

# Reading Madness in the Archive: Shakespeare's Unread "Letters"

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## Abstract

Materialist Shakespeare criticism focusing on writing practices and utensils has tended to shelve the task of reading, abandoning philology and questions of textual corruption while reducing the temporality of objects to the spatial textual metaphor of the palimpsest. In response, Burt calls for a return to philology as a "textual fauxrensic," with close attention to what Derrida calls the "spectral structure of the archive." Some of Shakespeare's plays' letters go unread, moments frequently attached to madness that demand a different reading or a recording, a setting down. Examples of unread letters are to be found in scenes in *Twelfth Night*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Henry V*, *Titus Andronicus*, and *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare's unread letters put critical pressure on the ordinary understanding of letters, as if forcing the word into scare quotes — "letters" — letters meaning both messages with material supports and alphabetic letters. These letters also put critical pressure on what we mean by "reading," since some of these "letters" go unread, although not literally so. Burt discusses unread letters as multi-media archival effects — not as open and shut letters (enveloped, addressed, and posted significations), but as open and "cut" letters, taking the blurring between alphabetic letters and the material supports of letters as text messages. The material supports include not only paper, but also the mutilated body and even the wounded corpse, both in need of reading. Scenes of reading letters in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Romeo and Juliet* call up deconstruction's ghosts, leaving open whether letters (Derrida) or language (De Man) has priority over the other.

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*No, madam, I do but read madness. An mean your ladyship will have it as it ought to be, you must allow vox. — Twelfth Night*

*De foot et de coun! O Seigneur Dieu! ce sont mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique, et non pour les dames d'honneur d'user. — Henry V*

*No philological fundamentalism will ever efface the incredible fortune of the brilliant invention. For there is here, without doubt, a staggering artifact, the casualness of an exegetical move as hazardous as it is generous — indeed abyssal — in its very generativity. Of how many great texts would we have*

*been deprived had someone (but who, in fact?) had not one day taken, and perhaps, like a great card player, deliberately feigned to take, one omega for another? Not even one accent for another, barely one letter for another, only a soft spirit for a hard one — and the omission of the subscript iota. — Jacques Derrida, *The Politics of Friendship**

*I am indeed not her fool, but her corrupter of words. — Twelfth Night*

*There is never a choice between what is to be read in an open book (as visible as the nose in the middle of one's "face"!) and the most hermetic script. It's the same — insupportable support. I didn't dare say "like a post card," the atmosphere was too pious. On the way out, diverse presentations. "With you, one can no longer present oneself," a young American (I think) woman says to me. She gives me to understand that she has read (before me, therefore, she was just coming from the U.S.) "Moi, la psychanalyse" in which I let play, in English the so difficult-to-translate vocabulary of presentation, of presentations, of "introductions," etc. — Jacques Derrida*

### Shakespeare's Archive Fever

Is there a substantial, rigorous difference between Malvolio's mad desire to read Olivia's very C's, U's and T's in the letter Maria wrote, forging Olivia's handwriting, and the critical desire in attribution studies to discover manuscripts with Shakespeare's handwriting, his very C's, U's, and T's?<sup>1</sup> I would answer my question in the negative. Textual forensics, I am quite willing to grant, is always more or less delusional, archival work being, by definition, feverish, a textual "fauxrensic," so to speak (Derrida 1995). Shakespeare's texts are corrupt and corrupting from the start. He is a "corrupter of words," as Feste puts it in *Twelfth Night*, a writer of foreign "mots de son mauvais, corruptible, gros, et impudique," as Princess Katherine puts it in *Henry V*.

In what follows, I am less concerned to demonstrate this rather broad argument about textual fauxrensic than I am with questions about unreadability, inaudibility, unreportability, and unarchivability that arise if we consider the First Folio as a palimpsest, an archive of performances and texts that can never be metaphorically X-rayed, then sorted and shelved according to the protocols of genetic criticism, or what I call "Under the Influence Studies."<sup>2</sup> Taking Jacques Derrida's work on archive fever as my point of departure, I will discuss unread "letters" as multi-media archival effects — not as open and shut letters, enveloped, addressed, and posted significations, but as open and "cut" letters, blurring between alphabetic letters and the material supports of letters as hand-written messages (Derrida 1995).<sup>3</sup> Derrida is particularly concerned with how writing media such as the fax, invented after Freud, have forced us to re-

conceptualize the archive and to reread Freud such that the space of the archive cannot be entirely mapped, metaphorically. Reading the archive in relation to Sigmund Freud's account of repetition compulsion and the death drive, Derrida maintains that an "anarchivity" of the archive produces inevitable breakdowns that compromise the archive's appearance of complete storage, preservation, retrieval, and recall and that therefore open the future to the possibility of what Derrida calls, after Kant and Arendt, "radical evil." As Derrida writes, "The archivist produces more archive, and that is why the archive is never closed. It opens out of the future" (1995, 45). Moreover, the anarchivity of the archive shatters all attempts to configure it either topographically, as if the archive were a building with a street address, or as a timeline. For Derrida, the archive is about the future, not the past, and archive fever arises from the structural possibility of the archive's self-destruction:

The *trouble de l'archive* stems from a *mal d'archive*. We are *en mal d'archive*: in need of archives. Listening to the French idiom, and in the attribute "en mal de," to be *en mal d'archive* can mean something else than to suffer from a sickness, from a trouble or from what the noun "mal" might name. It is to burn with a passion. It is never to rest, interminably from searching for the archive right where it slips away. It is to run after the archive, even if there's too much of it, right where something in it archives itself. It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a home sickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement. No desire, no passion, no drive, no compulsion, indeed no repetition compulsion, no "mal-de" can arise for a person who is not already, in one way or another, *en mal d'archive*. (Derrida 1995, 57)

My discussion of Shakespeare's archive fever will involve close readings of moments in Shakespeare's plays where "letters" go unread by characters, moments frequently attached to madness that demand a reading, reporting, or a recording, a setting down.

By refusing to limit the madness of Shakespeare's text, to think the text instead as a *pharmakon*, a poison and a remedy, I put the relation between letters as material supports, with messages and letters as alphabetic characters, into question.<sup>4</sup> Line delivery, as it were, is always a promise, dependent, as Feste says, on "vox." In what I take to be the madness of Shakespeare's text, the breakdown of the disciplinary distinction between textual criticism and literary criticism, that text ends up sedated and confined to the madness of particular characters, by simultaneously defaulting madness to ego psychology, as if we knew what madness is, or to the history of madness as written by Michel Foucault and anti-psychiatrists (Foucault 2006). Having caught the Freudian fever contracted in Derrida's psychoanalytic archive, I attempt to resist the impulse to

displace the meaning of character as letter by the meaning of character as a person with a coherent psychology, a character whose self-deceptions, darker purposes, and manipulative behavior may be traced through sophisticated close readings of speeches preceded and contained, as it were, by proper names.<sup>5</sup> I put the word "character" in "character criticism" in quotation marks, just as I put "letters" in quotation marks. I read "characters" as "letters," messages addressed, attributed or signed by proper names, "characters" as quasi-human, quasi-writing and archiving machines, at times functional, at times dysfunctional. In addition, considered as an archival question, reading "letters" also turns on death, specters, and the disposition of the corpse.

"What do you read, my lord? Words. Words. Words."

Two famous textual cruxes, one in *Hamlet*, the other in *King Lear*, throw into bold relief the way in which reading aloud a letter that is a prop may call into question whether the character reading the letter is quoting it directly or not. When Polonius reads aloud Hamlet's love letter to Ophelia, he occasionally interjects comments on Hamlet's "vile" word choice. Editors often help readers by inserting the word "reads" and italicizing the letter. Consider the Arden 3 *Hamlet*, edited by Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor: "[*Reads*] *To the celestial and my soul's idol . . . [Reads] 'In her excellent white bosom, these, etc. . . . Thine evermore, most dear lady, whilst this machine is to him, HAMLET'*" (Thompson and Taylor 2006, 2.2.108-21). The crux is the meaning of the word "etc." Is Polonius quoting Hamlet here? Or is Polonius abbreviating the letter? In a footnote on "etc.," Thompson and Taylor observe that "either Hamlet, in writing the superscription, or, more likely, Polonius, in reading it, abbreviates the commendations" (Thompson and Taylor 2006, 245). Quite reasonably, Thompson and Taylor do not put "etc." in italics. Nevertheless, the crux becomes more puzzling if we conclude that Polonius says "etc." rather than quotes it from the letter. For in response to Gertrude's question — "comes this letter from Hamlet to her?" — Polonius says that he "will be faithful." Thompson and Taylor gloss these words as "I will keep my word (to tell you everything)', or perhaps 'I will read the entire letter'" (Thompson and Taylor 2006, 245-46). When Polonius finishes reading it, however, he will clearly not have read the entire letter. His fidelity is breeched by an editorial judgment to abridge part of Hamlet's letter, even if that part is without consequence and Polonius' abridgement reasonable.

The crux in *King Lear* is more substantive. It is impossible to decide what Kent quotes or does not quote from Cordelia's letter after he has been put in the stocks.<sup>6</sup> In a note to the Quarto *History of King Lear* in *William Shakespeare: Oxford Textual Companion* (1987), Gary Taylor begins an extraordinarily lengthy and brilliant commentary on this passage with this sentence: "This whole passage — 'and shall find time / from this enormous [*sic*] state, seeking to giue [*sic*] /

Losses y [*sic*] remedies' — is one of the most difficult cruxes in the canon," adding that "nor can we easily assume that Kent reads two isolated phrases, out of context, from the letter" (G. Taylor 1987, 245).<sup>7</sup> In the Arden second edition of *King Lear*, R. A. Foakes tries to resolve the crux both by inserting a stage direction and by silently adding quotation marks to isolate the second of the two phrases that Kent reads aloud: "[*reading the letter*] 'and shall find time / From this enormous state, seeking to give losses their remedies'" (Foakes 1997, 236). In a note, Foakes writes that "Kent could be reading from Cordelia's letter here. Q and F agree in this obscure passage, regarded by most scholars as corrupt" (262; see also 166-68). As Alan Stewart comments, "This passage has caused editors considerable grief. How does Kent have a letter in his possession? How does it reach him? Does he read it at this point? Are some of these words then Cordelia's? — as R. A. Foakes's edition, cited here, suggests? Or all of them Kent's?" (Stewart 2009, 220). These are all wonderfully feverish questions. A materialist "reading" of written letters in *King Lear* that focuses on material supports, the messages on them, and their messengers, however, reduces reading to the sending, transmission, and reception of information. A materialist reading is a reading that refuses to read, to account for the play's resistance to reading letters. This resistance generates the kinds of textual forensics questions that Stewart raises while making answers to them maddeningly elusive. In one case, as Stewart notes, we cannot be sure if a character is referring to a written letter, adding that "even the letter disappears" (2009, 220).<sup>8</sup>

Even when there clearly is a prop for a letter, the prop is not transparently readable. For example, as a prop, Maria's forged letter poses problems of staging. How many times does Malvolio unfold it as he reads it aloud? Where is the postscript? Is it written on the letter? Or is it an attachment? Similarly, when the dying Edmund sends his sword, in afterthought, along with a message to stay the executions of Cordelia and Lear, the prop adds nothing to the message it supplements. Edmund's message neither condemns nor saves Cordelia and Lear; it may never have arrived. Furthermore, when Titus refers to "bloody lines" written in paper on the death sentence he shows to Tamora when she impersonates "Revenge," it is not clear whether he means that the "lines" have been written in blood or he is being hyperbolic: "for what I mean to do / See here in bloody lines I have set down; / And what is written shall be executed" (*Titus Andronicus*, 5.2.13-14).<sup>9</sup> If Titus does mean literally "bloody," whose blood did he use as ink? His own?<sup>10</sup> In addition to these performance problems is a question internal to *Twelfth Night* that involves Feste reading aloud Malvolio's letter. Olivia stops him from reading it, apparently because Feste is doing so in some of objectionable manner. Feste answers in his defense, "I do but read madness. An mean your ladyship

will have it as it ought to be, you must allow *vox*" (*Twelfth Night*, 5.1.308-10). Of course, what Feste means by "as it ought to be," what it means to read madness, we can never know.

"I do not mean to read." — *Julius Caesar*

To wish for an archive of letters as intact material supports with legible writing, the wish for audio-recordings of speech in Shakespeare's voice, is to wish for a supplement, another text message that is not reducible to a prosthesis or material support.<sup>11</sup> Consider the way in which alphabetic letters involve an improvised writing prop, sign-language, and translation when Lucius Marcus finds Lavinia, mutilated and mute, in *Titus Andronicus*. Even before Lavinia manages to spell out "rape" in Latin and the names of her violators with her "stumps," Lucius Marcus says he will turn her gestures and signs into "an alphabet" in order to "understand her" (*Titus Andronicus*, 3.2.41-43). Titus asks "O, do ye read, my lord, what she hath writ? / '*Stuprum*. Chiron. Demetrius'" (4.1.76-77). Although the alphabetic letters here are read aloud, they are rendered readable only through textual metaphors — "pen" and "print" — and the example, provided by Lucius Marcus himself: "[L]ook here, Lavinia: / This sandy plot is plain; guide, if thou canst / [. . .] / Heaven guide thy pen to print thy sorrows plain" (4.1.69-70, 76). Even what she will have written is described not as words, but as what they will have allowed her to express, namely, her "sorrows." The Latin word Lavinia writes, "*stuprum*," meaning "rape," is not translated into English by Shakespeare, as if the act were unspeakable, and "*stuprum*" oddly echoes the word "stumps" in the stage direction given just before Titus says the word, as if writing and rape could not either be separated or severed through translation: "*She takes the staffe in her mouth, and guides it with her stumps and writes.*" The stage direction creates a staging problem as well, since the "sandy plot" is apparently to be imagined, the writing on it hallucinated by the audience.

Moreover, Lavinia's writing proceeds indirectly, as if through an archive, by way of culling a book off a shelf, reading it, and "quoting" it. When Titus notices that Lavinia "busily turns the leaves" (4.1.48) of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, stops at "the tragic tale of Philomel" (4.1.47), and asks her "Shall I read?" (4.1.47), Marcus says, "Note how she quotes the leaves" (52). The use of "quotes" is certainly odd, but the word "quotes" stresses both how Lavinia's report is a repetition of another rape, a quotation of a book, and how her writing the names of the perpetrators repeats the example Titus offers her: "*He writes the name with his staff, and guides it with his feet and mouth*" (4.1.68).

Performance in the Archive as Pronunciation

We may gain a clearer understanding of what Derrida would call the "anarchivity" of Shakespeare's archive if we turn to alphabetic letters in the English lesson scene of *Henry V*.<sup>12</sup> Repetition is crucial to Derrida's account of the structure of the archive:

[W]e must also remember that repetition itself, the logic of repetition, indeed the repetition compulsion, remains, according to Freud, indissociable from the death drive. And thus from destruction. Consequence: right on what permits and conditions archivization, we will never find anything other than what exposes to destruction, in truth what menaces with destruction introducing, a priori, forgetfulness and the archiviolithic into the heart of the monument. (Derrida 1995, 14)

Quotation marks, or the lack thereof, in the letters we discussed in *Hamlet* and *King Lear* underscore only one of the forms in which the repetition of "letters" is present in Shakespeare's "letters." Sometimes repetition bears on pronunciation by making it possible to hear alphabetic letters activating puns. The English lesson in *Henry V* makes something clear that is harder to see in the examples we have hitherto discussed: repetition structures readability. As Gary Taylor says in an astute note in his edition of the play, the Princess activates a series of bi-lingual bawdy puns by reciting (the French word "recitation" is hers) English words that she has (mis)translated: She (mis)hears the English word "foot" as the French word "foutre," sometimes glossed as ejaculate, but more often glossed as "fuck"; and editors of the play tend to help the Princess out, translating "la robe" as "gown" when Alice (mis)pronounces it as "coun" (phonetically, in modern English, "cown"), so that it may also heard as French for "con" and then translated back into English glossed by editors as "cunt").<sup>13</sup> There is an odd sonic repetition in two French words, however, before her "recitation," which is activated by French pronunciation of the Princess's phrasing "ce sont de mots son," meaning "are bad sounding words." A strange homonymic effect, in which a non-signifying repetition is already installed in "sont" and "son" by muting — literally, not reading — the letter "t" in "sont," an unspoken, inaudible letter dropped at the very moment the Princess is expressing her disgust not at the "bad" ("mauvais") English words she mistakenly thinks she has just learned but at their sound: "Ce sont mots de son mauvais." The Princess's "letters," in this case, are not just unread, but unsound. And by "unsound" I mean not only unspoken and unheard but faulty, a word I use advisedly, and this repetition, not the recitation, approaches whatever serves to border what I consider to be the madness of the text and the madness of reading. In the Princess's unreadable, inaudible muting of two letters, I suggest, we may contract the fever that comes with the anarchivity or self-destruction of the Shakespeare archive, the orientation of the archive to a future possibly guided according to Derrida (1995), by what Freud identifies as the silent and invisible death drive

(as you will recall, both *Henry V* and *Henry VI* are on the way; in *Henry V*, royal marriage equals death, disaster, imbecility, and civil war). Speaking broadly, Shakespeare's unread letters not only involve repetition, but are structured by a repetition that encloses, perhaps hides, perhaps deafens, another repetition. The archiving of a "letter" also tends to be a moment of another "letter," another kind of archiving.

### Ghosts in the Archive: "The queen, my lord, is dead."

What Derrida calls the "spectral" structure of the archive, already evident in some of the missing alphabetic letters and disappearing props we've examined, is forcefully exemplified in Lady Macbeth's unwitnessed, unread letter that we hear about second hand from her Gentlewoman. Derrida writes:

The structure of the archive is *spectral*. It is spectral a priori: neither present nor absent "in the flesh," neither visible nor invisible, a trace always referring to another whose eyes can never be met, no more than those of Hamlet's father, thanks to the possibility of a visor. Also, the spectral motif stages this disseminating fission from which the archontic principle, and the concept of the archive, and the concept in general suffer, from the principle on. (1995, 54)

Here is the Gentlewoman's account of Lady Macbeth's "archive fever" as scene of letter writing and reading:

Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed, throw her nightgown upon her, unlock her closet, take forth paper, fold it, write upon't, read it, afterwards seal it, and again return to bed; yet all this while in a most fast sleep. (*Macbeth*, 5.1.4-9)

Some editors try to doctor the text, so to speak, by providing an antidote to their own archive fever, the "paper," meaning written "letter," to be the same letter Lady Macbeth received much earlier in the play from Macbeth and from which she quoted aloud.<sup>14</sup> There is only one written letter in this reading, in other words. In my view, it doesn't matter whether the second letter is the same one or a different one. The first letter is already structured by repetition, as a number of critics have noted: Lady Macbeth repeats what we already know.<sup>15</sup> The crucial aspect of Lady Macbeth's "performance," as the Doctor calls it, is that it is repetitive: she gets up "again." Is she writing on the same paper each time, or is she taking a new piece of paper each time? What is she writing on it? A confession? Gibberish? Transcriptions of what she said when she sleepwalked and sleep talked in the past? Is it a kind of script she will perform later when she is sleepwalking? Why does



Lady Macbeth write on the letter before she reads it? What is she reading? An original letter she received or the letter she has just composed, or perhaps decomposed, a more fitting word? Is her unconscious doing a kind of automatic writing? Given Lady Macbeth's writing on the letter, can it be said to be Macbeth's? Or is it now Lady Macbeth's? Can it rightly be called collaborative? What kind of authorship is in play here?

We cannot but help catch the archive fever this passage presents, so to speak, as we note the kinds of repetition in play in the archive that Lady Macbeth performs and is witnessed performing by her Gentlewoman. The letter is not only inaccessible, but also a palimpsest of repeated rewritings. "When was it she last walked?" the doctor asks the gentlewoman, almost echoing Duncan's conclusion that the bloody sergeant "can report, / As seemeth by his plight, of the revolt / The newest state" (1.2.1-3). Just as the battle seems perpetual ("newest," not "latest" or "current," implying that the battle has been raging forever), so Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking is of uncertain duration. The gentlewoman says afterwards that Lady Macbeth reads the letter, seals it, "and again / Return[s] to bed." There is no "last" time, only last times to be reported on and archived. Even before we see Lady Macbeth re-enacting the night she helped Macbeth murder Duncan, Lady Macbeth is on the way to becoming a recording device; we switch from the gentlewoman's account of what she saw Lady Macbeth doing and visual to audio when she enters sleepwalking.

The shift to audio does not provide direct access to the archive, however, but poses its own problems by making the Gentlewoman's report of when Lady Macbeth last sleepwalked or what she has said and done as inaccessible to us as the letter Lady Macbeth writes and reads. The doctor himself wants to become a recorder, his own archivist: "Hark! she speaks: I will set down what comes from her, to satisfy my remembrance the more strongly" (5.1.34-36). When does or when will the archiving happen? When the Doctor says, "I will set down," is he using the present or the future tense? The Doctor's ability to archive what Lady Macbeth did is further compromised by his own metaphor for speech of the mentally ill: the audio report he wants to remember is in fact unreportable. The recording device the Doctor mentions, namely, a pillow, functions because it does not record but is disabled. Personifying the pillow, the Doctor says that "infected minds / To their deaf pillows will discharge their secrets" (5.1.76-77). "Deaf" pillows cannot discharge secrets not because they are apparently mute, but because they could never have heard them in the first place. As if bearing out Derrida's conclusion that the archive is structured by a secret that can never be disclosed, by ash it can never contain, the Doctor describes a recording device that does not record anything. Whatever the pillow discharges or does not discharge has never been archived.

The resemblance between Lady Macbeth's inaccessible letter and the Gentlewoman's report on Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking becomes even clearer if we attend to problems in recording or

hearing what the Gentlewoman refuses to report. Twice. When the gentlewoman will not answer the doctor's questions about what she "heard" Lady Macbeth "say" in her other nighttime performances, the Doctor asks her what she has heard Lady Macbeth say: "In this slumb'ry agitation, besides her walking and other actual performances, what, at any time, have you heard her say?" (5.1.12). Surprisingly, the Gentlewoman refuses to respond to this request: "That, sir, which I will not report after her" (15). (Is it too much of a stretch to hear, in this scene about the hard of hearing, the words "*after her*" as an anticipation of Macbeth's response to her death, "She should have died *hereafter*?") When the Doctor presses her a second time, the Gentlewoman again refuses to answer him: "*Doctor*. You may to me: and 'tis most meet you should. / *Gentlewoman*. Neither to you nor any one; having no witness to confirm my speech" (17-20). By introducing a demand for a witness the second time she refuses to answer, the Gentlewoman's response radicalizes the problem the Doctor already faced in archiving "the truth" of Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking performances. Having given a report to the doctor to which we are never given access — the Doctor's report here of the Gentlewoman's earlier report goes unreported to us because it happened off-stage — and thereby motivating the Doctor to watch and see if Lady Macbeth sleepwalks, the Gentlewoman suddenly will not report to the Doctor or "any one" for an apparently new reason — namely, a witness is the condition of her reporting. This condition would be impossible to meet: even if she had a witness for her testimony, that witness would in turn need a witness for her testimony, and so on. Double, double, toil, and archive trouble.

The Gentlewoman's insistence on a witness after the doctor assures her that it she is permitted to tell him is particularly odd, given that she and the Doctor have been acting as co-witnesses even before the scene begins: "I have two nights watched with you." The Doctor is there to verify: "but can perceive no truth in your report" (*Macbeth*, 5.1.1). And when the Doctor asks for a specific date — "When was it she last walked?" (2-3)— the Gentlewoman does not supply one. Instead, she describes what she has seen in relation to a prior event, namely, Macbeth's departure: "Since his majesty went into the field, I have seen her rise from her bed" (4-5). Moreover, in describing to the Doctor what she has seen, the Gentlewoman does not refer back to the most recent sleepwalking, or even to a single time in the past. The past tense — "I have seen" — she uses to describe Lady Macbeth's recurrent bouts of sleepwalking opens up two readings of what she has seen: "I have seen" could be limited to what she saw once or expanded to include what she saw several times. And there is no way to decide on the truth of either of these readings. (Lady Macbeth's sleepwalking is strangely both singular and repetitive.)

However truthful the Gentlewoman's unheard, unreported report that the Doctor wants to verify may be, the partial report we do hear the Gentlewoman give does not match up with the

full report. In some respects, the reports are more radically inaccessible, more spectral, even more anarchic than Lady Macbeth's letter. Unlike the closet in which Lady Macbeth files her paper (or papers?), the report has no filing cabinet. There isn't even a case file to which Lady Macbeth could be assigned.

The archival problems we have thus far examined in the sleepwalking scene — the paper's inaccessibility and the report's unreportability, so to speak — extend to the errors, blockages, and interferences that structure Lady Macbeth's speech in the very same scene. As she re-enacts the murder scene (2.2.), Lady Macbeth turns into an archivist, a recording machine of her own performances. She is a broken machine, however, unable to repeat while sleepwalking anything she actually says in the murder scene. Instead, she interpolates new lines, some of which she repeats, perhaps in an unconscious effort to wash out the bloody ink of the earlier lines impressed in her memory. Despite, or perhaps because of, the way in which Lady Macbeth becomes a kind of broken recording machine that stutters as it gets stuck in play-back, a death drive legible only as a repetition compulsion finally overrides all intra-psychic and inter-psychic interference in Lady Macbeth's off and on again nighttime transmissions: after the sleepwalking scene, the next time we hear about Lady Macbeth, we learn — by Seyton's report — that she is dead. How she died is not explained. Whether she was sleeping or awake at the time, we will never know. If she screamed on the way down, there is no textual trace of it, only "the cry of women" (*Macbeth*, 5.5.10).

Having seen that the archival problems in *Macbeth*, the unreadability of "letters" extends well beyond the moment in which Lady Macbeth writes, reads, and seals a paper that we will never be able to access and reports that are never reported to us, we are now in a position to grasp why Shakespeare's unread letters cannot safely be limited to letters as material supports, but must be surrounded by quotation marks as "letters." We are also now in a better position to understand the archivolithic drive of the archive in relation to a death drive. Some archival moments in Shakespeare's plays involve writing, and in these moments writing is related not only to madness, but also to death and memory. Very similar moments concerning the archive that occur in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, and *Titus Andronicus* are worth collating: in each play, a character wants to archive, to set down evidence of a crime or possible crime that character wants to remember. The Doctor's desire to "set down" what Lady Macbeth will say, "to satisfy [his] remembrance the more strongly" (*Macbeth*, 5.1.35-36) at a future date, resonates with Titus Andronicus's desire to archive Lavinia's identification of her rapists and mutilators: "I will go get a leaf of brass, / And with a gad of steel will write these words" (*Titus Andronicus* 4.1.103-104). Hamlet wants to take dictation from Old Hamlet's ghost:

Remember thee?

Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat  
 In this distracted globe. Remember thee?  
 Yea, from the table of my memory  
 I'll wipe away all trivial fond records,  
 All saws of books, all forms, all pressures past,  
 That youth and observation copied there,  
 And thy commandment all alone shall live  
 Within the book and volume of my brain  
 Unmixed with baser matter. (*Hamlet*, 1.5.102-11)

Hamlet's reference to his tables is perhaps the most vexing of all these archival moments. New New Historicists have used this passage to explore material memory tablets, but they have blanked out the passage itself, as if they had gotten so high on facsimiles of "real" tablets that they forgot about the passage that launched them (Burt and Yates 2013, 17-46). Or perhaps repressed it. For the archival moment is also intensely metaphorical. Even if actors who play the role of Hamlet sometimes take out a notebook in this scene and pretend to write in it, the passage does not call for a prop: the phrases "table of my memory" and "the book and volume of my brain" do not have a stage prop as a referent (Thompson and Taylor 1990 and Hopkins 2002). Archiving is an event, not a chronological moment of archiving in any material or empirical sense. Only Hamlet's memories will be erased and replaced; no erasable memory device will be used to re-record the Ghost's words dictated to Hamlet.

### The Specter of the Archive: Archiving the Corpse

The issue raised by the archival moments I have collated, however, concerns the relation between death and a desire for revenge more than it does the materiality of the referent. Speaking more broadly, why do unread "letters" so provoke tele-technical connections between specters and the living, between death, or the condemning to death, an accidental death or a suicide to a desire for material supports? Why does the writing down on the support tend to be deferred to a later time, a deferral that means the archival record to come will be less reliable because remembered after the fact instead of recorded instantaneously? Is the desire to write down — either now or in the future — the moment in which the death penalty is delivered and becomes absolutely binding? Or does the deferral of writing and archiving mean that any tele-technical or spectral delivery of the death penalty has already been suspended, cancelled, as if the death penalty were simultaneously a stay of execution? We may bring these questions together in order to broach an even larger question

about Shakespeare's unread "letters" if we first attend to a passage on the fate of corpse in Jacques Derrida's *The Death Penalty, Volume 1*: "In the passage I am going to read to you," Derrida writes,

You will discover that there is something worse than the death penalty: there is a punishment more terrifying still because more inhuman, more ahuman than the death penalty, more than the death penalty, which remains a thing of reason and the law, a thing worthy of reason and the law (*logos* and *nomos*). The criterion of the distinction between the death penalty and what is supposedly still worse than the death penalty, the line of demarcation between the bad and the worst, is not determined by what precedes death, nor is it in the instant of death but in the corpse; it is what follows death and happens to the corpse. (Derrida 2013, 9)

With this passage in mind, let me close by asking a question about Shakespeare's death or what some Bardicide wannabes might consider to be his failure to die: what would happen to our understanding of letters, death, and tele-technical media in Shakespeare's play if we were to consider Shakespeare's corpus as a human corpse?

Let me close by considering not only Caesar's ghost but the archiving of Caesar's corpse in *Julius Caesar*. Brutus rules out desecration of Caesar's corpse, telling the plebeians: "Do grace to Cæsar's corpse" (*Julius Caesar*, 3.2.63). Antony imagines Caesar's spirit leaving the corpses of the traitors "groaning for burial":

And Caesar's spirit, ranging for revenge,  
With Ate by his side come hot from hell,  
Shall in these confines with a monarch's voice  
Cry "Havoc!" and let slip the dogs of war,  
That this foul deed shall smell above the earth  
With carrion men groaning for burial. (3.1.296-301)

Caesar's corpse apparently will be cremated, however. The plebian says, "We'll burn his body in the holy place" (3.2.268).

Inhumation and cremation are apparently both options for the disposal of Caesar's corpse. We don't learn what happens to Caesar's corpse. Mark Antony enters with it, as a stage direction in the Folio makes clear: "*Enter Mark Antony with Cæsars body*" (3.2.42). And Brutus announces, "Here comes his body, mourned by Mark Antony," (3.2.43). After Antony finishes reading Caesar's will, the second plebian says "Take up the body" (270).

The unresolved question this scene raises about what happens to Caesar's corpse is less crucial than is the way Marc Antony links Caesar's will to how Caesar's remains are to be archived. Antony initially says that he does not "mean to read" Caesar's will:

But here's a parchment with the seal of Caesar.  
I found it in his closet. 'Tis his will.  
Let but the commons hear this testament,  
Which, pardon me, I do not mean to read. (3.2.140-43)

Antony's account of finding Caesar's will raises questions of provenance, since only Antony testifies to its validity. Let us bracket all such questions, however, and assume the will really is Caesar's and that Antony is not just making it up as he goes along when, after the plebeians have forgotten about it, he finally does read it.

There are other wills, other legacies that are hidden by Caesar's will, other wills that are released, as it were, by the invocation of Caesar's will. Before he appoints himself executor of the will, Antony puts into question who rightfully gets to take records of Caesar's remains and, on their deathbeds, will the records to their heirs. The conspirators, Antony says,

would go and kiss dead Caesar's wounds  
And dip their napkins in his sacred blood —  
Yea, beg a hair of him for memory  
And, dying, mention it within their wills,  
Bequeathing it as a rich legacy  
Unto their issue. (144-49)

As I noted earlier, Shakespeare's unread "letters" have a curious structure: the unread letters I am collecting are not the opposite of read letters; they are not recorded on material supports as opposed to unrecorded speech; they are not transcripts, as opposed to scripts. One letter is archived by another, less visible archive. Just as Lady Macbeth's "paper" gets folded up into reports that do not report, Caesar's will calls up other wills. By saying that he does not mean to read Caesar's will, Antony is able to speculate on the wills of the conspirators, what they would do with Caesar's wounded corpse, what they want to do with it now and what they want to do in the future, "within their wills," with their records of Caesar's blood or hair (Burt 1990). Antony turns Caesar's will, uncloseted and sealed on parchment, into speculative capital that he spends even before he deposits it. Not reading Caesar's will, at least not yet, allows Antony to archive other wills that go unread because they have not been written. Yet Antony uses the future anterior conditional tense as if

it were the future anterior: what would have happened is the same as what will have happened. Antony acts as a witness, just as he serves as his own witness for the authenticity of Caesar's will (Caesar having used the word "will" earlier on the play to express his desire). The conspirators' speculative wills — in this case, partly spoken and partly written by the conspirators — nevertheless serve as containers, housing the relics of Caesar's remains "within their wills," wills that in turn house the relics rendered as memories ("beg a hair of him for memory"). And these entirely speculative wills are limited, by virtue of their being the conspirators' last words, as it were, and testament. The brilliance of Antony's speculation lies in the way he does not make the conspirators appear to be calculating. Precisely the opposite is the case: they have collectively assassinated a public figure and will at some future time each have personalized a piece of his remains, turned it into a family heirloom. But they will not have a piece of the corpse, as the mob who will tear Cinna the Poet to pieces might have. My speculations on the speculative capital Antony makes of Caesar's yet to be disposed of corpse lead me to my concluding speculative questions: what would it mean if we were to phrase the question of Shakespeare's will, his legacy, not as a question of "sur-vival," or living on, but as a question of "dying on," so to speak?<sup>16</sup> What would it mean to have condemned Shakespeare to death?<sup>17</sup>

### Notes

1. I would like to thank both Judith Haber for her insightful comments on an earlier draft of this essay and Alexa Huang for inviting me to deliver a much shorter version of this essay at the Global Shakespeares Symposium at George Washington University, 24-25 January, 2014 (<http://theshakespearestandard.com/global-shakespeares-symposium-george-washington-university-24-25-jan-2014-great-feast-languages/>).
2. On the archive and unreadability, see Burt and Yates 2013. See also Galey 2014. On textual fauxrensicis, see Burt 2012. On the new media archive, see Burt 2013.
3. On the archive and fire, see Derrida 1991 and Derrida 2006. On the destruction of letters, see the "Envois" in Derrida 1987.
4. On the *pharmakon* and writing, see "Plato's Pharmacy," in Derrida 1983.
5. Harry Berger, Jr. is the pre-eminent practitioner of this kind of penetrating, closely-read character criticism. See, for example, Berger 1991. A similarly remarkable reader, Stephen Booth, "reads without readings," in his words, and carefully describes what he calls "non-signifying patterns." Yet Booth continually defaults to psychologizing character criticism in practice. See Booth 1983 and Booth 1995. The same point holds true for Randall McLeod 1983. On character criticism and names, see Fowler 2003.

6. For a materialist discussion of this letter and others in *Lear*, see the chapter entitled "Messengers in *King Lear*," in Stewart 2009, 219-23. In a section of this chapter entitled "Undirected Letters: Critical Confusion in *King Lear*," Stewart observes that "the Letters in *King Lear* have infuriated critics" (219).
7. Taylor, *William Shakespeare: Oxford Textual Companion* (1987), 7.163/1179, 515.
8. The referent of Stewart's title is itself unstable. It may conjure up for some readers a fantasy of letters written by Shakespeare to his contemporaries.
9. All references to Shakespeare's works are from the Folger Digital Texts edition (Shakespeare 2017).
10. For a highly stimulating discussion of blood-writing in Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, see Gallagher 2006.
11. Or we might say that the prosthesis is not external to the human body, as Derrida maintains; see Derrida 1999. On the material support of writing, see Derrida 1994.
12. For an insightful account of the made-up language in *All's Well That Ends Well*, see Crider 1995. See also the crux posed by Timon's epitaph in act 5 of *Timon of Athens*; Dawson and Minton provide a very valuable account (2008, 104-109 and 338-39).
13. Katherine's "de hand" would have been pronounced "de and," an "h" always being silent in French when it is the initial consonant. Do we have here an example of Shakespeare's "[h]and writing?" For brilliant close readings of this scene, see Fleming 1989 and Haber 2013. Fleming offers indirect support for my point about the possible inaudibility of some of the audible letters: "Although even a word-conscious Elizabethan audience may not have caught every pun, it would certainly have been aware that the French lady's English lesson was actually a lesson in talking dirty. Although she realizes that male words are slippery in the mouth of a woman, Katharine repeats them in her enthusiasm to learn another language" (Fleming 1989, 45). I would say she learns "an Other" language.
14. See 1.5. For examples of Shakespeare using the words "paper" and "papers" to mean "letter," see *King Lear*. In the case of "paper" and "papers," the letter as message is not distinct from the letter as writing support, and the support is grammatically divisible: it can be either singular or plural.
15. See Kiefer 1996, 81, n. 71. Why Macbeth writes her a letter has been a source of critical perplexity, given that the letter could have been intercepted and his plot revealed to Duncan.
16. On the "sur-vival" or "sur-vivance" of texts, see Derrida 2010, 102-91 and Derrida 2011, 130-33. See also Kahan 2013 and Calbi 2013. On Shakespeare's inscription of his initials "W" and "S" in his works, see Fineman 1991.



17. On inhumation and cremation, see Derrida 2011, 160-69.

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