messenger narrate this scene (4.2) after it has already been staged?

Amina Tajbhai:

Shakespeare's Incorporeal Violence

The desecration of corpses – such as displaying York's head on York gates in *III Henry VI* or the baking of Tamora's sons in *Titus Andronicus* – suggests that, to the living, death is not a boundary to violent acts. But what happens when the dead are not done with violence? This essay examines Shakespeare's ghosts and the ways they, going beyond a call for revenge, can enact mental violence on those they encounter, driving them to madness and suicide. This agency does not go unnoticed, as living characters occasionally dress up as spirits in order to appropriate this power and conjure similar effects. By examining Shakespeare's ghosts, we notice that the boundaries of violence are equally incorporeal.

Usher, Penelope Meyers:

Violent Noise in Jonson's Epicoene

In Jonson's *Epicoene*, sound is weaponized; like a knife, it cuts and penetrates the body, causing pain, threatening death. Morose's hyperbolic sensitivity to noise is the stuff of comedy, to be sure—the punchline of much of the play's humor. But Morose also genuinely suffers as he is subjected to this noise, subjected to a violence that is invisible yet wracks his body. This paper will speak to the (broken) boundaries of violence in several respects: the way in which violence can reign unchecked in comedy, encouraged, rather than stifled, by laughter; the way in which sound can penetrate the body's own boundaries with such ease in order to inflict pain; and the way in which the lack of stable boundaries between self and environment in the context of early modern London leaves people vulnerable to the city's noise and violent assaults. Paying attention to a less visible (but no less penetrative) form of violence—one cloaked both by comedy and laughter and by a lack of blood and oozing wounds—I hope to shed light on the body's vulnerability to others and to its environment.

Wolf, Annalise:

Abiezer Coppe's "Divine Fireworks"

Abiezer Coppe, a radical self-proclaimed prophet writing around the English Interregnum, wrote pamphlets invoking fantastic, often divine, violence. Coppe's speaker is an ever-shifting constellation whose parts are in conflict. Rather than demonstrating the failure of language, as has been proposed, I suggest Coppe's speaker demolishes the concept of a discrete human self in

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the face of apocalyptic reality, and language's failure inevitably follows as a byproduct of the shattered self. Coppe's vision is, in some senses, a description in heightened rhetoric of the physical world we have always inhabited, but narrated and described so strangely that our vision lags in recovering the object of sight as familiar. Divine violence unifies a deserving world, although Coppe avoids prescribing human-enacted violence.

Coppe constructs human-object-nature assemblages acting according to divine dictates of mutual care. The rich who have failed to respect God's imperative for temporal, earthly hospitality have eternally cut themselves off from the communion of the saved. Coppe's prophecies recalibrate conceptions of "the saved" as exclusively human, as objects and nature participate in the common rhetoric of hospitality. His texts remind us that "Revolt is not integrated into the harmonious development of the world; it does not wish to be integrated but rather to explode at the heart of the world and to break its continuity."

Zajac, Paul:

"War, or peace, or both at once": Constructions and Contradictions of Peace in 2 Henry 4

Though Shakespeare's ambitious English history cycle chronicles a series of civil and foreign wars, the language of peace echoes throughout the plays. In *2 Henry 4* alone, the word "peace" and its variants appear 42 times, the second most of any Shakespeare play. From Rumor's prologue to the parley at Gaultree forest, from the dying regrets of Henry IV to the newly crowned Henry V's reconciliation with the Lord Chief Justice, characters insistently invoke peace in relation to war--whether as its absence, its opposite, or its endpoint. This essay engages with "peace studies" and recent research on violence and early modern ethics to examine moments when the play constructs the relationship between war and peace in potentially surprising ways. In particular, Archbishop Scroop, the de facto rebel leader who "[t]urns insurrection to religion" (1.1.202), emerges as one of Shakespeare's most unlikely and idiosyncratic theorists of peace. The archbishop's enemies accuse him of abusing his clerical power and perverting his religious responsibilities in order to convert peace to war. But the Archbishop of York describes himself as a peace-maker, a physician for a diseased nation, and an "offensive wife" threatened by her husband (4.1.210), while peace itself is "of the nature of a conquest" (4.2.89). Before he is tricked and executed for treason, Archbishop Scroop draws on military, political, and gender discourses to articulate a possible peace forged from forgiveness, forgetfulness, and averting violence at the last possible moment.

Zaloom, Rose:

"Slack in [Neither] Tongue [Nor] Performance": The Duchess's Cues for Revenge

When we consider Renaissance revengers, we often define revenge within boundaries that exclude female characters. Recognizing and removing these boundaries brings to light underdeveloped aspects of female revenge and helps to create a more inclusive portrait of revengers. Thomas Middleton's *The Revenger's Tragedy* features one such character, the

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Duchess, who seeks revenge after her husband refuses to pardon her son. In this paper, I explore the intersections between maternal identity and revenge that the Duchess exploits. In her appeals, the Duchess reconfigures legal justice to reflect her own desires as a mother seeking protection for her son. She attempts to force her subjectivity as a mother past its domestic limits into a legal institution. Her maternal status informs her navigation of revenge as she both grieves for her son's impending death and seeks to reshape her grief into a reassertion of her maternal identity. To develop this claim, I look at the maternal connotations present in the appeals the Duchess articulates, the actor/audience relationship that she attempts to form through a system of cues, and the ways she reorganizes these performance elements with more vengeful intentions after the trial concludes. I use a lens of performance theories to analyze the play text and to imagine staging choices that highlight the Duchess as a revenger. The Duchess's actions challenge the boundaries of what it means to be a revenger, inviting critical reconsideration of the boundaries we impose on revenge.