9:00am: WELCOME

9:15am-10:30am: SESSION 1

The rhetoric of omission
Chair: Lucy Brookes

Name: Rebecca Menmuir
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: The Rhetoric of Omission in Chaucer’s ‘Man of Law’s Tale’ and ‘Wife of Bath’s Tale’
Abstract:

For all their amplificatio and lengthy speeches, the Man of Law and the Wife of Bath both remain plagued by the unsaid: that which they will not or cannot say. Both invoke several rhetorical devices, such as praeferitio and procaletaplosis, to retain lexical power over their audience, both within the Canterbury Tales and without. The Man of Law revels in this power, withholding and sharing information at his discretion; the Wife of Bath, however, complicates matters by critiquing omission at the same time as utilising it. Approaching both tales as persuasive arguments expose them as articles that strategically manoeuvre themselves into positions of power, leaving readers uneasy with the sense that educational, sentence-driven aims have given way to indulgent rhetoric.

In this paper I will approach these tales as rhetorical arguments that use omission as a powerful persuasive tool. I will also discuss issues of gender and narrative anxiety, considering how these factors influence the way that each tale-teller tells their story. The concept of omission in the Canterbury Tales is particularly interesting given the number of narrative levels there are in the text, from Chaucer, to narrators acting as authors, to other characters in the text. Each level complicates the audience’s understanding of what is meant to be understood, despite being left unsaid.

Name: Eirian Yem
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: ‘The Broken Thread of our Narrative’: Omission in Walter Scott’s Waverley
Abstract:

In the postscript to Waverley, or ‘Tis Sixty Years Since, Walter Scott writes that “most novel readers... are apt to be guilty of the sin of omission respecting that same matter of prefaces” (Scott 1814, 363). He has, therefore, placed what should have been a preface at the end of his novel, “so that these remarks, being introduced last in order, have still the best chance to be read in their proper place” (Scott 1814, 363). The assumption that the reader might skip portions of text is, in Scott, so pronounced that it is reflected in his narrative procedure: Waverley is full of temporal accelerations and omissions, which “leave you to suppose those things which it would be abusing your patience to relate at length” (Scott 1814, 353). Scott’s allusions to reading assume both a limited, and limiting, character: reading is primarily described as a ‘desultory’ or ‘idle’, causing “dissipation of mind” and encouraging “habits of abstraction” (Scott 1814, 15-16). This paper will show that, in anticipation of readerly omission, Scott adopted a narrative form that, instead, demands “habits of firm and incumbent application” (Scott 1814, 13). It will consider his form as a ‘pilot’ or ‘rudder’ to our reading, and his fictional accounts of reading as hermeneutic models that encourage us “to hear ‘between’... words, just as we read between the
lines of original and tightly written books” (Shleiermacher 1829). Through omission, Scott advances the argument that form can be used to enforce readerly discipline and demonstrates that an attentive reader makes for an ethical citizen.

Name: Daniele Nunziata
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: The presence, or omission, of colonial and national languages in modern Cypriot life writing
Abstract:

This paper will consider modern Cypriot life writing, published in the juncture between independence and partition. Examining this seldom-studied former colony of the British Empire, I will ask important questions about the literary and linguistic forms employed by Cypriot writers from this era, alluding to its relevance to wider research on Mediterranean and Middle Eastern literatures. Comparing the Greek-speaking Costas Montis, who predominately composed in Standard Modern Greek, with the Turkish-speaking Taner Baybars, who wrote mainly in English, I will interrogate the languages employed by these contemporaneous life writers and analyse metatextual representations of linguistic identity within their works. Consequently, I will examine the notable omission of colonial English in Montis’ oeuvre, and the omission of Greek and Turkish, languages associated with nationalism, in Baybars’. Both writers feel the pull of political and ideological pressures on their creative process, but each contends with these constraints in diametrically-opposed ways.

Monuments and memory
Chair: Lillian Hingley

Name: Emma Skeels
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Monuments, Memory, and Mutability in the City Writings of Teju Cole
Abstract:

In his multivolume work Realms of Memory, Pierre Nora documents what he terms lieux de mémoire, ‘places of memory’ within a culture that hold a certain protean significance that shifts throughout history. Monuments, for example, are powerful lieux de mémoire not only in their capacities to be physical places of memory, but also because of their constantly changing roles in cultural memory. Monuments are frequently signifiers of only one side of history, perpetuating a colonial mythology of victory and triumph. However, they are also places of omission, obscuring the darker history upon which the same colonial mythology was founded. With such a history behind these monuments, with their entire creation obscuring, yet constantly referring to, the mythologies colonizers created to justify their power over others, is there a legitimate way to reclaim these sites as places of memory for all?

In an attempt to answer this question, I will examine the presence of monuments in Teju Cole’s Open City. The narrator’s account of New York City’s lieux de mémoire reveals a new way of looking at monuments, one that encompasses their multiple meanings and thus allows us a more thorough understanding of the histories they serve to commemorate. Through analyzing these monuments as sites of pain, conquest, and erasure, in addition to recognizing their traditional purposes as commemorators of colonial mythology, it will then be possible to extract and
dismantle the problematic colonial ideals implicit in them and attempt to reclaim a more multifaceted view of the true history behind them.

**Name:** Jean David Eynard  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Mangled words and textual loss in John Selden’s *Marmora Arundelliana* (1628)  
**Abstract:**

In 1626, a series of newly discovered Greek marbles and inscribed tablets arrived in London to join the antiquarian collection of Lord Arundel. The discovery of these inscriptions was an extraordinary event for the world of learning, and John Selden took up the task of collating and preparing them for a printed edition. Faced with numerous broken stones and copious textual loss, Selden resorted to peculiar typographical features to express such sense of erasure. This paper looks at these features, and explores how the presence of certain letters and typographical signs might actually indicate the absence of a text. In fact, Selden first printed the inscriptions with dots and blank spaces to indicate the lack of text, and subsequently reprinted it with his own conjectural emendations printed in red (figure below). Red ink was commonly associated with blood in the early modern period, and I argue that this typographical feature is particularly important, for the inscriptions are repeatedly described as being ‘mutilated’, ‘mangled’ and ‘eaten by time’. Selden thus employs rubrication and anatomical symbolism as a way of destabilising the text, reminding the readers of the hemorrhagic loss of information which he was trying to contain. By placing Selden’s *Marmora Arundelliana* within the editorial culture of the time, this paper elucidates the corporeal implications of textual omissions in the early modern period, and shows how different editorial decisions may ultimately supply for the original loss of information.

**Name:** James Waddell  
**Institution:** University of Cambridge  
**Title:** ‘An enormous geometry of emptiness’: The politics and aesthetics of American erasure poetry in the shadow of 9/11  
**Abstract:**

In the underground complex that houses the Ground Zero museum in New York, one wall is engraved with a quotation from Virgil’s *Aeneid*: ‘No day shall erase you from the memory of time’. The incomprehensibility of the complete erasure of lives, bodies, and buildings defined immediate responses to 9/11. As art historian Thomas Stubblefield put it, “the experience of 9/11 and its aftermath was one in which absence, erasure, and invisibility dominated the frame”. In the years following the tragedy, a poetic form rarely seen since the 1980s enjoyed a resurgence: erasure poetry. The technique treats a source text by removing certain words, or otherwise rendering them illegible, obscure, or faint. Possibly due to the fact that often “any radical deviation from a printing norm is taken to be a more important classificatory element” (Craig Dworkin, 2003) than underlying content, criticism of erasure poetry has largely overlooked its marked tendency to engage with political and historical subject matter, particularly the 2001 terror attacks and America’s subsequent military action in the Middle East. In my paper, I would discuss the very different ways in which such poems engage with the politics and aesthetics of 9/11 memorialisation. Focussing on a diverse group of works by Jonathan Safran Foer, Jen Bervin, Janet Holmes, and Travis McDonald, I would discuss the extent to which erasure poets have an ethical imperative to re-inscribe, undermine, or over-write the hegemonic...
revise, restage, erase: omission in the theatre
Chair: Anna Louise Senkiw

Name: Gabriela Minden
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: J. M. Barrie and the Ballets Russes
Abstract:

On 15 March 1920 James Matthew Barrie’s *The Truth About the Russian Dancers* premièred at the Coliseum, with Diaghilev ballerina Tamara Karsavina in the leading role. This one-act play was revived at the Savoy Theatre on 28 July 1926, in a revival for which, Karsavina recalled, ‘the script of 1920 was used’. Yet Karsavina’s assertion that Barrie ‘did not revise the play in 1926’ is contested by the existence of a prompt copy dated July 1926 that bears significant emendation. Reviews confirm that the play was in fact ‘considerably altered and extended’ in 1926 and provide further evidence of the content of these alterations. As one critic noted, a particularly striking alteration was the increasingly political nature of the play, which now opened with a ‘discussion of the Labour party’s attitude to the Russian dancers’.

This paper seeks to disinter the text of the 1926 revival to demonstrate the extent of Barrie’s engagement with the evolving reputation of Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes. With *The Truth About the Russian Dancers* Barrie entered into an intertheatrical dialogue with Diaghilev’s company that shaped the way in which his play was perceived. As the Bolshevist connotations of the Ballets Russes intensified, as did the political undertone of Barrie’s play. This paper will suggest that the 1926 emendations are integral to understanding Barrie’s awareness of the increasing politicisation of the Ballets Russes. They can be seen as constituting a response thereto, and their elision masks the enduring nature of Barrie’s engagement with Diaghilev’s company.

Name: Robert Laurella
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: ‘I Liked the Book Better:’ Rethinking Wilkie Collins and the History of Adaptation
Abstract:

Until recently, literary criticism has consistently neglected the dramatic works of Wilkie Collins in favour of his novels. Even when his dramatic adaptations are acknowledged, they are often read as heavily overdetermined by their relation to copyright law and subordinate to Collins’s literary works. These dramatic works, however, are more than mere legal formalities; incredibly popular throughout the nineteenth century, one contemporary critic stated: “Mr. Wilkie Collins was intended by nature for a dramatist; accident has made him a novelist.” Why, then, do we continue to overlook some of Collins’s most successful writing? To what end do we continue to employ what David Kurnick calls “the melancholy of generic distinction,” and how can we recover both these overlooked works and the wealth of information embedded within them? By focusing on what Collins omits, revises, and edits in his stage adaptations, this paper places these dramatic works at the center of a conversation that ranges in scope from intellectual property to divorce law, with a particular emphasis on *The Woman in White* (1860), *Armadale* (1866), and *The Evil Genius* (1885) – works that span the thematic and stylistic ranges of Collins’s prolific career.
Collins’s process of revising his novels for the stage offers significant insight into the history of modern adaptation: the legal, cultural, and political mechanisms that facilitate and encourage adaptation began to crystallize in the nineteenth century and continue to impact innumerable aspects of popular culture even today.

**Name:** Louise Bracken  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Un-writing the maternal: Succession in Shakespeare’s *King John*  
**Abstract:**

While much research has been concentrated on the disappearance of the Fool in *King Lear*, there remains another play in his canon where two characters disappear after the interval without a trace: the fictional versions of Eleanor of Aquitaine and Constance of Brittany in *King John*. Unlike the Fool, whose capering interruptions have been minutely examined, both Eleanor and Constance are both central to the plot and remain two of Shakespeare’s most outspoken female characters. Yet, the interest they have garnered in academia remain negligible in comparison. Moreover, there is no historical precedence for this; in terms of the timeline of the play, both characters are anachronistically killed off. For this conference, I would like to present research based on my C Course essay which will explain the sudden omission of these two characters from the play. I will begin my argument by considering the treatment of Eleanor and Constance George Peele’s *Troublesome Reign*, the predecessor of Shakespeare’s play. I will also make a case for the characters’ central importance within *King John* in terms of their involvement in the succession crisis which dominates their time on the stage. For the main part of my presentation, I will make a case for the omission of these female characters as being part of a wider un-writing of women which is prevalent throughout the history plays after the Reformation. Finally, I will try to correlate this process with the history of the period.

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**The body of the text: gender and absence**  
**Chair:** India Morris

**Name:** Hannah Greenstreet  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Gendered forms in *Two Man Show* by RashDash  
**Abstract:**

In the final scene of *Two Man Show*, performer Helen Goalen explains that she uses dance ‘Because the words don’t exist that say exactly what I’m trying to say […] I don’t want to make a show out of a man-made language that has hijacked my brain and stunted my imagination’. *Two Man Show* (2016) by feminist theatre company RashDash (Helen Goalen and Abbi Greenland) combines the company’s trademark movement work with a realist play-within-a-play about two brothers coping with the death of their father. These contrasting forms are gendered: the movement sections are performed naked by the female performers; the play-within-a-play is performed in drag. The movement sections can be read as supplement to the emotionally stunted realist play, in which the brothers fail to communicate. The performance suggests that theatre’s reliance on established conventions of realism and words themselves to generate meaning has omitted female voices and contributions. *Two Man Show* can therefore be seen to enact feminist critiques of language (Luce Irigaray, Helene Cixous) and of realism (Elin Diamond, Sue-Ellen Case) and to propose alternative, feminist or even female forms. Yet, *Two Man Show* also deconstructs the gendering of forms, both bodily and theatrical. In one
movement section, Abbi moves Helen’s body into a series of classic sculptures, reminding the audience that, like words, movement also works through gendered signs. Ultimately, RashDash’s performance deconstructs the terms ‘man’ and ‘woman’, interrogating their omissions and, in Judith Butler’s words in *Bodies That Matter*, ‘open[ing] them up, indeed, of coming to signify in ways that none of us can predict in advance’.

**Name:** Georgia White  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Leaking Bodies and Maternal Absence: Negating the Threat of the Witch-Mother in *The Tempest*  
**Abstract:**

Though no mothers appear onstage in *The Tempest*, their presences are made known through discussion and speculation by the offspring they produced. These exchanges speak to the unsolvable myth that is parentage: the mother may be fixed but the father is only ever theoretical, and it is the identity of the father, the one whom she chooses as consort, that determines the benevolence of the maternal figure. The most intriguing of the unseen mothers in *The Tempest* is the witch Sycorax, whose legacy to the island is “the son that she did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born—not honoured with / A human shape” (I.II, 282-4). The association between witchcraft practices and acts of malevolent motherhood has been well-established; what I wish to achieve in this paper is examine how the magical properties of Sycorax are described and reappropriated by Prospero in a way that mimics gentrified anti-witchcraft discourse. This rhetoric minimised the witch’s maternal qualities and the authority this would have afforded her and instead recast her as an enemy of the state who was a prop to a diabolic master through demonic pacts and possession.

**Name:** Addamms Mututa  
**Institution:** University of Tübingen / University of the Witwatersrand  
**Title:** Narrating Absences: Body as an Archival Text in Sherry Hormann’s *Desert Flower*  
**Abstract:**

A desert denotes an empty space not just because it appears vacant, but because ‘something’ we expect is omitted from its surface. This metaphor is important in discussing Waris Dirie’s (Liya Kebede) body, the protagonist in Sherry Hormann’s *Desert Flower* (2009). Due to childhood Female Genital Mutilation, her body configures an archive of her history, culture, and identity, grounding the narrative in the unique world created by the omitted ‘something’. When she migrates from Mogadishu to London, grows up from a young girl to an adult, and later becomes a financially successful model, this ‘something’ guides her responses to the external world, disallowing her changing circumstances to interfere with this archive. I make the argument that for her character, her bodily absences are more important than what is present in presenting an authentic Somali narrative. Yet, dodging Dirie’s unique connection with her body and pursuing the stereotypical narrative of an illegal African migrant fleeing war, as many diegetic characters in the film do, sidesteps the very essence of this omission. This body, paraded in the international fashion world as an object of beauty, is to her, a resource to publicize the significance of absences which remain largely overlooked by the commercial model industry and the British social culture. I argue that by identifying with her omissions, the protagonist supplants the materialistic narrative of migrant survival by deploying absence as a resource for activism. Her body is a placeholder of a life narrative that can only be told as an omission.
10:30am-10:45am: COFFEE

10:45am-12:00pm: SESSION 2

Unutterable, unconscionable, invisible: poetry and absence
Chair: Paul Stephens

Name: Alice Simkins
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: The unutterable in Percy Shelley’s The Cenci and Mary Shelley’s Mathilda

Abstract:

Biographically The Cenci and Mathilda are intertwined: Mary and Percy were both working on these pieces at the same time while living in Rome, and both texts are concerned with incest. Notably, Percy initially urged Mary to write on the Cenci story; later, she translated the Italian version for Percy to use as a source text for his play. Omissions in Mary’s manuscript from the Italian source material are particularly interesting—the main horrific events are not detailed, setting a precedent for Percy’s presentation of incest in his play. The Cenci and Mathilda revolve around the fact that incestuous rape, the subject of the play, cannot be explicitly verbalized. While the writing process may have begun as a game of avoidance to please the contemporary audience, it seems to have mutated into a questioning of the implications of spoken and unspoken language. Critics such as Mary E. Finn have read Beatrice as being left like the portrait Percy describes in his preface, unable to speak and urging the viewer to further contemplation. Instead, both Beatrice and Mathilda’s withholding of speech means they have an impact on the movement of plot and text—their selective silence morphs into a source of power, as they resist incest by not articulating it. Using and translating controversial source material together in Italy, Mary and Percy were clearly exploring the limitations of language, setting their protagonists a challenge similar to that which they were pursuing themselves—to explore linguistic control under complex circumstances.

Name: Fergus McGhee
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Browning's 'Unconscionable' Ellipses

Abstract:

‘[Y]our Ellipses’, John Ruskin complained to Robert Browning, ‘are quite Unconscionable: before one can get through ten lines, one has to patch you up in 20 places.’ Browning’s highly idiosyncratic use of ellipsis (‘the omission of one or more words in a sentence, which would be needed to complete the grammatical construction’) has long irritated critics, who have tended to dismiss it as a perverse mannerism. This habit is most pronounced in Browning’s notoriously difficult epic, Sordello (1840). Situating this poem in relation to Victorian classical pedagogy (one of whose preoccupations was the elucidation of ellipses in ancient texts), I show that Browning in fact elicits complex and varying effects from this figure. Further, I suggest that Browning invests these gaps with political and philosophical import in ways which anticipate, and may even have directly affected, Ruskin’s influential thought on the ‘grotesque’. Attending to this neglected
aspect of Browning’s technique offers to illuminate Ruskin’s role as the leading nineteenth-century advocate for the ‘incompletely expressed’.

**Name:** Sinéad McDonnell  
**Institution:**  
**Title:** Dialogues with the Departed: Absent Auditors in William Wordsworth’s *The Prelude*  
**Abstract:**

As a self-referential concept, absence is necessarily ‘ghostly’, haunted as it is by the impress of the departed presence (the absence). It is the centre that holds in Wordsworth’s narrative, and the linchpin of this paper, which argues that *The Prelude* is defined as much as by what is not there, as by what is. Published posthumously in July 1850, for example, the most important absence that renovates the life of *The Prelude* is Wordsworth’s own. The poet’s departure from this world allowed for his literary work to live, albeit not the literary work the author had intentions of conceiving in his 1814 “Preface” to *The Excursion*. At this basic level, absence is a creative catalyst. In the autobiographical poem eventually published, Wordsworth’s voice persists across a series of formative experiences that are enriched by notable absences. This paper argues that absence leaves a generative space in which Wordsworth’s artistic agency is consolidated. Although the whole poem is a sustained dialogue to Samuel Taylor Coleridge – a dynamic which forms an allegory of listening with Coleridge ostensibly as its main auditor – Wordsworth is more convincingly engaged in a dialogue of self-reflection. This paper explores Wordsworth’s project of self-reflection through absence, reading it alongside the philosophy of John Locke. By rethinking absence as being no longer merely a negation of space, this paper similarly argues that Locke’s much maligned epistemology, whilst ostensibly rendering the human mind as passive in its interaction with the outside world, more persuasively advocates its creative agency.

**Prison, torture, and the ethics of omission**  
Chair: Lloyd Meadhbh Houston

**Name:** Susan Maginn  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** The Site and Sight of Omission: Prison Writing and Metatheatre  
**Abstract:**

By examining the prison as both the site of omission and the mechanism by which viewship and visibility informs ideas of omission, this study specifically puts pressure on normatively sociological or autobiographical approaches to existing scholarship surrounding prison writing. A close examination of Samuel Beckett’s *Catastrophe* as one example of a prison play highlights the extent to which both theatre and incarceration operate within similar frameworks of visibility and visibility - hence looking at bodies that may be ‘seen’ and bodies that must be omitted from representation. The metatheatricality of the play articulates the central paradox of prison writing: unless currently imprisoned, access to prison experience is necessarily mediated through (re)presentation. Ultimately then, we might construct the penitentiary as existing in cultural imagination as an eruption of the violent Real rather than in some ‘real reality’.

**Name:** Jake Rickman  
**Institution:** University of Oxford
Title: Camped Before a Closed Door: Fictional (Un)Representation of Torture and Incarceration in JM Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians

Abstract:

The way in which depictions of torture tend to be proscribed in JM Coetzee’s Waiting for the Barbarians (1980) may be understood as a form of representational lacunae, the origins of which lie in certain ethical demands placed upon a white South African novelist writing in the era of the apartheid regime. Six years after the novel was published, writing in an article Coetzee states that torture ‘has exerted a dark fascination on many…South African writers’, positing that the torture room provides a ‘bare and extreme’ metaphor between an authoritarian regime and its ‘victims.’ If the novelist is to imagine what takes place behind the closed door then he must contend with certain ethical demands placed upon him, demands which are rooted in the fact that the ‘torturer does not exist outside the dehumanizing power relations that constitute torture.’

Given the predominance of this ‘dark fascination’ that is the spectre of torture in South African literature in the apartheid era, I argue that the extent to which one wishes to evaluate Barbarians in light of the ethical demand Coetzee himself raises may be better understood if the novel is considered among other works in the contentiously classified genre of ‘prison literature.’ Specifically, I draw on two prison memoirs, The Jail Diary of Albie Sachs and Ruth First’s 117 Days — both of which were authored by two white anti-apartheid South Africans — in order to provide a more informed reading of Barbarians and the way in which it contends with issues related to the impossibility of certain forms of testimony or bearing witness raised by Giorgio Agamben.

Name: Benjamin Gibbons
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Endlessly Filling an Empty Self: Playing the Witness in Breyten Breytenbach’s ‘The True Confessions of an Albino Terrorist’
Abstract:

The narrator of Breyten Breytenbach’s prison memoir is insistent that ‘there is no self’, nothing real beneath the name that he is supposed to call his own. Critics like J.M Coetzee have attributed such narrative incoherence to the solitary confinement that Breytenbach details in his account, portraying it as a failed testimony, a failed account to render the self whole through language. But in this essay, I interpret the evasion of a fixed narrative form as an act of refusal – a refusal of the socially intelligible self that we read for when we encounter testimony. It is exactly at the level at which the account breaks down, moving schizophrenically between different narrative styles, that the text unravels the power structures that give testimonial form its power. I use Agamben’s account of testimony, which links it to judgement of the court, to disrupt the dominant account of confession given by Susannah Radstone, who posits the confession as a modally distinct form. Instead, it is possible to read Breytenbach’s account as, not the language of a traumatised self, but the self of a traumatised language – a language that can never coincide with the truth, that can only utter an empty ‘I’. Yet the conditions of prison have only revealed in language what has been latent all along. Language can never be the medium through which we find the self, and yet we must submit to it to enter into the ‘bargain of intelligibility’ and enter into the social realm.
**Title:** 'Homer in khaki shorts': Taban lo Liyong's African Palimpsest

**Abstract:**

In my paper I propose to analyse the forms of palimpsest that characterise the Ugandan-Sudanese poet and critic Taban lo Liyong's engagement with (and frequent opposition to) the European literary tradition. I will argue that Liyong's poems, essays and stories demonstrate a commitment to a form of academic satire grounded in intertextuality and (mis)reference. By deliberately omitting from, misquoting, and parodying European sources, Liyong is able to develop methods by which he can counteract these very sources' tendencies to omit African epistemologies from their frames of reference.

What emerges from Liyong’s uses of intertextuality is a cultural palimpsest that reflects the linguistic palimpsest Chantal Zabus has described in her influential study, *The African Palimpsest* (2007). Yet, rather than simply attempting to convey ‘African concepts, thought-patterns, and linguistic features through the ex-colonizer’s language’, Liyong attempts to use aspects of European literary traditions (in conjunction with African ‘concepts [and] thought-patterns’) as a means of writing against those very traditions.

The range and strength of Liyong’s engagement with European literary and philosophical traditions ought to serve as a prompt for a more comparative approach to criticism in the Anglo-American academy – one which no longer omits the variety and depth of response from anglophone Africa.

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**Title:** 'Great Pan is dead!' The eradication and rebirth of the goat god in early 20th century British fiction

**Abstract:**

‘Mythic thought’, writes J. M. Bernstein, ‘represents, however inadequately, the moment in cognition in which dependence on nature is acknowledged’. Adorno and Horkheimer signalled the inevitable return of such thought in *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, whereby anthropomorphised nature is reintroduced through self-reflection. This paper will argue that Pan, the Arcadian pastoral god and nature spirit of classical mythology, was once erased by Enlightenment thinking, a process which embodied humankind’s rational domination of the natural world, but that during the first few decades of the twentieth century he began to re-emerge in British fiction - in Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*, E. M. Forster’s ‘The Story of a Panic’, and the weird and fantastical tales of Algernon Blackwood, Arthur Machen and Lord Dunsany. His presence is felt as a manifestation of an animated landscape and as a transcendental, sexual force, yet he is rarely a physical character, an omission that remains conspicuous. This paper seeks to answer how a return to figures such as Pan at the turn of the 20th century engenders both a refutation and reworking of Enlightenment thought and marks the emergence of new ecological relationships between humankind and its non-human environment.
Name: Glenn Cahilly-Bretzin  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: Lost in Translation? The role of Omission in the Old English Translations of Saints’ Lives  
Abstract:

Scholars often disregard the anonymously produced Old English prose saints’ lives as ‘literal’ translations of their Latin exemplars. However, when one considers these works in more detail one finds that Anglo-Saxon translators manipulated their sources to produce narratives that resonated with contemporary audiences as well as relay messages pertinent for their editorial programme. A commonly employed method in manipulating the source narrative was omission. Through omitting sections or passages from his/her exemplar, the translator was able to highlight aspects of the narrative he/she found important, avoid references or settings Anglo-Saxon audiences may not understand, and redirect the narrative to conform their particular editorial programme or theme. This is particularly evident in the anonymously produced Old English homily on the Life of Martin of Tours.

In this adaptation of Sulpicius’ life, the Anglo-Saxon translator omits all of the episodes that do not involve either conversion or pagans or healing. By limiting the narrative to these particular episodes, the adaptor fashions his narrative for early tenth-century audiences, especially in those areas with high Scandinavian settlement. This 'cut-down' version of Martin’s life seems to urge audiences to consider converting their neighbors and focus on the healing powers of the Christian faith. Likewise, the omission of references to Church politics and Martin’s role as an exorcist might suggest that the homily was intended primarily for secular audiences who would not be concerned with the such details from the Latin Vita. Through this it is clear that omission, even in “slavish translations”, sheds great insight into the intentions of medieval translators, their stories, and the contexts in which these works were produced.

Silence or suggest: the representation of same-sex desire  
Chair: Robert Laurella

Name: Stephen Turton  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: 'Improper Words': Silencing Same-sex Desire in Eighteenth-century English Dictionaries  
Abstract:

A much-repeated apocryphal story tells how Samuel Johnson, upon being complimented by a ‘literary lady’ for not admitting into his Dictionary of the English Language any ‘improper words’, replied, ‘No, Madam, I hope I have not daubed my fingers. I find, however that you have been looking for them.’ While Johnson did not, in fact, omit all ‘improper words’ from his 1755 dictionary (see Johnston 2005: 12), there is one body of lexis that is noticeably absent from its pages: the language of same-sex desire. Eighteenth-century dictionaries published prior to Johnson’s own—particularly the works of his chief commercial rival, Nathan Bailey—offered an abundance of terms for same-sex acts and their actors, from buggery to confriacatrice to pederasty, albeit these terms were defined censoriously. Johnson, on the other hand, appears to have thought that the best prohibition against same-sex sexuality was to proceed as though it were not even discursively conceivable. His influence on subsequent English lexicography was so profound that the lexis of same-sex desire largely disappeared from general dictionaries for the rest of the century, despite the claims many of their titles would make to the comprehensiveness of their linguistic coverage: Rider’s New Universal English Dictionary, Barlow’s Complete English Dictionary, and so on. This paper examines how such omissions work to construct images of
English and Englishness from which same-sex-desiring subjects are alienated by their absence, cast into an ‘excluded and illegible domain’ (Butler 1993/2011: x) beyond the bounds of legitimate language and society.

Name: Chloe Lim  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Writing the Self: J.R. Ackerley and Christopher Isherwood as Post-War Queer Sons  
**Abstract:**

"I am a camera with its shutter open" - Christopher Isherwood's narrator in *Goodbye to Berlin* famously declares. This posture of apathetic spectatorship is one that the narrators in the works of both J.R. Ackerley and Isherwood often adopt. However, their recording of events in their 'autobiografiction' is part of a 'pseudo-reticence' that creates an illusion of impartiality. Both men had much to hide - being middle-class gay men struggling with their sexuality, their relationships with family members, and class status. Writing ten years before Isherwood, Ackerley challenged institutional norms in three decades as chief-editor of the BBC's *Listener*. Simultaneously, his novels, *Hindoo Holiday* (1932), *My Dog Tulip* (1956), *We Think the World of You* (1960) and *My Father and Myself* (1968) relied on a dialectic of omission and confession, creating an oeuvre that revealed the man behind the professional mask. This dialectic can also be seen in Isherwood's works, both before and after WWI, in works ranging from *Mr Norris Changes Trains* (1935) to *Christopher and His Kind* (1976). Both writers wrestled with publishing censorship and arguably the more defeating, self-censorship. While Isherwood is now far more commonly discussed, this paper provides a fresh perspective on Ackerley and the social circles of both, including E.M. Forster and W.H. Auden. Although both writers toyed with omission as an artistic device - their marginalised queer voices should not be subject to omission today.

Name: Antony Huen  
**Institution:** University of York  
**Title:** Tamar Yoseloff's Hidden *Sweetheart*  
**Abstract:**

Tamar Yoseloff (b. 1965) is a poet based in London, whose long-standing interest in modern and contemporary visual arts is traceable to her first collection *Sweetheart* (1998). The collection refers to an extensive range of visual artefacts across genres and time, ranging from Frida Kahlo's *The Two Fridas* (1939) to 'a man in miniature'. These aesthetic and popular artefacts are central to the poems which are grounded in the interrelations between physicality and spirituality. Drawing on philosophical and psychoanalytic ideas including Ludwig Wittgenstein’s distinctions between the public *picture* and private *image*, and Marion Milner’s use of free drawing to represent but also *clothe* her thoughts, I argue that Yoseloff demonstrates and tests the capacity of both poetic and visual arts to construct a self which presents an incomplete picture of him/herself, and which manipulates the body as its conduit. This paper shall thus explain how the poet’s foray into the artificial world created by visual artists heavily and fruitfully contributes to her poetic transformation of the body and self, a fascinating example of poetic engagement with visual arts which is omitted in the critical discussions about it.

12:00pm-1:00pm: LUNCH
Denial, negation, representation  
Chair: Rachael Hodge

Name: Ben Card  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: 'No more but the meere love of learning': Denial and negation in John Milton  
Abstract:  
In the Trinity Manuscript, a young John Milton wrote out two versions of a "Letter to a Friend" (1633?). Not only did he never send either version of the letter, but he left them both unfinished, and the manuscript is black with busy self-deletions, emendations, and piled-on clauses (YPW 1:319-20). In this paper I will identify in this early self-defensive handwriting a lifelong Miltonic habit of self-justification and 'negative speaking' that reappear in famously knotty passages of his two epics (PL, 3.117-19 and PR, 4.286-8). I will argue that Milton self-consciously marshals his 'negative speaking' to diverse ends: a richly poetic tactic of possibility in Paradise Lost (1667), his negative style in the mouth of the Son has become cryptic and ascetic by Paradise Regained (1671), and neither usage resembles more than superficially Milton's mealy-mouthed procrastination in the "Letter to a Friend."

In charting Milton's self-correcting tic from the inkblots of the Trinity Manuscript to the printed page of his late-career epics, I develop the thinking of James Grantham Turner, who suggests in "Elisions and Erasures" Milton's fascination with "that special condition of language in which something is simultaneously uttered and not uttered," in addition to that of Stephen Fallon. While Fallon compares his tone of self-justification in the "Letter" to the late words of the Son in Paradise Regained, intend to go further, explaining what Milton's tic of negative speaking can reveal about the poem(s) per se rather than the persona of the narrator.

Name: Richard Phillips  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: The Killingworth Murder Pamphlet: no body; no confession  
Abstract:  
The anonymous Killingworth murder pamphlet (1608) is unique in omitting both of the genre’s cardinal features – there is no body and no confession. Instead the pamphlet provides a tightly woven and densely circumstantial narrative of how the Creechurch community responded to the challenges of an empty room in which Mistris Killingworth’s neighbours believed her to have been murdered and then incinerated by her lodger, Mistris Abbot, who afterwards vanished with her valuables. Much later, witness testimony identified a woman from far away None-Such as Abbot. The testimony withstood the scrutiny of identity parade, committal and trial before Coke LCJ. The None-Such woman, however, consistently denied being Abbot or having any role in Killingworth's murder. The confidence with which she did so before the gallows moved the shrieves to pause before proceeding, and convene an extra-judicial hearing outside Killingworth's house. The witnesses were searchingly examined again and remained adamant that the None-Such woman and Abbot were one and the same.
My paper will address how the pamphlet represents the community to itself and to its other readers, through the ways in which it describes the community’s response to the uncertainty posed by the absent body and absent confession. In particular, I will focus on exploring the relationship between these twin absences and the narrative’s character, in terms of the absences’ role in generating a tightly woven and deeply circumstantial narrative which then acts to efface their troubling significance.

Name: Andy Hicks  
Institution: University of Bristol  
Title: ‘A Pillar of Salt’ – What is Not In Slaughterhouse-Five  
Abstract:  
As several critics have noted since its publication, two of the most remarkable aspects of Kurt Vonnegut’s Slaughterhouse-Five are its mosaic-like, fragmented structure, and its curious omission of its central, organising subject – the firebombing of Dresden. Much has been written on these topics, and still more in the critical debate as to whether the novel represents a passionate call to pacifistic action, or an expression of nihilistic quietism. Rarely, however, have these two areas of interest been read together, and I will argue that the novel’s powerful ambiguity can only be understood by reference to its systemic structure.  

Using Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory as a theoretical model, I will argue that S5 resembles an operationally closed but environmentally open autopoietic system. Its use of recursion and repetition, are, among others, the elements that appear to self-generate and self-reference its form and content, in the manner described by Luhmann’s theory of the structures of first, second and third order observation. Operationally closed as such, it is nevertheless influenced (‘irritated’, in Luhmann’s terminology) by its central theme – Dresden – which is, in turn, the operative ‘blind spot’ that cannot be represented by the closed literary system. This absent heart of the novel, depicted through non-depiction, is paradoxical – but in Luhmann’s systems theory, paradox is productive. Indeed, it is the basis on which any distinction can be made at all. It is, I argue, the simultaneous impossibility and necessity of action, expressed through the paradoxical act of observation, that lends S5 its unique power.

A spatial kind of emptiness: omission and space  
Chair: Ellen Brewster

Name: Maddie Mitchell  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: Race, Place, and Urban Space: Ta-Nehisi Coates and the Sociology of the Streets  
Abstract:  
One important factor that has been omitted from much of sociological urban theory is race. One of the most prominent scholars in the field is Michel de Certeau, who authored The Practice of Everyday Life. In it, de Certeau suggests that walking the city and forging one’s own trajectories and paths is a distinctly rebellious act, as it breaks with the prescribed “rules” that the city’s map makers and urban planners have established. However, to be this invisible, flâneur character who de Certeau envisions, you must have a certain type of privilege, one that allows you to wander through the streets without attracting notice.
These ideas come to the fore in Ta-Nehisi Coates’ books The Beautiful Struggle and Between the World and Me—especially in the latter, which was written in 2015, in the wake of Michael Brown and Freddie Gray’s deaths, in a post-Black Lives Matter era. Coates’ books show that black men, women, and children in Baltimore do not have this ability to move so freely or to slip by undetected and unmarked. Rather, the penalties for reformulating the “rules” of the city and rearticulating your own paths can be fatal; it is the reason why many black Americans have lost their lives while walking in predominantly white neighborhoods, areas to which they are not perceived to belong. Freely walking the city as a form of “rebellion” and as an assertion of individuality can, in practice, only apply to certain demographics in society. Given the fact that de Certeau is an extremely influential sociologist whose theories are widely taught today, I argue that it is incredibly important to introduce more contemporary discussions of race and environment to these ideas and put pressure on their arguably reductive nature.

Name: Arnie Cornish
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Mist, missing and omission in The Faerie Queene
Abstract:

‘Mist’, meaning ‘a diffuse cloud of fine water’ (OED I), has Germanic origins, cognate with Middle Dutch ‘mest’ and Icelandic ‘mistr’. Its relation to the verb ‘to miss’, meaning either ‘to go wrong’ (OED I) or ‘to fail’ (II) is superficial. Yet in his allegorical epic The Faerie Queene (1590-6) the sixteenth century poet Edmund Spenser playfully suggests a folk etymology linking noun and verb. Three times in the poem Spenser rhymes ‘mist’ with ‘wist’ (knew), implying a contrast between knowledge and clouded or misted error. When, for example, Mammon is pursuing Guyon (hero of the poem’s second Book), he finds him suddenly snatched away; when he sees ‘his purpose mist/Him to entrap another way he wist’ (II.vii.34.8-9). Alongside this relation of physical mist to error, another pun is operating: the supine of the Latin verb ‘omitto’ (‘let go, leave out’) is ‘omissus’. Spenser’s repeated rhyme links mist and missing with omission: in Fairyland, the world of the poem in which heroes search for revealed truth, gaps and omissions are spots of error. Based on this close reading, my paper will demonstrate in The Faerie Queene an allegorical technique that departs, as Maureen Quilligan has shown, from wordplay. Yet I will also argue that Spenser’s rhyme does as much to distinguish mist and omission as it does to yoke them together. (Rhymes, like simile, compare and contrast simultaneously.) There might be important differences between ignorance in the non-allegorical world of ideas and its manifestation in an allegorical landscape. Based on my thesis, which considers Spenser’s allegory in relation to spatiality, I will aim to illuminate these differences.

Creating omission: annotate, compile, anthologise
Chair: Hannah Greenstreet

Name: Christine Jacob
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Reconstructing an Author: Editing ‘Octavia Walsh her booke’
Abstract:

Like Mary Sidney before and Dorothy Wordsworth after, Octavia Walsh risks being cast into the diminutive role of ‘sister to the poet.’ When scholars, sellers of rare books, and her own family members mention Octavia, they speak of her in relation to her brother, the celebrated poet and critic William Walsh. Though Octavia Walsh herself was a writer, there are only two modern
volumes—both anthologies—where you may find her work: Roger Lonsdale’s Eighteenth-century women poets (1989) contains one poem; and Jill Seal Millman and Gillian Wright’s Early modern women’s manuscript poetry (2004) contains six. In this paper, I will make the case for editing Octavia Walsh more comprehensively and, while doing so, also critique the popular textualist approach to editing manuscript writing. Octavia Walsh’s extant manuscripts—an autograph notebook in the Bodleian library and an expanded presentation copy, now only on microfilm, at the British library—provide textual ground(s) on which to challenge theories that disregard the author in favour of viewing the manuscript as object. The material approach perpetuates the marginalization of ‘non-canonical’ writers. As Betty Travitsky has pointed out, women’s writing needs to be first edited—implicitly in an idealist form—before it can be deconstructed in a textualist form. To edit Octavia Walsh means to first create ‘her booke.’

Name: Ciara C. Barrick  
Institution: King’s College London  
Title: Marianne Moore’s “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns:” Annotations and Paratexts  
Abstract:

In September 1924, Marianne Moore sent her poem, “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns,” to Scofield Thayer, co-owner and editor of the 1920s literary magazine The Dial. Upon receiving the poem, Thayer and magazine president Dr. Sibley Watson were puzzled. They could not identify a number of the allusions, and they did not understand Moore’s use of quotations. It was recommended to Moore that she provide footnotes to the poem. In this presentation, I would like to provide my own set of footnotes to “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” through an examination of the annotations by Thayer on the proof of the poem, the correspondence surrounding its publication, and details from Moore’s unpublished autobiography, “On Coming About.” I will use these oft-overlooked sources to focus on Moore’s relationship with Thayer, a largely uninvestigated yet problematic character in her life. It is his commentary in the galley proofs that color their relationship as well as speak to the provenance of the poem itself. A fourth source of information regarding this relationship is Moore’s unpublished novel, “The Way We Live Now.”

By drawing together this archival material, I hope to contribute to the scholarship that addresses the gaps and omissions in Moore’s oeuvre. By putting Moore’s archive in Philadelphia in conversation with Thayer’s and The Dial’s at the Beinecke Library at Yale, I hope to establish a new reading of “Sea Unicorns and Land Unicorns” and encourage archival scholarship as a means of discovering new paratexts that illuminate canonical poetry.

Records of exclusion: psychiatry, history, the canon  
Chair: Zac Seager  

Name: Ciarán Byrne  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: Gaeler in Hell: the genesis of Austin Clarke’s Mnemosyne Lay in Dust  
Abstract:

‘on the walls ... countless names long forgotten, I scratched ... my epitaph ... one line 'Austin Clarke, Poet and Fool’ ” – The House of Terror
Based on his own experiences, Austin Clarke’s masterpiece, *Mnemosyne Lay in Dust* (1966), is a disturbing poetic account of involuntary psychiatric confinement during the Irish War of Independence. When viewed in tandem with his psychiatric records (medical certificate, case notes, administrative documents), the verisimilitude of the events relayed in *Mnemosyne* become evident: both accounts note the date of admission; Clarke’s delusional state and that, ultimately, he was force-fed through a rubber tube. Viewed in this context, his writing assumes the quality of personal testimony.

During his confinement, Clarke began writing a prose account of his hospital experiences. Alternately entitled 'The House of Terror' and 'Letters from the Madhouse' (c.1919), these manuscripts are living documents which Clarke returns to and annotates over the interim; a forty-year gestation which would see the work transformed from a first-person account to *Mnemosyne*, a poem written in the third-person which mediated Clarke’s experiences through the prism of an invented alter-ego.

Supported by ancillary documentation including two love-letters drafted in the first days of his hospitalisation, and the myriad dream-diaries he kept over his life, these manuscripts present an opportunity to explore both the experiences of an Irish psychiatric patient, and the manner through which one patient’s attitudes towards their confinement evolved throughout their life. Given the wealth of these unexplored documents, I propose the history of a single psychiatric patient; the recovery, in so far as possible, of at least one of the forgotten voices etched on the wall of the hospital ward.

**Name:** Huzan Bharucha  
**Institution:** University of Edinburgh  
**Title:** Gender Disparity in the Literary Canon: Editorial Bias in the Norton Anthologies  
**Abstract:**

This paper will examine the role of editorial bias in scholarly anthologies, and its effects on canon formation. In particular, it will examine the ways in which medieval and early modern women writers have been systematically marginalised in literature anthologies. The paper will combine statistical data analysis with a close examination of the editorial process and content of select literary anthologies. I will specifically be examining multiple volumes of the *Norton Anthology of English Literature* and the *Norton Anthology of Literature by Women*, as they are most commonly used in higher education. Data analysis, such as studies conducted by Gillian Gualtieri, Michelle Levy and Mark Perry, demonstrate that when gender disparity exists in the editorial process, it is often reflected in the content of the anthologies. At the same time, I will attempt to decipher why a volume like the *NALW*, edited primarily by women and scholars of feminist literature, also fails to recognise the prominence of coterie writing in the early modern period, and as such, dismisses much literature produced by women at the time. Additionally, these anthologies often favour certain female writers above others, which hinders attempts to broaden and diversify the literary canon. To conclude, I will explore some ways, including online portals, through which we can make literature by women, particularly from the pre-Victorian period, easily accessible to students. In doing so, I hope to focus on the pragmatic considerations to be taken when compiling a teaching anthology, and the controversies that arise from excluding women writers from such texts.

**Name:** Adele Caon  
**Institution:** University of Oxford
Title: What it looks like outside history: An embodied approach to *Life and Times of Michael K*

Abstract:

Current cognitive approaches to literature facilitate an embodied analysis of texts, in which both reader and characters are considered to have moving, feeling, expressive, and responsive bodies. Guillemette Bolens’ embodied interpretations of character can be read alongside Lisa Zunshine’s work on mind-reading to show how readers infer characters’ mental states and other rich social information through body language. A character’s shudder, gait or blush sometimes communicates more nuanced or significant detail than a narrator could otherwise describe.

In addition to movement, I suggest that readers are informed by static aspects of a character’s appearance. In everyday experience, elements of appearance are associated – often incorrectly – with personal information or traits such as political preference, religious affiliation, criminality and authoritativeness. One common example is the so-called ‘halo effect’, whereby an attractive person is perceived as having other positive qualities like intelligence, success or moral worth. Accordingly, the handsome hero is a more recognised literary convention than the hero of average looks. Authors may follow, challenge or subvert such expectations.

My particular subject in this paper is J.M. Coetzee’s *Life and Times of Michael K* and the social information readers infer from its characters’ bodies. K himself is portrayed as bathetic and genuinely ascetic: I examine how both interpretations are enlivened through K’s appearance and gestures, and how their incongruity relates to Coetzee’s statements elsewhere about literature’s role outside history. I consider how Michael K – his walking, starving, staring, harelipped self – conveys this ‘rivalry’ with history.

2:15pm-3:15pm: ROUND TABLE

Eleanor Lybeck (Trinity College, Oxford)
Emily Mayne (University of East Anglia)
Andrew Dean (St John’s College, Oxford)

3:15pm-3:30pm: COFFEE
3:30pm-4:45pm: SESSION 4

Silence and texts

Chair: Zac Seager

Name: Carissa Ma
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: The Empty Set: Silence in the Novels of Kazuo Ishiguro, Arundhati Roy, and Damon Galgut
Abstract:

The historic silence of women or that of the traditionally disenfranchised and their struggle to reclaim a voice in literature have been widely explored in recent scholarship. While silence in these writings is generally perceived to be a lamentable trope of passivity and/or oppression, many scholars have also argued for the intrinsic power of silence. Dauenhauer, in his work *Silence: The Phenomenon and Its Ontological Significance*, clarifies the tenuous connection of silence with human production and intention. In the same vein, Kalamaras in *Reclaiming the Tacit Tradition*, asserts that “silence and language act in a reciprocal fashion in the construction of knowledge”. All these existing works on the unspoken ground my own investigation into silence performed, imposed, and experienced. In Mathematics, the empty set denoted as {} is not equivalent to nothing; it is a set with nothing inside it, and a set is that which exists. I argue that the three novels: Damon Galgut’s *In A Strange Room*, Arundhati Roy’s *The God of Small Things*, and Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Buried Giant*, each a daring project of re-imagining in form and in content, challenges a rhetorical tradition that equates silence with merely the absence of text or voice, in turn revealing the troubled nature of silence. This paper seeks to explore how silence is represented as a multifaceted condition, by connecting silence to otherness, guilt, intention, and memory.

Name: Holly Fathi
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Silent But Deadly: Kay Ryan’s Silent Spaces
Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to contribute Kay Ryan’s poetic strategy to the debate over how silent space can and should be represented in poetry. The paper exposes the ways in which Kay Ryan overcomes the obstacle that ‘the word silence is still a sound’ - as Georges Bataille announced - to show that the use of sound and print is in fact fruitful, not limiting, to present silent space. Instead of attempting to represent or find an equivalent, Ryan gives rise to silent space through her manipulation of word, sound, and print. The poems ‘Losses’, ‘Gaps’, ‘Deferred Silence’, ‘Emptiness’ and ‘Sharks’ Teeth’ are considered pivotal poems for Ryan’s strategy. The paper uses these poems to examine how Ryan manipulates the multiple possibilities of words, including their semantic, sonic, structural, formal and visual potential, to lead to an irreversible and unsettling awareness of the presence of silent space in her poetry. Her release of silent space as a result of the method of her presentation causes a permanent change in navigating not only Ryan’s other poems but possibly even comparable linear poetry in general.
Name: Sophie Zhuang  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: Silence in *Samson Agonistes*

Abstract:

Milton’s closet drama *Samson Agonistes* deals extensively with silence. Samson, a prophesied hero, loses his secret strength because he fails to keep his silence. As punishment, he is cut off from divine communication and left to worry that God has forsaken him. Many critics interpret divine silence in the play as a condition for Samson’s understanding God through apophatic theology, which culminates in the suicidal attack as a divinely justified resolution.

In my paper, I argue that we have no access to Samson’s moral condition in the critical moment due to his own silence and absence, which in turn result from the genre of the text as a tragedy. Moreover, I argue that the eponymous protagonist’s absence in the critical moment of the play reflects the impossibility of depicting his moral condition, as well as the impossibility of such a condition in the first place. Unearthing Calvinist references in his earlier monologues, I argue that Samson is tormented by the contradiction between the absolute certainty of his glory and the fundamental unknowability of the very same thing. The former is revealed to him through prophecy and the latter, through God’s silence. I also interpret his blindness as a twisted Arminian metaphor for resisting Grace. Drawing on Hegel’s view of tragedy as being caught between two conflicting religious, epistemological and moral systems, I conclude that Samson’s suicide is not a resolution but a non-solution to his existential contradictions, with which Milton explores the nuances of Calvinism and Arminianism.

Forgotten, ignored, excluded: “women’s work” off the record  
Chair: Laura Jayne Wright

Name: Sarah Pickford  
Institution: University of Oxford  
Title: Omission in eighteenth-century manuscript recipe collections  
Abstract:

The handmade manuscript notebook of Helen Maitland in the Weston Library is a mishmash of different eighteenth-century recipes, from syllabub to hair powder, mince pies to gooseberry vinegar. There are blank spaces, annotations in different hands, and half-finished and repeated recipes. Nearly every recipe is unattributed. My paper will examine the invisible processes of construction behind this manuscript, tracing each unattributed recipe to its print source and examining how the compilers use and deviate from these sources. A study of omissions allows us to see how individual readers in the eighteenth century selected and adapted ‘useful’ material according to personal preference and economic circumstance.

My paper will seek to focus attention on the genres of cookery books and household manuals, and other non-fiction forms that have been omitted from canons and literary surveys of the eighteenth century. Whilst literary studies have historically tended to focus on exceptional writers and readers, I will examine how we might understand everyday readers and their use of everyday texts in relation to the theme of ‘omission’.

Name: Kate Allan
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** 'A Design Injurious or Rude': The Exclusion of Katherine Philips from Scientific Discourse  
**Abstract:**

My proposed paper would examine the work of the seventeenth century poet Katherine Philips, a poet whose work is steeped in the language of omission, in the light of a proto-scientific context from which she has thus far been excluded. In her poem ‘A Friend’, Philips argues that ‘for Men t’exclude / Women from Friendship’s vast capacity, / Is a Design injurious or rude’ (‘A Friend’, 165-67). My paper would examine how Philips negotiates this exclusion from masculinized male friendship (amicitia) through her reinterpretation of John Donne’s alchemical imagery, complicating the gender dynamic inscribed in Donne’s Neoplatonism and creating a more proto-feminist interpretation of this philosophy.

Philips’s negotiation of her exclusion from male friendship has been discussed by critics such as Valerie Traub, Lorna Hutson and Catharine Grey. However, the proto-scientific, alchemical aspect of her writing has received notably little critical attention. I would argue that Philips’s use of alchemical imagery is crucial in enabling her to create a politically significant egalitarianism between genders.

Philips is a poet ideally suited to an examination of omission: omission has been both her subject and that to which she has been subjected through critical elision. I would welcome the opportunity to readdress this omission in a paper that proposes a new context in which to read her poems, celebrating the ways in which her proto-feminism and proto-scientific writing renders her a pivotal figure both in women’s poetry and women in science.

**Name:** Kitty Gurnos-Davis  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** Omissions of Experience: women’s work and the material culture of theatre  
**Abstract:**

Omissions do not occur solely in the construction or transmission of a text, performance, or artwork, but also in the way in which a subject is addressed in scholarly and popular narratives. This paper proposes that in order to shed light on the omitted experiences and perspectives of underrepresented social groups, it is necessary to conceptualise new methodological approaches to our subjects. I use material culture studies to consider how decentralising agency from text-based research permits an untethering from established perspectives of the socio-cultural environment. I explore how this approach can offer an alternative lens through which to reflect on women’s experiences in the theatre that have been lost, hidden, or overlooked by a Western canon of androcentric written sources.

It is particularly fitting to bring together women, material culture, and the stage. For centuries women have been ideologically associated with the corporeal and the material world, while men have been aligned with the spiritual and the mind. Although this trades in gendered archetypes, the consequences of this division has served to restrict the representation of many women’s full participation in society, something that can be revalued through the inherent concern of theatrical form with the interactions between bodies and objects in a material context.

I will consequently revalue the representations of women’s work onstage and its actualities backstage through the material culture of theatre in a Victorian to contemporary context. My
paper is particularly concerned with hierarchies of theatre work that are influenced by gender politics.

[Text not found: exclusion and absence]

Chair: Beatrice Montedoro

Name: Rachael Hodge
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Printer as reader in early modern England: Richard Jones’s “purpose[ful]” omission
Abstract:

On 14 August 1590, printer Richard Jones entered “The twooe comicall discourses of TOMBERLEIN” for publication in the Stationers’ Register. Later that year, Jones printed both parts of Marlowe’s Tamburlaine as “Tamburlaine the Great…Devided into two Tragical Discourses.” This striking generic inversion – from “comicall” to “tragicall” – is seemingly explained in a printer’s preface, in which Jones claims that he has “(purposely) omitted and left out some fond and frivolous Jestures…far unmeet for the matter.” Jones effectively positions himself as editor of the play, imposing upon it a generic decorum of the kind advocated in Sidney’s Defense of Poesy (c. 1581), with its invective against “mingling kings and clowns.” Jones’s intervention has shaped the subsequent reception not only of Tamburlaine, but also of Marlowe and, indeed, of early modern tragedy as a genre. Yet Jones’s preface has been largely overlooked by critics, who are, like Jones himself, unwilling to countenance the prospect of a comic Tamburlaine. In this paper, I will take Tamburlaine’s preface as a starting point for exploring Jones’s contribution to the emergence of early modern dramatic genres in print. Building on recent work in bibliographical studies, and particularly on Marta Straznicky’s Shakespeare’s Stationers (2013), I will consider Jones as a “reader…as well as a trades[man]”, demonstrating that his career before Tamburlaine evinces a sustained interest in dramatic genre, and arguing that he should be viewed, along with more famous stationers like Edward Blount, as a significant figure in the development of drama on the printed page.

Name: Molly Clark
Institution: University of Oxford
Title: Rhyme and Missing Words in Early Modern Drama
Abstract:

My paper will demonstrate two ways in which we can use rhyme to analyse the material evidence of early modern theatre practices. First, I will look at actors’ parts, and at cues more generally as they can be extrapolated from full dramatic texts. The scroll from which an early modern actor learnt his part is famously a catalogue of omissions: he is given nothing to go on but the last couple of words from the speech previous to his. I will demonstrate the ways in which rhyme fills these gaps for the actor, providing during performance a sonic cue additional to the pre-learnt written part. In the second half of my paper, I will examine the evidence we have of the censorship that early modern play texts underwent, and I will show how rhyme can be used to reconstruct what went missing as a result of these erasures, and to demonstrate the ways in which censors approached texts. I will also review some examples of humorous self-censorship in the form of blanks that must be filled in. I hope that my paper will offer a new way of bringing together literary criticism and theatre history, in using rhyme as a tool to approach the wide-ranging evidential omissions of early modern drama as we encounter it today.
**Name:** Yajya Shrivastav  
**Institution:** University of Leeds  
**Title:** Disdained and Erased: Dickens’ Christmas Collaborators  
**Abstract:**

The Christmas stories or the ‘extra Christmas Numbers’ published in Charles Dickens’ periodicals *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* form an integral part of Dickens’ short fiction. The fact which makes these relatively unknown stories intriguing and stimulating for the study of mainstream Dickensian canon as well, is that these works happen to be among the rarer and fewer grounds where Dickens collaborated (in the truest sense of the word) with other Victorian authors - mostly obscure - who constituted the writing staff for his periodicals. Works like *The Seven Poor Travellers*, *The Holly-Tree Inn*, *The Wreck of the Golden Mary* etc. are narratives constituting multiple segments which were written in collaboration with authors like Wilkie Collins, G. A. Sala, Harriet Parr, Percy Fitzgerald and many others. However, following the first appearance of these collaborative works in 1850’s and 1860’s, majority of the reprints and later editions - until the present - have deliberately omitted the sections by other writers and have only printed the portions written by Dickens; thus, reducing these diverse and multi-authored collections down to a creation solely and exclusively by Dickens. The omission of the very writers from the Dickensian canon who, with Dickens, co-created the texts which significantly helped carry forward the Dickensian Christmas tradition - both in terms of its spirit and values as well as in terms of the massive commercial market it attracted - is difficult to grasp, and thus, raises many questions. Examining the Christmas numbers of *Household Words*, this paper will endeavour to assess the value and importance of the sections written by other authors (which are now omitted) to the overall plot. Are their sections really needed for a proper comprehension of the narrative’s meaning or are they merely some optional and dispensable accounts whose absence would not make any difference to the fulfilment of the storyline?

**Censoring the self**  
Chair: Lillian Hingley

**Name:** Camilla Jackson  
**Institution:** University of Oxford  
**Title:** A journey of epic proportions: wandering narration in Byron’s *Don Juan*  
**Abstract:**

*Don Juan* famously defies definition. Scholars have struggled with Byron’s sprawling, contradictory, paradoxical poem which refuses to be limited by genre, narratology, and characterisation of narrator or hero. It seems to disguise more than it reveals; it is slippery and full of misdirection and deliberate omission. However, I argue that Byron makes deliberately ambiguous choices in structure, narratology and characterisation to reflect a vacillating picture of the world. He employs leaps in time and place, variable temporalities, and digressive episodes to allow his poet-narrator responses which require the Greek concept of *mētis* as a heroic attribute of his poet-narrator.

In its most general translation, *mētis* is a kind of cunning intelligence, most embodied by Odysseus. *Mētis* appears as multiple, many-coloured or shimmering and shifting due to its equivocal schema of operation. It is a power of cunning and deceit, operating through disguise
to mask its true being. It is required to have these traits in order to enable an appropriate response to and outwitting of the equally indeterminate and fluctuating realms of the reality it participates in. Byron’s *poliunétis* poet-narrator re-characterises heroism through his cunning in poetics and actions, and it this aspect of omission through disguise which invites us to question what we seek in a modern hero.

**Name:** Fernanda Lai  
**Institution:** University of Cambridge  
**Title:** Publication Without a Publicity of the Self: The Lyric ‘I’ in Emily Dickinson and Claudia Rankine  
**Abstract:**

This paper compares the lyric “I” in Emily Dickinson and Claudia Rankine, showing how both poets pursue strategies of self-omission to achieve a publication without a publicity of the self, deliberately refusing any possible identification of the “I” with the poet. “Don’t Say I if it means so little,” Rankine writes in an earlier work, and she takes this to heart in her widely-acclaimed *Citizen*, omitting the usual “I” of the lyric for the implicating “you.” Through the sustained use of direct address, Rankine refuses to appear as the univocal and authorial “I” of her text, putting “you” in her place instead, structurally thematising the question of responsibility as she confronts racism through her poetry. Upon first glance, Dickinson seems to be the antithesis of Rankine as a poet; indeed, “I” is the dominant pronoun in Dickinson’s work. However, it was Dickinson’s express intention to appear as other than herself in her work, and Dickinson’s “I” should not be understood as a representation of herself, but as she once wrote — a “supposed person.” By omitting the “I” of the poet, both Rankine and Dickinson prove “I” to be a position that destabilises the boundaries between “I” and “you,” and reveals the limits of the communicability of individual experience for the speaker and reader, creating a reflective and differential relation that allows both to remain specific without specifying through relation.

5:00pm-6:00pm: KEYNOTE  

6:00pm: DRINKS RECEPTION