



does not exhaust all the components of the genius specific to Sophocles's play]" (301). By way of agreement, may I add that I recently served as dialect coach on a college production of Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and in early rehearsals, observed seasoned director Lee Lyons patiently block each scene, working out every movement and compiling a small arsenal of gestures, cues, and props, including an exploding tennis ball and three battle sequences. All functioned in lightning-speed unison during four stunning performances, and otherwise existed solely in the director's mind. Which is to say, in accord with author Navaud, that more happens in a performance than is captured on a page.

Owen Staley, *California Baptist University, USA*  
doi:[10.1017/rqx.2024.271](https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.271)

*Blanks, Print, Space, and Void in English Renaissance Literature: An Archaeology of Absence.* Jonathan Sawday.

Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023. xviii + 574 pp. \$45.

---

Text dominates in the act of reading, and because of this dominance it is easy to see the empty spaces surrounding the text as an absence, completely neutral in their conveyance of meaning. Sawday argues, however, that this assumption of neutrality, of an absence of meaning, when viewing empty spaces in early modern literature is limiting. In *Blanks, Print, Space, and Void in English Renaissance Literature: An Archaeology of Absence*, Sawday seeks to systematically dismantle his reader's assumption about different kinds of empty spaces on the printed page, replacing them with a systematic "archaeology of absence" that will add to their own thinking about "blanks," an extensive expansion of Iser's reader-response theory.

Sawday's book divides ten chapters into two parts. Part 1, "Landscapes," provides contextual information about the use of blanks in the Renaissance in its five chapters. Here, Sawday begins with a careful definition of the word *blank* that he uses to analyze the discomfort that blank spaces have historically provided. In doing so, he reveals that this unease with empty space or voids in the West is present beyond the page and provides examples of this using reader-response theory, twentieth-century cinema, and early physics. Throughout his book, Sawday never shies away from providing relevant examples from other mediums and periods if their connection to the Renaissance is clear. The theoretical first chapter is built upon by the more specific contextual chapters that follow. Sawday's second chapter provides a crucial parallel between *blanke*

and *blacke*, demonstrating how discussions of race in the period used the printing process as a metaphor. This chapter also highlights how colonial expansion was rationalized by defining Indigenous areas as empty on maps being produced during the period. In chapter 3, Sawday becomes even more focused on the printed page, providing contextual information about how page layouts, spacing, and font choices were defined before analyzing dedications and empty pages in Renaissance books in chapters 4 and 5. I appreciated the book's commitment to context in the first section, which provides foundational structures that interested readers can use to expand upon or interrogate the conclusions in the specific case studies in the second part.

Part 2, "Excavations," consists entirely of case studies that rely upon the first half's focus on context. For example, chapter 6, "Exploring the Blank Archive," is an analysis of blank forms in the early modern period that draws upon the contextual work of chapter 2 to highlight how the slave trade required an extensive bureaucracy facilitated by blank forms. Subsequent parts of this chapter underline how small jobs such as form printing were vital to printers in the period, a financial reality that even interrupted the printing of the 1623 First Folio of Shakespeare's plays. Chapter 7 focuses on omissions, providing a contextual discussion of missing text practices in the period, culminating in an analysis of Shakespeare's missing couplet in Sonnet 126. Chapter 8 takes a more holistic view of the use of space in poetry. Within this chapter, I was particularly struck by the correlation between the use of space in printed collections and royalist politics, which I found was emblematic of Sawday's interest in tying material decisions to consequential literary positions. The final two chapters of the book look at larger systems of omission, tackling censorship and the unfinished text. These act as a return to Sawday's expansion on Iser's reader-response theory, highlighting how both readers and authors construct meaning using blanks.

The knowledgeable reader will look at individual sections of Sawday's extensively researched text and notice blanks of their own that they may wish to fill, and this is to the author's credit. *Blanks, Print, Space, and Void in English Renaissance Literature* is ambitious in its scope and successful in demonstrating that any blank contains a multitude of meanings that are worth unpacking. Sawday creates a framework for that discussion, that, thanks to the lines he draws between material history and historical theory, leaves his readers with only a few blanks to fill.

Benjamin Djain, *American University, USA*  
doi:[10.1017/rqx.2024.255](https://doi.org/10.1017/rqx.2024.255)