

Shakespeare and the Plastic Arts
SAA 2012
Abstracts and Participants
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Caroline Bicks

Boston College

Abstract: “Rueful Acts”

This paper explores two different but equally dominant strands of the Flora story in the early modern period: Flora, the Roman whore turned theatrical patron/deity; and Flora the raped nymph turned goddess. Both of these stories had a strong pictorial tradition. How do these alternative narratives of human transformation, supported and often enacted through art, help to contextualize and complicate Perdita’s initial resistance to performing the goddess in Act Four of *The Winter’s Tale*? This paper comes out of my work on early modern girlhood and girl-actors. I’ve recently argued that Ophelia’s madness should be read as a type of performance mobilized to inspire acts of historical memory. We have an obvious example of this performing figure in Perdita, a character who echoes Ophelia in unmistakable ways, both in how she looks and what she does.

I argue that we must consider these figures together, both pictorially and textually, in order to arrive at a more complex reading of Shakespeare’s performing girls. Perdita is instructed by Florizel and her foster father to get “pranked up” as the goddess Flora, but she consistently calls attention to herself as a resistant player. In doing so, she deconstructs her performance as the Spring goddess who represents a particularly female rite of passage, one marked by sexual activity. She halts time rather than enabling its passage by resisting her role. At the same time, she reenacts Ophelia’s own insistence on remembering what has been lost by handing out the herbs that defy “natural” cycles of birth and death by lasting “all the winter long.” Perdita remarks: “Methinks I play as I have seen them do / In Whitsun pastorals. Sure this robe of mine, / Does change my disposition” (4.4.132-34). What we hear second-hand in *Hamlet*—the chanting of Ophelia’s “old lauds,” gets captured in the text, on stage, and on the canvas with Perdita’s distinctly pagan/Catholic performance. By detaching the pranked up Perdita from her resistant words, however, do these pictures create a different kind of nostalgia? And, if so, for what?

Cris Smith

Independent Scholar, U.S.A. [former Professor of English, two Brazilian universities]

Abstract: “Images of Ophelia in Brazil: the politics of subversion of the female artist”

Images of Ophelia have remained widely popular since their explosion in 19th century England. Achieving the status of a cult figure, the Shakespearean heroine occupies a privileged place in Western visual culture, becoming one of the most popular subjects of literary painting. While most scholarship devoted to the iconography of Ophelia traces her presence in British and American cultures, her visual renditions have also found their way in different corners of the world and help chronicle how distinct cultures respond to the “myth of Ophelia” in contemporary globalized, or rather “glocalized”, world. My contribution to the seminar will be to look at the very recent (2008-2011) emergence of Ophelia in Brazilian visual arts. I will analyze images (mainly photographs, but also images of performances) produced by three Brazilian female artists who engage energetically with resurrecting Ophelia from a counter discursive perspective. Using their own bodies as political sites to reread essentialist inscriptions of the feminine so conspicuous in clichéd appropriations of Ophelia, the artists/models propose to make visible what paintings of beautiful dead Ophelias have striven to keep hidden under a poetic veil. I am also interested in interrogating why images of Ophelia were so tardy to land on Brazilian soil. I will suggest what socio- historical circumstances prompted her sudden materialization in Brazil as well as consider the intercultural re-workings the Brazilian Ophelias were submitted to.

Michelle Ephraim
Worcester Polytechnic Institute
Abstract: “Shakespeare’s Body Online”

I first became interested in Shakespeare’s body while researching a paper on contemporary feminist retellings of *The Merchant of Venice*. This led me to historical-romance novels like Erica Jong’s *Serenissima* (later renamed *Shylock’s Daughter*) and Faye Kellerman’s *The Quality of Mercy*. The most striking aspect of both these novels is the role that Shakespeare’s body plays in them. Effeminate, erotic, and flexible (in every sense), his body appears in a number of “hard core” sequences with men, women, or some combination of both. As Richard Burt has shown, there is a thriving intersection of Shakespeare’s plots and porn; what I’m interested in, however, is how Shakespeare’s own body is imagined erotically in textual, pictorial, and digital form.

Both Jong and Kellerman (and others, I would discover) seem obsessed with Shakespeare’s body, an obsession that I too acquired (but in a different sense) as the reader of these novels. It is both frustrating and interesting that finding material representations of Shakespeare’s body is difficult. In this essay, I discuss his corporeal form in webcomics such as *Thinkin*

Lincoln, in which he appears as the disembodied head, Skeleton Shakespeare. I will also look at graphic novels such as the recent *Kill Shakespeare*, the plot of which is driven by a quest for Shakespeare, his body itself the elusive object of desire. The main question I pursue in this essay is how these material representations express both cultural fantasies about and hostility towards Shakespeare.

Marcia Eppich-Harris
Marian University

Abstract: “Julie Newdoll’s Series *Shakespeare: The Mirror Up to Science: Hamlet, Apoptosis, and the Mise en Abyme*”

Artist Julie Newdoll creates an interdisciplinary experience of Shakespeare’s *Hamlet* in her ongoing series of oil paintings, *Shakespeare: The Mirror up to Science*. As a trained artist with a degree in microbiology, Newdoll’s full portfolio represents scientific subjects within a literary and mythological framework. In her Shakespeare series, Newdoll explores *Hamlet* as a metaphor for programmed cell death, known in biology as apoptosis. Linking Hamlet to apoptosis asserts that the hero’s journey toward revenge is not only a quest to kill an unjust foe, but is also a suicide narrative, as has been acknowledged by Burton R. Pollin in “Hamlet, A Successful Suicide.” Newdoll’s paintings present cellular suicide and *Hamlet* as narratives that reflect one another, creating a distinctive *mise en abyme* within each scene.

Newdoll’s work on Hamlet includes five paintings: *The Arrival of the Death Message*, *The Mousetrap: Checkpoint on the Path to Destruction*, *The Commitment*, *The Falling Off*, and *After the Dead March*. The first painting, *The Arrival of the Death Message*, shows Hamlet’s companions swearing on his sword not to reveal the story of the ghost to anyone. *The Mousetrap: Checkpoint on the Path to Destruction* portrays the play within the play in *Hamlet*. *The Commitment* portrays the moment when Hamlet contemplates killing Claudius as he prays. *The Falling Off* shows Laertes strangling Hamlet in Ophelia’s grave, as the dead girl lies nearby and the rest of the funeral attendees attempt to reach for the fighting men. Finally, *After the Dead March* displays the coffins of Gertrude, King Hamlet, and Prince Hamlet, as well as a painting within the painting that shows Hamlet pouring poisoned wine down Claudius’s throat. Each of these scenes represents particular moments in the process of apoptosis and corresponds to related scenes in Hamlet’s own fated destruction as a revenge hero.

Claire Falck
Knox College

Abstract: “Mocked with Art’: Mannerism in *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and the Masque Designs of Inigo Jones”

This paper analyzes how the visual aesthetics of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* reflect and influence the development of mannerism in the Jacobean court, specifically in the drawings and masque designs of Inigo Jones. A figure more often associated with Ben Jonson, his frequent collaborator in the production of courtly masques, this paper examines the ways Jones's masque designs mirror Shakespeare's appropriation and examination within these plays of the powers and dangers of a mannerist aesthetic that privileges artifice over naturalism, decoration over austerity, and a love of artful ornament over structural unity. This paper argues that in these plays Shakespeare examines the interrelationship between nature, art, and artifice, particularly in terms of how art can serve and imitate, but also overshadow and corrupt nature through the lens of a visual mannerist style, as well as through open allusions to the courtly masque form. Jones, as the most famous artist at the court of King James when mannerism was in vogue, uses but also revises and critiques the mannerist style in his masque designs, achieving, as John Peacock observes, "work [that] is both mimesis and imitatio, its material both nature and art."¹ By exploring the parallels between the treatment of mannerism in Jones' masque designs and Shakespeare's interrogation of mannerist aesthetics in *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale*, this paper analyzes the connections between Shakespeare and one of his earliest visual imitators and re-interpreters within the larger context of the overlapping and mutually influential relationship of visual and verbal art in early modern England.

1. John Peacock, *The Stage Designs of Inigo Jones: The European Context*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995) p. 34.

Jeanie Grant Moore

University San Diego

Abstract: "The Royal Gold Cup"

In a glass case at the center of the British Museum's Gallery 40 rests an exquisitely beautiful artifact known as The Royal Gold Cup. Its history of travel and exchange is imbricated with political events in France, England, and Spain and evokes certain moments in the plays of Shakespeare. As it is about to be featured in a special exhibit at the British Museum in 2012, "Shakespeare and the Theatre of the World," the time seems especially appropriate to explore the trajectory of the Cup, as well as its possible connections to *Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Pericles*.

Originally created for the French royal family, the Royal Gold Cup came into the hands of John, Duke of Bedford, appointed Regent of France by Henry V in 1422. If we think of the Cup as one of the spoils of war deriving from Agincourt, an irony arises in relation to the historical events in Shakespeare's plays. In *Henry the Fourth, Part One*, when Hal resists Falstaff's urging that he take part in a robbery, Falstaff comments pointedly, "[T]hou cam'st not of the blood royal, if thou darest not stand for ten shillings" (Riverside 1.2.140-41). He implies, of course, that Hal's father stole a kingdom, so Hal ought not to balk at theft. Bardolph will later pay with his life for stealing a pyx, in contrast not only to Henry IV, but also to Henry V, who aggressively "stole" France in violation of all contemporary rules of war. During the French occupation, the Duke of Bedford gained many treasures, the most valuable of which was the Royal Gold Cup. The privileged get away with far more momentous crimes than Bardolph's. Romeo could have advised him: "The world is not thy friend, nor the world's law, / The world affords no law to make thee rich..." (*Rom.* 5.1.72-73).

The Royal Gold Cup appears in later Tudor inventories, having been displayed during Henry VIII's reign, when a band of Tudor roses was added to the Cup's stem, and during Elizabeth's reign as well. Under the Stuarts, during the Somerset House conference in 1604, James I gave it as a good will offering to Spain. Subsequently, it remained in a Spanish convent for over two hundred years.

The Cup's enameled artwork tells the story of the martyrdom of St. Agnes, whose experience in the brothel parallels that of Marina in *Pericles*. Shakespeare puts an early-modern twist on the Biblical narrative represented on this lovely medieval piece.

The Royal Gold Cup's presence in England during Shakespeare's time opens the possibility of seeing analogous moments in these three plays.

Sujata Iyengar
University Georgia

Abstract: " 'Those Arden Shakespeare Books': The Brotherhood of Ruralists' Covers"

During the late 1970s a group of English artists retreated from the increasingly conceptual and abstract London art world to the countryside, styling themselves (in emulation of both the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and of Samuel Palmer's Brotherhood of Ancients) The Brotherhood of Ruralists. The Ruralists' first joint major exhibition (1980) comprised a series of paintings, drawings, and sculptures on Shakespeare's Ophelia that encompassed a variety of styles and approaches – from the arch wit of Peter Blake, the so-called "Godfather of English Pop Art" and the sardonic feminism of his then-wife, the fabric artist and sculptor Jann Haworth, to the affectionate portraits of Annie Ovenden, the clear lines and color blocks of Graham Ovenden, the subtle watercolors of Ann Arnold, and the heightened botanical detail of Graham Inshaw. Despite their differences, these works and, later, the Arden 2 Shakespeare covers designed by the Ruralists and marketed aggressively by Methuen shared what Blake himself called a "magic realism," a deep engagement with the textual world of Shakespeare within a mythologized English landscape.

The Arden 2s sold well, but the mainstream British art establishment accused the Ruralists of "loud commercialism," pretentious sentimentality, and anti-intellectual nostalgia. Over the past five years, however, art critics have re-evaluated the Ruralists' place in British art, noting their "strangeness" or even "extraordinariness" and contextualizing their contribution to British Pop Art. In this paper I will consider the Ruralists' Arden 2 covers as postmodern Pop Art and suggest that what seemed at the time to be narrow-minded insularity now strikes us as an ecological concentration on the natural world; what seemed to be trendy modernizing now looks like the postmodern trait that Linda Hutcheon and others identify as "pastiche," and that what seemed sentimental now appears, in Fredric Jameson's term, as a historical "euphoria."

Tracey Metivier
Indiana U

Abstract: "Will o' the Wisps: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Shakespeare's Flashbulb Memory"

In my paper, "Will o' the Wisps: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and Shakespeare's Camera Obscura," I locate a distinctly photographic vision at the heart of the play. I begin with a Victorian theatrical and artistic culture obsessed with spectacularizing Shakespeare's fairy-tale and then turn to photography as an alternative representational model for conceptualizing the relationship between authenticity and fantasy in the play. In this paper, I illuminate a set of aperture-like moments within the play that "dodge and burn" collective memory. This phenomenon, I argue, best describes an affective conflict between skepticism and intense belief inherent in the contested relationship between photography and more traditional plastic arts: namely, the former's association with documentary impulses and the latter's association with imaginative impulses. For the purposes of this discussion my paper follows a more dream-like path in which associations are made freely.

Kevin Pask
Concordia University (Montreal)
Abstract: "Fairy Painting, Fairy Theater"

This paper examines the eighteenth-century representation of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, stressing the implicit competition between the visual arts and the theater for a privileged

role in representing Shakespeare. From Henry Purcell's *The Fairy Queen* onward, the play was often adapted to semi-operatic or musical format; the only full theatrical production in the eighteenth century was a failure. Visual artists, on the other hand, seem to have taken *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as an invitation to exceed the representational limitations of the stage. The visual response to the play from the later years of the eighteenth century was to emphasize the imaginative—and erotic—landscapes that it produced, profoundly inaccessible to any possible stage production. Significantly, it was the German-speaking artist, Henry Fuseli (Johann Heinrich Fuesli), affiliated with Sturm and Drang and Johann Gottfried Herder, who introduced the genre of fairy painting, and in particular Shakespearean fairies, to England. Fuseli was the first to have clearly recognized something of the grotesque sexuality that characterizes Shakespeare's play, inaugurating a strong distinction between Romantic fantasy and the more conventional theatrical productions of the play. At about the same time, both George Romney and Sir Joshua Reynolds explored somewhat different versions of sexuality, especially female sexuality. William Blake, on the other hand, created images of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* equally remote from the stage, but which stressed, instead of sexuality, the social leveling implicit in Shakespeare's treatment of Puck. The combined effect of such visual representations of the play made it available to both sexual fantasy and political rebellion.

Kimberly Rhodes

Drew University

Abstract: "Shakespeare and Pre-Raphaelite Image-Making in *The Germ/Art and Poetry*"

It is a commonplace of Pre-Raphaelite scholarship to mention that in 1848 William Holman Hunt and Dante Gabriel Rossetti formulated a list of "immortals" comprised primarily of literary figures, including Dante, Shakespeare and Keats, although Jesus Christ perches at the pinnacle of the hierarchy. The immortals play a pivotal role in the well-rehearsed narrative of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood and often serve as a marker of its youthful ambitions, but Elizabeth Prettejohn rightly surmises that, given the disagreements among the Pre-Raphaelites about the immortals, analyzing the list in a comprehensive manner is difficult. However, by considering the visual and textual presence of Shakespeare's characters in four issues of *The Germ* (later *Art and Poetry*), the illustrated journal published in 1850 designed to promote Pre-Raphaelitism to a broad audience at its nascent stage, we can examine the instrumentality of the "immortal" featured most prominently therein in the public construction and dissemination of a burgeoning Pre-Raphaelite identity that is marked by complex allegiances to both the traditional and the avant-garde, the past and the future, and the national and the international. At the time, Shakespearean subjects were favored by "conventional" British artists and often featured in more mainstream periodicals and, knowing this, the Pre-Raphaelites may have strategically deployed Shakespearean material to simultaneously assert their English conformity and difference at this early stage in their development. Examination of the role of Shakespeare in the periodical also enhances discussion about how William Michael Rossetti, simultaneously as editor of *The Germ* and art critic for *The Critic*, used Shakespearean subjects as a didactic and defensive tool to instruct viewers and readers on Pre-Raphaelite principles at a critical moment in the group's history.

Marcia Robinson

Kean University

Abstract: "Apocalyptic History in the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery"

John Boydell's project for developing a school of English history-painting was situated in an eighteenth-century discourse which lamented the English preference for portraiture and extolled the superiority of historical-painting, which, its proponents argued, represented a universal humanity and so promoted the civic virtues of a ruling class. Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, in contrast, was designed to attract a newly

prosperous English middle class and to create a commercial market for the engravings based on the paintings in his gallery. In selecting Shakespeare's work as the subject of his gallery, Boydell accorded him the role of national historian and endorsed an expanding conception of the work performed by historical painters, whose traditional subjects had been drawn from the classical world and the Bible. Theorist newly claimed that history- painting might also represent the distinctive customs of a nation to its people, promoting a sense of national affiliation and nationhood. The focus of my essay will be an engraving from the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery, "The Christening of Princess Elizabeth," based on Matthew William Peters' painting of the final scene of King Henry VIII. I will discuss how the engraving participates in a contemporary debate inspired by the French Revolution. How do Boydell's English viewers, living in a revolutionary era in which some regarded themselves as witnesses to an apocalyptic age and others as audience to a tragedy of shocking proportion, situate themselves and the English nation in relationship to Peters' evocation of Shakespeare's messianic prophecy of monarchical triumph? I will argue that the engraving appropriate Shakespeare's text to give visual embodiment to a counter revolutionary model of national identity and to re-frame eighteenth-century English history as successor to and a continuation of Shakespeare's idealized Elizabethan past.

Catherine Thomas

College of Charleston

Abstract: "All the World's a Page: Meaning and Representation in the Earliest Shakespeare Comics"

This essay discusses several comic artworks from the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries that include Shakespeare and his works in their design. I primarily analyze an anonymous set of lithograph prints from 1824-1825, entitled "Shakespeare Illustrated: Life's but a Walking Shadow." These three prints appear to be very like comic strips in format, although their frames seem to be non-sequential. While certainly borrowing from similar contemporary artistic trends, I contend that this set of prints may be considered one of the earliest Shakespeare comic strips. As I show, its physical properties and thematic links demonstrate more similarities than differences with later, more familiar comic strips which appeared especially in newspapers of later decades. My analysis positions these prints within popular artistic genres of their period and draws our attention to the important and myriad ways that social and political narratives were artistically being linked to Shakespeare's work and to his stature as a British cultural icon. Some questions I address include: Are these scene selections merely random and the overall print set an extended drawing exercise themed around a well-recognized British author? Or should we see them as deliberate social commentary and a predecessor to modern comic book forms of Shakespeare's work? What are the material, social, and political stakes of deploying Shakespeare (man, works, cultural icon) in this particular medium?

Alan Young

Emeritus, Acadia University

Abstract: "Sarah Bernhardt's Sculpture of Ophelia"

This paper examines Sarah Bernhardt's sculptural representations of the death of Shakespeare's Ophelia. Sarah Bernhardt was a highly accomplished sculptress, who in the 1870s came near to abandoning her theatrical career in order to devote herself fully to sculpting and painting. She first exhibited at the Salon de Paris in 1874 and regularly exhibited works in the cities abroad where she performed while on tour. In 1880, during her first tour in the United States, she exhibited for the first time a marble bas-relief of the death of Shakespeare's Ophelia. This paper discusses some facets of Bernhardt's work as a sculptress, the broad cultural context that gave rise to her Ophelia, and the particular interest of Bernhardt in the subject of Ophelia.