

Master List - SAA Abstracts for Echoes of Violence

Charlotte Artese
cartese@agnesscott.edu

The Uncanny Blood-stained Object in “Maiden-Killer” Folktales and *Macbeth*

Abstract

Macbeth is saturated with blood as well as with folk traditions about blood wrongfully shed. The manner in which the Macbeths frame the gentlemen of Duncan’s chamber reflects the folk narrative motifs K2155.1. *Blood smeared on innocent person brings accusation of murder* and K2155.1.1 *Bloody knife left in innocent person’s bed brings accusation of murder*. These episodes occur in the folktale “Crescentia” (ATU 712),^{1*} which seems to have influenced other aspects of *Macbeth* also. Both Macbeths draw on the tradition of motif E422.1.11.5.1, *Ineradicate bloodstain after bloody tragedy*, Lady Macbeth in her sleepwalking scene and Macbeth immediately after the murder when he laments that his hands will never be cleansed of Duncan’s blood.

I have presented papers on these aspects of folk tradition at SAA and the American Folklore Society annual meetings. In this essay, I plan to examine the influence of folktales on the role of a particular object in *Macbeth*, the blood-stained dagger. A dagger is a small weapon for a bloody murder, suiting it admirably to the purpose of framing someone. The play draws special attention to the daggers beyond their instrumental convenience, however, using them to bracket the horrific regicide. As he prepares to kill Duncan, Macbeth famously sees a dagger in the air before him, spotted with blood. He then unaccountably brings the daggers away with him from the murder scene, leading to another argument between him and his wife, before she returns the daggers to the bloody chamber.

In this way, the daggers go beyond dramatic properties and take on the weight of the uncanny bloodied objects in another narrative tradition, that of two related folktales, “Rescue by the Sister” (ATU 311) and “Maiden-Killer” (ATU 312). The former is perhaps most familiar as the Brothers Grimm’s “Fitcher’s Bird” and the latter as Charles Perrault’s “Bluebeard.” In these stories, a woman who has been forbidden by her fearsome husband to enter a certain room does so anyway, only to discover the corpses of murdered women. In her shock, she drops a key or an egg in the accumulated blood, and cannot clean off the bloodstain (Motif C913, *Bloody key as sign of disobedience*; Motif C913.1, *Bloody egg as sign of*

^{1*} The designations for motifs and folktales derive from two standard references in folktale studies, *The Motif-Index of Folk-Literature* and *The Types of International Folktales*.

disobedience). The bloodstain in these stories serves as proof that the wife possesses a knowledge of her husband that he does not want her to have, that of the murder-room. The theme of forbidden knowledge surfaces in the scene in which the waiting gentlewoman and the doctor observe the sleepwalking Lady Macbeth. In the “Fitcher’s Bird” story, the heroine’s foolish sisters drop the egg in blood, but the wily heroine instead places the egg in a safe place before she ventures into the forbidden room. Macbeth is like the foolish sisters, returning with self-incriminating bloodstained daggers from the crime scene, whereas his wife is the wise sister, keeping the blood contained in the death chamber.

Of the folk narratives related to bloodstains in *Macbeth*, the “Rescue” / “Maiden-Killer” tradition resembles events in the play the least. The parallels are not ones of plot or character, but rather of theme. Given the overall richness of the traditional narrative substratum of the play—in general and as pertains specifically to bloodstains—and the popularity of “Maiden-Killer” stories, I think that it is possible to hear and decipher these echoes of violence.

Keywords

Macbeth, folktale, blood, dagger

Greg Foran, Nazareth College

Abstract

“Echoes of Senecan and medieval mystery play violence in *Macbeth*”

Macbeth has been called the most medieval of Shakespeare’s plays in terms of imagery, characterization, and dramatic structure. It draws on incidents and motifs from the Corpus Christi plays, such as the Harrowing of Hell, the *ordo prophetarum* (a cross-stage procession of prophets of Christ), and the ranting of the tyrant Herod. Herod’s desperation to evade his fated overthrow by Christ culminates in the *Massacre of the Innocents* plays found in all four of the extant complete mystery cycles, plays that anticipate Macbeth’s and Lady Macbeth’s figurative and literal violence against children. Yet this violence also recapitulates horrifying assaults on children in Senecan tragedies such as *Medea* and *Hercules Furens*. Thanks to these thematic resemblances, as well as to verbal and imagistic similarities, *Macbeth* can thus be counted among Shakespeare’s most Senecan plays, as well as his most medieval.

My seminar paper will consider the overdetermined sources of *Macbeth*’s depictions of violence. I am interested not only in scenes of interpersonal violence, but also in the play’s doomsday rhetoric. Though I have previously analyzed Macbeth’s fantasies of destruction through the lens of Christian apocalypticism, they equally echo the Stoic accounts of cosmic dissolution featured in Seneca’s plays and philosophical works. I seek to correlate the doubleness of *Macbeth*’s intertextual situation with its treatment of human agency—the way actions find their origins both within and outside of the characters who perform them—and sovereign violence, which is both law breaking and law-establishing.

Key Words

Macbeth; *Hercules Furens*; Massacre of the Innocents; Senecan tragedy; medieval cycle drama; apocalypse; sovereignty.

Loreen L Giese
Contextualizing Domestic Violence:
Modern Distortions of Marital Cruelty in Early Modern England

Modern literary, social, and cultural historians often use the terms “domestic violence” or “violence” to label spousal abuse in early modern England. Whether the abusive behaviors are enacted, threatened, or stifled, these terms distort the original terms, definitions, and contexts of marital abuse in sixteenth and seventeenth-century English suits. As the spousal abuse cases in the London Consistory Court from late sixteenth to early seventeenth century reveal, litigants and witnesses rarely use the term violence in their testimony. This paper discusses the terms, definitions, and contexts of marital abuse these cases document to explore the differences between our modern and their contemporary terms of marital abuse and examine how the modern terms of “domestic violence” and “violence” distort contemporary language, behaviors, and attitudes, thus affecting our interpretations and influencing our methodologies.

Key Words: domestic, violence, marriage, abuse, and distortion.

Dr. Jennifer Lodine-Chaffey

Pity and Compassion at the Scaffold in Early Modern England

Echoes of Violence, Shakespeare Association of America Seminar, Spring 2023

Early modern philosophers and theologians differentiated between clemency and pity, arguing that while the good or masculine type of concern for the sufferings of others involved objectivity and a stoic acceptance of pain's manifestations, bad or feminine pity stemmed from a "feeble mind" and should be avoided. Compassion for the punishment of criminal offenders, in particular, was often suspect, because according to the English translation of Pierre Charon's *Of Wisdom*, such feelings "produceth unjust effects, not respecting the depth and merit of the cause, but the present fortune, state and condition." In short, most 16th and 17th century thinkers advised emotional distance when confronted with the suffering of others. However, in reality many individuals—not just women and children—expressed compassion for the pain of others. In the accounts of English executions in this period, many writers noted the tears and pity of audience members, the calls for compassion from the condemned, as well as the lack of pity expressed by witnesses. While religious sympathies certainly influenced expressions of sorrow and empathy from the crowd at the executions of those labeled as martyrs, responses to witnessing pain and physical violence seem to be linked to a number of other factors. The age and gender of the condemned, the perceived heinousness of the crime, the assessment of the victim's sincere repentance, and the level of violence used against the individual experiencing punishment all impacted the reactions of audience members. This paper will explore execution narratives that describe affective responses from the crowd to determine how and why authors and audience members cultivated "bowels of compassion."

Key Words: violence, pity, compassion, execution, affect, capital punishment

Gabriel Lonsberry

ABSTRACT

Coriolanus, Essex's Rebellion, and January 6th, 2021

When, during the 1608–09 holiday entertainment season, the King's Men staged twelve plays for King James and his court, it is likely that Shakespeare's newest composition, *Coriolanus*, was among them. And if so, the play would inevitably have resonated with growing tensions between the King and his ideologically adversarial son, Prince Henry Frederick. Almost as soon as the pacifist James had ascended the English throne in 1603, militant Protestants cast the young Prince Henry as the future champion of their expansionist ambitions and the savior of a soldierly, chivalric ethos last embodied by Robert Devereux, 2nd Earl of Essex. His early awareness of this dissenting wave of Elizabethan nostalgia is difficult to estimate, but in the years leading up to his sixteenth birthday and 1610 investiture as the Prince of Wales, Henry at last began to vitalize his popular cult and signal his identification with the militant Protestant cause by stepping into the role that had been prepared for him. Indeed, 1608 was a turning point, for the Prince had made his first moves toward cultivating his Essexian image in the public imagination, and the King had responded by commissioning first a pamphlet and then a court masque that denounced his son's militarist mythology and raised the worrying specter of rebellions like Essex's.

It is this specter that would have given Shakespeare's *Coriolanus*—a play about a military hero and his insurrection against Rome—new, perhaps entirely unintended resonances. And I want to examine this episode in order to open a broader conversation about the effects of political context on our own teaching and writing about this play. For now, at least, it is hard to engage with *Coriolanus* or other Shakespearean plays about insurrection without recalling the 6 January 2021 attack on the United States Capitol. This context has changed the play for us, I wish to suggest, just as memories of Essex's Rebellion changed the play for its first court audience.

Paul Werstine
werstine@uwo.ca

Ecchoes of violence from *Romeo and Juliet*

While no doubt there was sword play in the 1590s performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, the ecchoes of violence that descend to us from those performances are entirely verbal in the form of allusions in the play to the manuals on duelling published in the same period. As early as 1783, Edward Capell identified *Vicentio Saviolo his practise*, 1595, as the source of some of these verbal ecchoes, and subsequent Shakespeareans have referred also to *DiGrassi his true Arte of Defence*, 1594. By 1857 Howard Staunton could cite Jerónimo Sánchez de Carranza, *De la Filosofía de las Armas y de su Destreza y la Aggression y Defensa Cristiana* (Medina-Sidonia, 1569) and quote from George Silver's *Paradoxes of Defence*, 1599. Shakespeareans are therefore justifiably confident that they know the sources of such terms as "the immortall Passado [and] the Punto reuerso" that appear in the 1599 printing of *Romeo and Juliet*, but there has been a great deal of debate among editors and scholars over the centuries about just what these terms actually meant and apparently no way of resolving such discussions, as this paper will document.

Allusion, duelling, Saviolo, editing

Kelsey Ridge

Abstract:

My project looks at Ariel in *The Tempest* as the victim of a series of violent colonizers and addresses the role of that trauma in shaping his relationship with Prospero and Caliban. While post-colonial interpretations and adaptations of *The Tempest* often fault Ariel for his subordination or regard him as insufficiently oppositional to Prospero (e.g., Césaire's *Une Tempête*, which styles Ariel as an Uncle Tom), this study argues that Ariel represents another outcome of the enslaved – psychologically-beaten-down victims who become compliant with their abusers in order to survive their situation. This study further analyzes the critical tendency to treat Ariel as a willing subordinate of the imperial Prospero in light of modern society's frequent willingness to blame the enslaved for 'not having tried hard enough' not to be enslaved. This project builds on Adam Beach's work applying modern research on the psychological ramification of slavery to early modern texts; it relies on the psychological and social research, particularly the work of Judith Herman, Elizabeth Hopper, and José Hidalgo.

Key words:

The Tempest; post-colonial criticism; trauma theory; slavery

Julie Prior

KEY WORDS

The Taming of the Shrew; domestic violence; actor biography; marriage; genre and violence; performance history

ABSTRACT

“It is a kind of history”: A real-life couple, domestic violence, and the problem of genre in the Sothern-Marlowe *Taming of the Shrew*”

The Taming of the Shrew is notorious for its frequent deployment of its starring couple’s tumultuous offscreen relationships in service of creating what was meant to be viewed as an overlap between the couple’s onscreen fictional marriage and their real-life relationship. The Taylor and Burton *Shrew* offers a vivid and immediately intelligible representation of the way *Shrew* puts real-life and onstage marriage into relation around problems of violence and genre. In the twentieth century, productions and adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* similarly featured actors with offstage chemistry in order to employ what appeared to be real-life overtones. But while many of these *Shrews* were quite self-conscious in deploying the actors’ reputations, other productions relied more subtly on the actors’ offstage lives to convey a message about the working of domestic violence and abuse. Taking as its main case study the 1905-1923 *Shrew* in the United States starring Julia Marlowe and Edward Hugh Sothern, I am interested in the ways in which couples who starred in *Shrew* relate to the turn toward “authenticity” in stagings of Shakespeare, and how this in turn was related to the play’s representation of marriage.¹

A connected line of inquiry this paper takes up is around genre; contemporary reviews of the Sothern-Marlowe production suggest that this *Shrew* made audiences grapple openly with the problem of genre: what, I ask, is the difference between farce and tragedy, and how do violence and conceptions of actors’ personal lives help us determine that difference? I contend that the actors’ off-stage relationship would have been a part of the audience’s negotiation of this question, and suggest that while the production was often received as, and even thought of itself as, farcical, it nevertheless always veered toward tragedy by representing—and perhaps even endorsing—an abusive relationship between husband and wife. I also explore how, because of what the audience knew (or thought they knew) about the central couple’s offstage relationship, such productions naturalized domestic violence.

¹ For the purposes of this shortened version of my paper, I exemplify this through the study of just one couple. My longer article in progress for *Shakespeare Bulletin* also addresses a second case study in service of this paper’s argument—the 1887-1919 *Shrew* in England featuring another married couple, Frank and Constance Benson, at the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre. I work with the 1921 prompt book from the *Shakespeare Birthplace Trust* archives in discussing this production.

Amanda Eubanks Winkler

Keywords:

Sonic torture, imprisonment, music, violence, *Duchess of Malfi*, John Webster

ABSTRACT

"Sonic Violence: Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi*"

"O Let Us Howle Some Heavy Note" sing the madmen in John Webster's violent tragedy, *The Duchess of Malfi* (1612–13). At this point in the drama, the Duchess is imprisoned, and her brother Ferdinand sends musical madmen to torture her. In the Jacobean-era production these madmen sang Robert Johnson's remarkable tune, which musicalizes the unruly howling of the madmen in discordant and unsettling ways for the early modern listener.

In this paper, I consider how the violent musical past echoes in the present in two modern productions of *The Duchess of Malfi*, the 2013 Greenwich Theatre production and the 2014 Shakespeare's Globe production. The Greenwich Theatre production takes a modern approach to the madmen's interlude, combining insane laughter, electronic distortion, and song. The onstage discomfort of the Duchess also guides audience response: she begins the scene bravely, but the effect of the mad song is evident as she squirms with discomfort and becomes disoriented. Conversely, the Globe production uses period music (or period sounding music) and because the Duchess sings frequently in the production for her own pleasure, she feels sympathy for the musical madmen instead of horror and disdain. By way of conclusion, I connect these divergent musical choices in the 2013 and 2014 productions to recent scholarship about the use of music to torture prisoners in the twenty-first century by Jonathan Pieslak, Suzanne Cusick, Lily Hirsch, and Morag Grant. In the Greenwich production, the strategy of using music as torture is immediately recognizable to modern audiences, and it replicates realities outside the theater. In the Globe production, the text is subverted, the connection between music and torture undermined. The Duchess is a musician who has sympathy for the poor souls who sing and howl, so their tune is not torturous. The echo of violence is silenced.

Megan Snell

Abstract:

This paper considers dramaturgical reverberations of infanticide, a unique form of violence in theatrical performance that exemplifies the echoing nature of violence itself. Played by a prop in both medieval and Renaissance drama, a baby in a play takes on its human identity through a network of actors signaling the prop's role for audiences through gestures and dialogue. When threatened, such horrific violence reverberates out across these networks of performance. The paper begins with *A Yorkshire Tragedy* to explore how violence against a child played by a young actor dramaturgically differs from violence against a baby-prop, as a child narrates and performs his own death but infanticide especially relies upon a network of others to represent this act and convey its effects. I then contextualize the stagecraft of violence against infants in the tradition of the medieval Herod "Massacre [or Slaughter] of the Innocents" mystery plays, which model the triangulating effects of staging infanticide. I conclude by exploring how the Herod "Massacre" plays haunt not only Shakespeare's rhetoric but also his stagecraft, as threats of infanticide catalyze violent reverberations across *Titus Andronicus*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *Macbeth*. While infanticide is ideologically clear in differentiating between victim and perpetrator, the affective combination of violence and infancy creates, and is created by, unwieldy performative forces, illustrating the reiterative nature of violence itself.

Keywords:

Infanticide, performative violence, Herod, *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, Shakespeare

Jeffrey S. Squires
SAA 2023

“is is it; is is our Beast”: Examining violence and the monstrous in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and Ridley Scott’s *Alien*.

Abstract

In this paper, I am interested in how violence resonates in multimodal ways across texts, time, and place as a site of ideology. I explore how film intertextually maintains certain ideological facets of violence that resonate through spectacle, including the way that spectacle seeks to make known both the unknowable and the unknown. This paper takes an odd turn of examining how Shakespeare’s *Tempest* resonates with postcolonial notions of violence in science fiction films, particularly in how the fantastic elements brought before the audience violently demonstrate ideological facets. In other words, postcolonial violence materializes via spectacle as a way of translocating the ideological aspects of genre, text, and film.

I use the case study of the explored relationships of *The Tempest* with Ridley Scott’s dark science fiction film, *Alien* (1979), to categorize three preliminary types of resonating violence: ecological violence, violence toward person, and violence as a boundary of self. I examine how these categories emerge in *The Tempest* and resonate with Scott’s director cut of *Alien*, arguing—at least preliminarily—that this pairing demonstrates a useful entanglement of violence, identity, and expansion that can serve as a basis for building a future framework of analysis.

Keywords: violence; postcolonial; film studies; ideology; spectacle

Jesse Swan
swan.jesse@gmail.com

SAA Seminar: Echoes of Violence
Directors: Samantha Dressel and Matthew Carter

Title

An Early Modern Woman Writes into a Tradition of Violent Sodomy and Murder

Keywords

Sodomy, homophobia, rape, murder, woman writer

Abstract

For the grisly murder of Edward II, Christopher Marlowe famously has the actor impersonating Edward bellow so fiercely that one of the murderers exclaims, "I fear me this cry will raise the town" (5.5.113). Marlowe dramatizes Raphael Holinshed's remark that Edward's "crie did mooue manie within the castell and towne of Berkley to compassion, plainelie hearing him vtter a wailefull noise" (*Holinshed's Chronicles*, [1807] 2.587). Marlowe also dramatizes the use of "a table (as some write)" in the murder scene, but he does not dramatize the more gruesome and sexually perverse sodomitical use of "an horne, and . . . an hot spit" with which the villains burn "his [i.e., Edward II's] intrailles" (2.587). Burning the society clean by the means of the sin plaguing it, the authorities are presented as feeling, the queen and her son can advance a more holy kingdom. This notorious act of violence -- the sodomitical homicide of Edward II -- had many meanings and effects in Shakespeare's England, and my paper draws on several representations in order to explain the meaning for Elizabeth Cary as she engages the shocking tradition in her story of Isabel and Edward.

Title: Shakespeare's Embodied Disembodied Heads

Keywords: Shakespeare, Disembodied Heads, Violence, Memory

In *3 Henry VI*, Margaret has York's head displayed after his death, signifying his treason and serving as a warning to his followers. However, the act doesn't have the intended effect; instead, it racks Henry VI with guilt and inspires his sons to continue their rebellion. Rather than a warning, York's head becomes a reminder of violence previously enacted and encourages more of the same. Shakespeare's plays are filled with these kinds of heads. Displayed, cradled, thrown: they remind characters and audience alike of preceding brutality. This essay considers how beheading creates a uniquely violent echo that resonates within and across plays. The disembodied heads that reappear both passively remind viewers of past scenes and actively accuse those who witness them, influencing events long after their body's demise. By examining Shakespeare's many beheadings, we can see how the thud of a fallen head marks more than the end of a character. In some ways, the violence is only beginning.

Paul Joseph Zajac
SAA 2023
Seminar: Echoes of Violence

Echoes of Peace: Intertextuality, Humanism, and Violence in Shakespeare's *King John*

Abstract: Though Shakespeare's ambitious English history cycle chronicles a series of civil and foreign wars, the language of peace echoes throughout the plays. Despite being the shortest of these histories, *King John* contains 45 instances of the word "peace" and its variants—the most of any work by Shakespeare. Modern peace theorists encourage us to conceptualize peace as more than simply the opposite of war, so that we can privilege a positive, active peace over a negative peace defined by absence. Even so, *King John* insistently reenforces such a binary opposition—an opposition that rarely bodes well for peace. The predominant experience of the play for both characters and audiences is one of whiplash, with circumstances and alliances changing constantly and abruptly. Calls for peace turn to cries for war, and a treaty is dissolved the very day it is formalized. Moreover, the characters' Christian beliefs, which could encourage them to pursue peaceful solutions, are instead used to justify war (an intellectual tradition owing much to Augustine and Aquinas), and Cardinal Pandulph emerges as the clerical figure responsible for perpetuating otherwise avoidable violence. This essay considers the play's discourse of peace (its nature, its value, and its fragility) in relation to two possible intertexts: Desiderius Erasmus's proto-pacifist writings and George Peele's *The Troublesome Reign of King John*. Collectively, these texts give voice to the urgency and difficulty of peace in an increasingly violent, divided world, and they expose the especial threats posed by religious authorities who abuse their power to incite conflict rather than promote peace.

Keywords: Peace, War, Erasmus, Religion, History Plays, Intertextuality