

Group 1: Epistemologies of Ghosts and Monsters

‘The Unbaptised Race’

Hanh Bui, Shakespeare’s Globe

This paper examines how non-white racialised embodiment is represented as ‘bare’ matter—formless, abject, and ambiguously animate—in medieval and early modern texts. I begin with a discussion of *The King of Tars*, a fourteenth-century romance in which a monstrous, shapeless infant is transformed into a ‘fair’, recognizably human child through the ritual of Christian baptism. Drawing on theorists including Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Zakiyyah Iman Jackson, I consider how the poem constructs ‘bare life’, a being-ness suspended between potentiality and exclusion from what Sylvia Wynter calls the ‘genre of Man’. More specifically, I explore how the spectre of hybridized, semi-abortive life haunts *The Tempest* in two ways: through the characterisation of Caliban as a ‘moon-calf’, the alleged love-child of the devil and a North African witch, as well as the anticipated future offspring of Claribel, princess of Naples, and the African King of Tunis, a union that Shakespeare frames as non-consensual—or at the very least, coerced by Claribel’s father. In both texts, the question of consent is bound to anxieties about Islam, sexual reproduction, racial purity, legitimacy, and the unstable boundaries of ‘human’ identity.

A Ghost in the Playhouse: The Spectral Underworld’s Queering of

Death and Time in *Macbeth*

Saraya Haddad

As its name indicates, The Globe, like many playhouses of its time, was architecturally designed to be a theatrical microcosm of the cosmos. The ceiling above the stage symbolised the heavens, the stage the earth, and beneath the stage, hell. With the opening of a trap door, the underworld beneath the stage, and earth above the stage experience a glitch between their respective temporal planes, opening a portal in which death seeps into life. In *Queer Phenomenology* Sara Ahmed writes that to ‘make things queer’ is to ‘disturb the order of things’ as the hetero-temporal world is ‘organized around certain forms of living- certain times, spaces, and directions.’¹ Queer time is anti-chrononormative, it unearths rhythms, timings and crossovers which exist beyond and consequently unravel a linear conception of temporality. In *Macbeth*, the queerness of Banquo’s ghost body, which is built on contradictions- present yet absent, fleshy yet incorporeal, dead yet alive-distorts and disorients chrononormativity. Drawing on the knotty messaging throughout Shakespeare’s lifetime surrounding the existence of ghosts, as well as the resulting mass confusion felt about spectral figures in the period, this paper looks at how Banquo’s ghost exhumes queer temporality, unleashing it from the underworld onto the early modern stage. Ultimately, by queering audience members’ experience of time, Banquo’s “ghost” brings the world of the dead into the world of the living, collapsing the distinctions between each realm.

Reading in Defense of Secrets

Kate Bolton Bonnici

This paper brings together Anne Dufourmantelle's *In Defense of Secrets* and two haunted early modern works—the pamphlet “Great News from Middle Row in Holbourn: or a True Relation of a Dreadful Ghost which Appeared in the Shape of one Mrs. Adkins” and “A New Ballad of The Midwives Ghost”—to consider how one might read and write about the (un)dead without excavating and textualizing the exhumed corpse/corpus. In the opening of “Great News,” the author describes how “this weighty secret has been long concealed, but since the great God has thought fit that such a Monstrous Crime as that Appearance did portend, should be no longer hid or masked, in Darkness be forever silent,” inviting us to share in a harrowing tale of midwifery, illegitimate birth, murder, hearth burial, and festering guilt that leads to ghostly revelation—all the while making the argument that revelation is a good thing. This is a tale of disinterment that scholarship often mimics. As Thea Tomaini writes in *The Corpse as Text*, “[d]isinterment represents a form of historical materialism in which the corpse is the ‘thing’ that generates intellectual energy” (9). But must we textualize the corpse? More precisely, must we textualize the corpse as narrative? What other forms and methods of attention are available? How might one be a scholar of early modernity and death studies without a desire for excavation? How might scholarship “defend the body’s secret[s]” and research preserve secret-keeping (Dufourmantelle 43)? How might we write against the grain of narrative impulse?

Group 2: Apocalyptic Afterlives

They Keep Coming Back: How Shakespeare Became a Charismatic Killer

Mary Odbert

In the prologue to *Two Noble Kinsmen*, Shakespeare and Fletcher warn the audience that their undue hissing might “shake the bones of that good man and make him cry from underground,” unleashing the reanimated corpse of Chaucer on the adapters. Following in the zombified steps of his own undead idol, Shakespeare’s posthumous consecrations in the publication of the *Folio*, the preservation of his hometown, and centuries of stagings not only of his characters but his own likeness create a persistent catalogue of Shakespeare’s mortal remains all variously undergoing their own material processes of decay. This paper explores the primacy of viscera in the specific monstrosity of the zombie to situate the material remains of Shakespeare amid the postmodern crystallization of cinematic zombie mechanics and cultural capital.

Taking Freddy Krueger as a case study, this analysis traces the paradoxical emergence in the 1980s of the individuated zombie out of the previously undifferentiated masses which initially defined the genre. Building upon Paul Budra’s notion of the charismatic recurrent monster, this analysis aligns Shakespearean cultural capital with the popularity-driven resurrections of figures like Freddy Krueger and Jason Voorhees as a means of identifying the points at which

Shakespeare the playwright transcends mortality and returns as an idea, personified, activated, and even embodied, but whose individual autonomy remains buried at Holy Trinity. Despite the request etched upon his grave not to move his bones, the notion of the reanimated writer summoned by a particularly impressive (or particularly atrocious) production of his work reminds us that the autonomy enabling such an etching in life is precisely what is lost in death. By reading Shakespearean adaptation through the lens of the charismatic recurrent monster, this analysis pushes beyond the life and death of the author to propose a third methodology which holds the author as both post-autonomous human and present concept in the zombified author.

Prophets of the Blasted Heath: Blighted Lands and Blighted People

From Shakespeare to Vandermeer

Jeffrey Squires

In my seminar paper, I'm interested in exploring the "Blasted Heath" as an apocalyptic, environmental metaphor that speaks to the corruption of those who encounter a cursed land. A famous example is H.P. Lovecraft's reference in "The Colour out of Space" drawn from either Shakespeare's *MacBeth* (I.iii l. 77) or Milton's *Paradise Lost* (I l. 615), where the term connotes a type of divine blight. The "blasted heath" is repurposed by later dark science fiction writers to contextualize the monstrous ways that the land, its inhabitants, and divinity become entangled so that the people within these lands become a monstrous other to all who encounter them. Lovecraft's usage prescribes a particular corruption of a common ecological principle, an type of inversion of Darwin's famous "tangled bank" (*Origin of Species* 429) or the more contemporary Gaian Hypothesis. The early modern precedent implies that the land and people are entangled so that this ecological feature also functions as a divine curse.

For my seminar paper, I focus on how this concept captures an impingement of agency and autonomy wherein the land must reflect human corruption but humans also are powerless to escape the corruption of the land. Signaled in both *MacBeth* and *Paradise Lost*, this loss of autonomy and agency manifests in contemporary dark science fiction like HBO's *Last of Us* and Vandermeer's *Annihilation* where human actors are entangled with a blighted land so that they must bear within them this blight forever more. While neither of those works manifest 'zombies' in a manner similar to say Romero's zombies, they speak to how humans are enslaved to a greater ecological being that strips them of agency and autonomy.

Is this the Beginning of Zombie Shakespeare?

What *The Simpsons* Can Tell Us About Shakespeare in the 21st Century

Katherine Hennessey

This paper explores allusions to Shakespeare, zombies, and the undead in the American animated TV series *The Simpsons*. Starting with the cameo appearance in the third "Treehouse of Horror" Halloween episode (Season 4, episode 5) of a ghoulish character in an Elizabethan ruff who asks plaintively "Is this the end of Zombie Shakespeare?" and moving through other notable

Simpsons Shakespeare references like the series' parodies of *Hamlet* ("Tales from the Public Domain," Season 13, episode 14) and *Macbeth* ("Four great women and a manicure," Season 20, Episode 20), this paper argues that *The Simpsons'* depictions of Shakespeare as 'undead' critique the privileged place he and his work continue to be accorded in contemporary literary and social discourse. The paper also examines how changes to the writing of the long-running series from Season 8 onwards have given rise to accusations that it has now become the "Zombie Simpsons," a heartless, brainless shell of its former self—an ironic parallel to the accusations that the series itself previously leveled at contemporary Shakespearean discourse and performance.

Group 3: The Biopolitics of Zombie Contagions

“Reproduction, White Royal Womanhood, and Trans feminization in *Henry VIII* or *All is True*”

Mira ‘Assaf

Royal occasions draw out eager spectators who have opinions, affects, and embodiments, upon which the state imposes its regulatory structures. In the ritualized movement of a monarchical progress, an intensification of raced, gendered, and classed respectability politics comes to the surface, where the division between groups of people is parsed out, its contours clearly delineated, and deviations from it are swiftly disciplined. In William Shakespeare's and John Fletcher's *Henry VIII* or *All is True* (1613), public ceremonies create a particular dynamic in which an arrangement of gender politics, reproductive embodiment, and the accumulation of capital are enfolded in the biopolitical technologies of imperial expansion and population control. With an eye to the zombified commoners populating key scenes of royal pageantry and statecraft, particularly Anne Boleyn's (Bullen in the play) coronation, Katherine of Aragon's classed defense of the protesting commons, and the baptism of the baby princess Elizabeth I, this essay considers how the play's obsession with class segregation, unstable bodies, and reproductive futurity underwrites the state's biopolitical management of racialized gender politics on which two orderings of sexuality rest: the induction of Anne Boleyn and Princess Elizabeth in the exclusive domain of white royal womanhood, wherein procreative powers secure the royal line, transfer of property, and enlargement of capital. While *Henry VIII* opens with a portrayal of Katherine of Aragon as fully acculturated in the role of England's virtuous queen, she is stripped of this status during the play and re-inscribed into the category of suspicious foreign queen once Anne Boleyn enters the chat. In another quarter, the construction of the unruly commoners places them as a racialized, corporeal problem to the body politic that needs to be controlled and excised. What might these antithetical yet parallel figurations of bodies in motion from an early modern history play teach us about trans feminization, bodily sovereignty, intimacy, and the continued state oppression of the lives and livelihoods of trans people in the present?

Contagion and Disintegration: Monstrous Bodies and Biopolitical Anxieties in *Titus Andronicus*

Jo Rho

This paper examines how Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus*, written during London's recurrent plague outbreaks (including one just a year prior to its premiere), reflects the public health concerns of Elizabethan England through grotesque spectacles of violence, bodily invasion, and narrative fragmentation. I argue that the play provokes an affective response in the theater to the frequent outbreaks of plague, with its dismembered bodies and disrupted boundaries revealing the fragility of human sovereignty. Its weak and chaotic plot embodies an infected body—disrupted, incoherent, and susceptible to decay—positioning *Titus* within proto-zombie narratives that blur the boundaries between life and death. These elements offer a metaphor for the biopolitical challenges of managing contagion and the fragile divide between health and disease in Elizabethan society. Building on Antonin Artaud's *Theater of Cruelty*, this essay argues that *Titus Andronicus* operates as a theater of miasmas, dramatizing a contagion of violence that spreads across both its narrative world and the audience. Artaud's notion of theater unearthing “dormant images” resonates with Shakespeare's visceral depictions of death and decay, which evoke fears of disease, cultural “others,” and bodily disintegration. By centering on the “mouth” as a site of physical and metaphorical contamination, the essay interweaves New Materialism, monster theory, and biopolitics to explore *Titus* as a theater of bodies and grotesque affects. In sum, *Titus Andronicus* emerges as a text on monstrosity, which embodies Shakespeare's undead legacy. It reanimates Elizabethan cultural anxieties, offers a metaphorical plague-house, and anticipates theater's transformative power to disrupt and reshape communal understandings of life, death, and disease.

Narrating the Zombie Apocalypse: Dekker's *Wonderful Year* (1603)

Penelope Usher

The Wonderful Year, Thomas Dekker's 1603 plague pamphlet, presents apocalyptic descriptions of the plague-ridden streets of London and the infected Londoners whose dead and dying bodies spread the disease in the city's close quarters. In this paper, I will examine how Dekker's descriptions of plaguey bodies (which occupy a sort of limbo between life and death) and the plague-ridden city (whose own vital functions are ground to a halt by the devastating mortality unfolding within it) confer upon them a zombie-like status. In particular, I will explore how London is portrayed as a flesh-eating monster, comprised of but also distinct from the living-dead plague victims who inhabit it; how Dekker depicts Elizabeth I as a sort of “Patient Zero” whose own (un)death throws the lives of her subjects into flux; and, finally, how Dekker employs the conceptual framework of undeath to characterize his own text, his own position as author, and the status of his readers. No one—within or outside the world of Dekker's text—seems to escape the zombie apocalypse that consumes it from the inside out.

Group 4: Aesthetics and Erotics of the Undead

Shakespeare's (Un)Dying Women and the Aesthetics of Necromantic Desire

Ani Govjian

The crimson splash of Juliet's lips and cheeks, Ophelia's "mermaid-like" drowned repose, Hermione's warm stone body, Hero's return as "Another Hero!" just as beautiful as ever, and Cleopatra's "strong toil of grace" that could lure yet "another Antony" in her sleep-like death are all marks of pretty "dead" things. They appear in Shakespeare's plays that aestheticize the death or near-death states of tragi-femme characters to create a visual narrative of reanimation where death is necessarily performative.

In plays like *The Winter's Tale*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Cymbeline*, and *Pericles*, resurrection is a key element of plot where death is transformative rather than final. In plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Othello*, the language of resurrection is used as a metaphorical device to confer a fleeting rebirth. Such moments attempt to invoke the divine or uncanny when situating these characters as haunting figures poised between life and death. How? By demanding we look upon their corpses or effigies and see otherworldly beauty that belies the decay and grotesquery of their suffering.

A stunningly painful complication to a schema that mingles the beautiful and the dead in Shakespeare's oeuvre is Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*. While Shakespeare transforms the deaths of so many heroines into spectacles of beauty, serenity, or transcendence, the brutal damage inflicted onto "lovely" Lavinia's body ushers in a faltering half-life or undeath where the cruelty of her perpetrators ensures her continued suffering. My paper will examine depictions of heroines who experience

The Undead Consort in *The Lady's Tragedy*

Margaret Owens

The Lady's Tragedy, a play now included in the canon of Thomas Middleton, features an outrageous sequence of desecrations of the remains of virtuous woman, beginning with the disinterment of her corpse from its resting place to serve as an undead consort to a lust-driven Tyrant. The series of desecrations of the Lady's corpse reaches its culmination when her husband, the true king, poisons his dead wife's lips to deliver the fatal kiss to the tyrant. In a passage marked by the censor for deletion, the Lady's corpse is honoured with a posthumous coronation by her husband, who has now regained the throne. Difficulties abound in the play's attempt to negotiate the dual identities of the Lady as spirit and body after her death. In the final scene, two versions of the Lady—corpse and spirit—appear together on the stage. As much as the play confounds distinctions between body and spirit, it also unsettles the antithesis of chaste and unchaste femininity. By contextualizing *The Lady's Tragedy* in relation to royal funerary practices involving effigies, I argue that the play registers ambivalences and uncertainties over the nature of sovereignty and its embodiment.

Zombie Resurrection in Shakespeare and Donne

Tracey Miller-Tomlinson

“To sleep, perchance to dream,” the “dread of something after death”: I propose to examine Hamlet’s fear of death as a fear of resurrection, a monstrous reawakening from, and yet still in, the flesh. I read Hamlet’s “to be or not to be speech” (3.1.64-98), as well as his belated self-declaration at Ophelia’s grave, alongside resurrection imagined by Williams in *Henry V*, in which soldiers’ fragmented body parts cry out for justice. Williams’ battlefield resurrection insists on the voice and individuality that zombifying elites of the *Henriad* seek to redact from the common flesh. However politically restorative this vision of resurrection in *Henry V*, Hamlet’s fear of a living and incomplete death, rather than a totalizing end, engages the monstrousness of the Resurrection in Christian thought. (Given space, *Henry V*’s political deployment of resurrection may be compared with George Romero’s anti-capitalist *Land of the Dead*.) John Donne in *Death’s Duell* (1630) welcomes a correspondingly revenant monstrousness as dissolving the boundaries of living and dead so that all are living dead, from the unconscious fetus to the “universal churchyard” of the world in which the appearance of “life and motion...is but as the shaking of buried bodies in their grave” (171). The Resurrection, as distinctly imagined by Shakespeare and Donne, demonstrates Jeffrey Jerome Cohen’s first and second theses about the monster, that “the monstrous body is pure culture” (4), and that “the monster always escapes” as “the undead returns” (5). The resurrected body, disallowed to die in *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, and *Death’s Duell*, epitomizes Cohen’s description of the monster as a “problem...that unsettles what has been constructed to be received as natural, as human,” and “an intriguing simultaneity or doubleness: like the ghost of Hamlet” that demands to be “remembered” (ix). In their dependence on the eucharistic consumption of Christ’s undead flesh and blood, these resurrections may be read as zombifications of the human that constrain the agency of the after-living even as they restore a flesh whose status (old, infirm, scattered, doubled, corrupt) is the subject of deep anxiety expressed through an idiom of horror.

The Living Sculptural Bust in Seventeenth-Century Author Portraits

Marlin E. Blaine

The seventeenth century saw the development of a portrait type that I have identified as “the living bust,” though images of this type are graphic representations of busts, not actual sculptures. They depict sitters as classical busts, but rather than employ the grisaille technique by



which artists typically mimic carved stone, they adopt a multitone method to present illusionistically rendered flesh, hair, and facial expressions that suggest an active subjectivity in a disembodied head and upper torso. These images typify in some ways the often disorienting and visually illogical effects of Baroque aesthetics. Originating in the work of Peter Paul Rubens, the living bust motif quickly became a popular format for author portraits (often posthumous) on frontispieces and title pages of books printed in England and Northern Europe. I suggest that its proliferation resulted not only from the prestige of its originator but also from its function as a visual analogue of the

classical topos that authors' works are "living monuments" in which a part of them survives after bodily death. The uncanny figures seen in these portraits appear to be living but cannot be alive in any ordinary understanding of the term. They lack trunks that would house vital organs and limbs that would signify physical agency, yet their animated visages suggest the operation of a consciousness, and their pictorial placement, usually centered or elevated, imparts authority. Rosemarie Garland-Thomson has argued that the "armless and legless wonders" of nineteenth-century freakshows challenged spectators "to determine the precise parameters of human wholeness and the limits of free agency." Living busts, as a kind of undead or spectral presence, also challenge those parameters and limits, though from a different direction, countervailing the inevitability of bodily death with an image of a transcendent, yet strangely diminished authorial ego.