

SAA 2013: Greek Texts and the Early Modern Stage

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J.F. Bernard (University of Montreal) – Shakespeare, Galen, and the Whirligig of Humours

This paper relies on *Twelfth Night* as a synecdochic representation of a salient feature of Shakespearean drama, where the plays both draw from and eschew Galenic ideologies. My contention is that, while Shakespearean characters often rely on a Galenic lexicon for self-representational purposes (particularly in the midst of extreme passions), these instances are undercut by larger tonal and thematic pressures that shift the focus away from physical (humoural) characterizations. I examine the rampant melancholy found in *Twelfth Night* as a linchpin of such a phenomenon. The play represents an ideal test case for this aforementioned shift since it essentially closes the book on ‘pure’ Shakespearean comedy, ahead of the great tragedies and more problematic late works, and stands at a pivotal generic juncture. Here, characters like Orsino, Olivia, and Viola borrow heavily from humoural discourses in order to communicate the woes that plague them. Although this fosters much comedy within the play, it ultimately shows itself to be an inadequate mode of self-characterization. This relegation of Galenism thus dovetails with the play’s swooping wave of self-transformations, as the manifold melancholic incarnations that populate the comedy’s first half are eventually curbed and replaced by a nostalgic sense of sorrow, akin to the inevitable passage of time. This emotional transference, from the physical to the ethereal, attest to the paradoxical persistence of Galenic humouralism in the period’s drama, as simultaneously relevant and obsolete to Shakespearean drama. On its broadest level, the paper will highlight Shakespeare’s opportunism in drawing from Classical Greek texts, respecting or refuting Galenic models as the occasion dictates.

Marie Blackman (University of Massachusetts, Amherst) – *The Taming of the Shrew: Language as the Measure of All Things*

Shakespeare was a thinker, a playwright who used the resources of drama to explore Renaissance philosophical debates about the nature and limits of the search for knowledge. *The Taming of the Shrew* situates the audience amidst a philosophical conversation that began with the ancient Greeks, a battle between faith and reason and the complex problem of immanence and transcendence, called universals. The central questions in this conversation dealt with the boundaries of what the body perceived and the noumenal faculties that persisted in recognizing the existence of something beyond bodily perception. Was there an essence common to all things that was made manifest in the particular, or was there an individual, changeable, essence that led us to apprehend the universal? Was there a concealed reality independent of the sense-appearance that defied descriptors, or were words and symbols themselves somehow fully capturing, or participating in, and therefore communicating, all the reality there was? These questions raised important issues about knowledge and the ways in which reality was apprehended and understood. During the Middle Ages, these ancient philosophical concerns re-emerged in the form of what has subsequently been termed Nominalism and Realism. The Nominalist movement promoted the idea of the absence of universal principals. As their name indicates, Nominalists believed that there was nothing other than names to describe reality; words were arbitrarily applied to immediate, tangible objects and their meaning agreed by collective agreement or convention. Their positions were set against those of the Realists, who believed in the existence of universal ideal forms. For Realists such as Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), the word that defined the object was its accurate representation. During the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, these issues continued to be addressed in many forms. But it was the

rediscovery of Plato's *Cratylus* that particularly shaped Renaissance engagements with these traditional philosophical debates. As E. J. Ashworth writes,

Serious discussion of the possibility of naturally significant spoken language seems to have been purely a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century phenomenon. It was due in part to the rediscovery of Plato's *Cratylus* and other classical sources, in part to the strong Renaissance interest in magic and the cabala, with the concomitant hope that knowledge of natural language would enable one to exercise some control over the objects signified, and in part to renewed biblical studies. (156)

In this paper, I argue that Shakespeare's concern with language in *The Taming of the Shrew* is in dialogue with these Renaissance debates anchored in Plato *Cratylus*, particularly in those debates that sought to understand natural language, its source, and its role in the creation of reality.

Charlotte Coffin (University of Paris Est-Créteil) – ‘To Unlock the Casket Long Time Shut’: How Heywood Did (Not) Bring Homer to the Masses

In the same period when George Chapman published his translation of the *Iliad*, Thomas Heywood was offering Homer's "treasure" to the reputedly lowbrow audience of the Red Bull Theatre. While the *Ages* are really based on medieval material and embrace a much wider set of myths than the Trojan war, Heywood emphasizes Homer's importance by using him as a chorus in three of the plays. This paper will compare Chapman's and Heywood's knowledge of and approach to Homer and classical mythology. It will contrast Chapman's elitist presentation with Heywood's vulgarizing enterprise, and discuss how the translation and the dramatic adaptations may embody different forms of humanism. It will also highlight discrepancies between apparently similar arguments, and analyze how the two English authors appropriate the Homeric figure for the construction of legitimacy and cultural authority.

Hannah Crawford (King's College London) – Staging Euripides: *Samson Agonistes* and the Politics of Allusion

The debt that Milton's closet drama, *Samson Agonistes* (1671), owes to Greek tragedy has long been recognized. From the title page citation of Aristotle's theorization of tragedy in Book VI of his *Poetics* to Milton's use of a Euripidean chorus throughout the work, the political context of *Samson Agonistes* is inseparable from what I term the politics of its allusions to Greek texts. But Milton does not simply engage with the Greek originals; he is also entering a dialogue with a complex series of responses to the ancient tragic drama. These include the fourth-century Church Father Gregory of Nazianzen, the supposed author of *Christos Paschon*, a Biblical tragedy taking the form of a cento of Euripidean texts, to which Milton alludes in the Preface to *Samson Agonistes*, 'Of that sort of Dramatic Poem which is call'd Tragedy'. A further important precedent lies in the Scottish political theorist and poet George Buchanan's anti-tyrannical adaptations of Greek plays, including translations of *Alcestis* and *Medea* and, most notably, his Euripidean-influenced, proto-republican Biblical drama *Baptistes* (1577). Indeed, so closely was Milton associated with Buchanan, whom he holds up as the author of exemplary tragic drama in his *Second Defence*, that for many years he was considered the author of a translation of *Baptistes* published in 1642, entitled *A Tyranicall-Government Anatomiz'd*. Yet further works in this tradition by Hugo Grotius and (his translator) George Sandys also provide key contexts for Milton's own endeavour. My paper will look at the intertextual relationships between *Samson Agonistes* and these Greek-

inspired dramatic precursors, arguing that Milton does not simply allude to Euripides in writing his own readerly play (as it has been called), but that he is instead interested in staging this whole history of allusion. Citationality lies at the heart of Milton's own Greek tragic drama, I will suggest, and allusion in *Samson Agonistes* is at once inherently dramatic and, at the same time, a fundamentally political act.

Penelope Geng (University of Southern California) – ‘When Maidens Sue, Men Give Like Gods’: Affect, Ritual, and Law in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*.

In classical literature, a suppliant typically signals her distress by kneeling, weeping, and holding out her hands to the supplicandus. Isabella's supplications, however, deviate from the script developed by Greek and early modern authors. Unlike Giraldi's Epitia or George Whetstone's Cassandra, Shakespeare's Isabella does not appear to understand the poetics of supplication and complaint: her delivery is, to quote Lucio, "too cold." By withholding her emotions at critical moments, Isabella achieves a degree of agency, even power, in a paternalistic community.

Patrick Gray (United States Military Academy at West Point) – ‘Eye to Eye Opposed’: Shakespeare’s ‘Strange Fellow’

In this paper, I compare Cassius' conversation with Brutus at the beginning of Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* about Brutus's inability to see his own true worth with Ulysses' conversation with Achilles in *Troilus and Cressida* about the impossibility of maintaining self-esteem in isolation. The basic premise of both discussions is a commonplace of present-day philosophical anthropology: self-image is constructed through relation with the other. Within his relatively early historical context, however, the degree of sophistication that Shakespeare brings to bear upon the subject is unusual. Ulysses in *Troilus and Cressida* claims to derive his ideas about the role of the other in self-knowledge from a "strange fellow," whom he never names, but whose book he enters reading, and critics have put forward various hypotheses about the possible identity of this mysterious source. Several have suggested Plato's *First Alcibiades*. Others have proposed Cicero's *Tusculan Disputations*. I argue here that the most likely inspiration for Ulysses' book is a summary of Aristotle's ethics, the *Magna Moralia*, once thought to have been written by Aristotle, and even popular as an introduction to his thought, but now considered of dubious authenticity. The theory of friendship articulated in this treatise strongly resembles the idea of the other as a "mirror" or "glass" which Shakespeare presents in *Julius Caesar* and *Troilus and Cressida*, as well as *Antony and Cleopatra*, when Maecenas describes Antony as Octavian's "spacious mirror." At times, however, Shakespeare greatly complicates Aristotle's original conceit. Initially, he articulates the relationship between self and other in similar figurative language. Over the course of key passages, however, Shakespeare comes to grant the other a much greater degree of independent agency in shaping self-perception than Aristotle does in his own theory of friendship. The other has a power over the self, and the self a corresponding vulnerability, that can be better represented by the meeting of "eye to eye opposed," than by the metaphor of a reflection in a mirror.

Susan Harlan (Wake Forest University) – This Sad Shadow: Theatrical Affect and Ekphrasis in Shakespeare’s *The Rape of Lucrece*

This paper examines Lucrece's affective response to a visual representation of the Trojan War in Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece* (c.1594). After she is raped and before she

produces her own narrative of this violent encounter, Lucrece remembers – or “calls to mind” (line 1366) – a painting of the Trojan War that hangs in her house. This moment doubles Aeneas’ own encounter with the mural in Dido’s temple in Carthage in Book 1 of the *Aeneid*. When Lucrece visualizes the painting, she brings to life not only this moment in the *Aeneid*, but the military violence of the *Iliad*, as well. The painting operates as a visual mnemonic, designating as it does Lucrece’s personal and prosthetic memories and how these memories may be called forth by the visual arts (and I borrow the term “prosthetic memory” from Alison Landsberg). As in so many texts of the period, the Trojan War is figured as crucial to early modern conceptions of English national identity and history.

It may seem strange that I have elected to write about a poem for a seminar on the early modern stage, but I will maintain that visuality in *The Rape of Lucrece* is governed by a mode of affect that Shakespeare associates with audience response to the theater. Several critics have noted that the poem has dramatic qualities. Others have read it as a complex engagement with rhetorical tradition. Certainly, the reader’s experience of the painting – and his or her capacity for affective response – is mediated by Lucrece’s viewing practice and emotional response. Lucrece surveys the painting, identifying with several figures, including Hecuba and Sinon. The poem’s narrator tells us that, “On this sad shadow LUCRECE spends here eyes, / And shapes her sorrow to the beldam’s woes...” (lines 1457-58). The term “sad shadow” suggests that she perceives the painting as a performance: a collection of just so many moving “shadows” or players. Indeed, her mode of affective visualizing does not simply communicate information about her character or subjectivity but rather animates the painting. The poem thus figures the capacity to remember – both Lucrece’s own personal capacity to remember and the early modern English subject’s cultural memory of the *Iliad* – as a prerequisite to theatrical animation or representation.

In his attention to the visual in this aesthetic encounter with the past, Shakespeare exploits an overlap between ekphrastic and theatrical discourses at the end of the sixteenth century. In *The Emblematics of the Self: Ekphrasis and Identity in Renaissance Imitations of Greek Romance*, Elizabeth Bearden defines *ekphrasis* as “the verbal representation of visual representation” and notes that it was a rhetorical term originating in grammar school exercises of the Second Sophistic (3). Leonard Barkan has maintained that ekphrasis is “...the emblem of a kind of utopian poetics, a dream that poetry can do just about *anything*” (327). In *The Defense of Poesy*, which was published in 1595 but written in the late 1570s, Sir Philip Sidney maintained that poetry is a “speaking picture.” Certainly, Chapman took the liberty of adding vivid descriptions to his translation of the *Iliad*. In Lucrece’s ekphrastic moment, the poem strains against the admonitory impulses that define its Argument and conclusion, opening up instead a space of affective response to the violence of the *Iliad* that Lucrece models by way of the intervening figure of Aeneas. The narrator explicitly engages the reader with the second-person “you” – “There might you see the laboring pioneer...” (line 1380) and “You might behold...” (line 1388) – as well as with the third person “...one would swear he saw them quake and tremble” (line 1393). Here, the conditional tense (“one would swear”) embodies potentiality, a wealth of possibility of aesthetic response for the viewer-reader. In its attention to modes of visualizing the violent antique past, the poem looks backward to *Titus Andronicus* (c.1588-93) and forward to Shakespeare’s Plutarchan Roman plays.

David Hershinow (Johns Hopkins University) – Diogenes the Cynic and Freedom of Speech in Early Modern England

Principally known to later ages through the compilation of apothegms in *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* (ca. 350 CE), Diogenes the Cynic circulated in early modern

England as both a positive and a negative figure. On the one hand, accounts of Diogenes brazenly mocking and humbling Alexander the Great led many to invoke Diogenes as the mascot for the period's ideal of an honest and forthright counselor. But on the other hand, stories that emphasized Diogenes' shamelessness, his rejection of society, and his bristly antagonism toward others allowed the figure of the Cynic to be dismissively aligned with such early modern types as the parasite-jester, the melancholic and the misanthrope. At present, scholarship on Diogenes' early modern reception remains relatively thin on the ground, and what little work exists on the topic has made the mistake of treating a *moderated*, more palatable, version of the Cynic stance as this period's only valorized ideal. To be sure, the majority of Diogenes' admirers sought to assimilate Cynic philosophy into the *ars rhetorica*, presenting him as a counselor whose deployment of frank speech could productively test the limits of, yet ultimately conform to, the governing precepts of courtly decorum and eloquence. But for a small minority of his supporters, the same stories of Diogenes confronting Alexander the Great suggested a compelling alternative to the pragmatics of free speech. According to this aspirational view, the Cynic way of life, above all others, could imbue its practitioner with unprecedented legitimacy and persuasive force, even when delivering truths to a hostile public or an unwilling sovereign interlocutor.

In this essay, I argue that Thomas Wilson and John Lyly belong to this restless minority. Dealing with Wilson only briefly, I primarily make my case for this more argumentatively robust interpretation of Cynic critical practice through an extended reading of Lyly's closet drama, *A moste excellent Comedie of Alexander, Campaspe, and Diogenes* (1584). I devote the majority of my essay to the work of establishing this under-recognized strand of Diogenes' early modern reception. However, in my conclusion, I offer a cursory outline of the way in which Shakespeare responds to his period's most valorized and debased interpretations of Diogenical free speech through his characterization of Lear's Fool (a parasite-jester), Hamlet (a melancholic), and Timon (a misanthrope).

Marion Hollings (Middle Tennessee State University) – Genealogies of Shakespeare's Scythian: Herodotus and Early Modern Historiography

The specter of the Scythian haunts several of Shakespeare's plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI, Part I*, *King Lear*. Shakespeare might have derived his idea of the Scythian from sources including such classical accounts as Herodotus' *Histories*, appearing in several fifteenth- and sixteenth-century compilations, editions and translations into modern languages, as well as more popular forms of transmission such as contemporary theatre (notably Marlowe's *Tamburlaine*) and travel literature making use of Herodotus: John Frampton's 1579 englishing of Bernadino de Escalante's 1577 *Discurso de la Navegacion* (itself a paraphrase of Gaspara da Cruz's 1569 *Tractada*), Spenser's *Vewe of the State of Ireland* (1598), among many others. But Scythians emerge in Herodotus' *Histories* as figures more complex than the metonym for barbarity that early modern discourses on the Scythian might seem to suggest. In particular, the Scythian's kinetic restlessness, or what Herodotus calls their "cityless" state, presents itself as more foregrounded than the quality of barbarism—their "rootlessness" more than their "ruthlessness"—and this is connected to the "lawlessness" and chaos associated with them in Shakespeare and his contemporaries. The Scythians have no "center," but this draws Herodotus' admiration. Herodotus betrays a respect for what he sees as the Scythians' shrewd refusal to build cities and become "cultivated," or agricultural, as opposed to nomadic. Re-examining the Scythian's primary characteristics in *The Histories* within the context of early modern accounts of "Scythian barbarism," appearing in Spenser's *Vewe* and elsewhere, invites a reconsideration of the significance of the Scythian in the writing of early modern chronicles and genealogies, which Shakespeare's plays contribute

to. Herodotus admires in the Scythian's restlessness an attendant facility in self-perpetuation by mixing with "all nations," an admiration reproduced in Spenser's *Vewe*. This quality of mixing is perhaps most clearly revealed in the character of Tamora, behind which the specter of Tomyris can be seen, and propelled by cultural expectations regarding the Scythian. The play ends with the promised survival of Tamora's and Aaron's child. The inherent drama of the Scythian's self-perpetuating strategies, through movement and mixing, points more broadly to dramas in Shakespeare's critical reception concerning authorship and genre—tangled genealogies that have in a sense "Orientalized" Shakespeare's oeuvre.

Linda Jacobs (Francis Marion University) – Howling Dogs in a Wilderness of Tigers: *Hecuba* and *Titus Andronicus*

Shakespeare apparently admired the *Hecuba* of Euripides; he alludes to it several times in both *Hamlet* and *Titus Andronicus*. And the Renaissance generally found Euripides, and *Hecuba* in particular, more to their taste than do more recent classical critics. In fact, Erasmus of Rotterdam's introduction to his much-admired Latin translation calls that play "the supreme example of tragic grief," and Emrys Jones in *Origins of Shakespeare* mentions the esteem of early modern writers for *Hecuba*. Euripides wrote over his long career many plays about the sufferings of families in times of conflict, catastrophe, war, and exile: *The Trojan Women*, *The Phoenician Women*, *The Suppliant Women*, the two Iphigenia plays—even *Andromache*, *Medea*, and *The Children of Heracles* treat the same theme. But the *Hecuba* makes an especially moving and powerful statement, infused with a touch of madness and the grotesque. The Shakespearean play that most resembles *Hecuba* in structure and tone is *Titus Andronicus*. Both share a concern with "post-traumatic stress" resulting from war and repeated family atrocities at the hands of enemies. Titus literally and repeatedly compares his own suffering to Hecuba's. Both protagonists—though they represent high moral and familial ideals in the eyes of their respective cultures—descend into madness and animalistic revenge. Many critics, including no less a figure than T.S. Eliot, trace the descent of *Titus* from Senecan closet drama, but the dramatic scenes of atrocity and suffering more closely resemble those of Euripides. And I remain convinced that all the lopped limbs, heads, hands, and tongues in Shakespeare's play derive not only from Ovidian Philomel story and the Atreus/Thyestes myth—the latter referenced in *Hecuba* as well—but from the suggestive language of Euripides himself. Several studies of Greek *threnoi* have pointed out echoes in Euripides (*The Suppliant Women*, for example) of traditional oral laments for the dead or suppliant prostration and pleas for mercy sometimes performed by men as well as women.

Niamh O'Leary (Xavier University) – Amazonian Revisions: Female Community in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*

This paper explores how Shakespeare and Fletcher revised Chaucer's and Boccaccio's versions of Palamon and Arcite's story in their 1613 collaboration, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. This play has become a standard reference for those who seek to point out the unviable nature of female friendship in early modern drama (and, perhaps, culture). Emilia's famous speech, delivered in response to Hippolyta's recounting of Theseus and Pirithous's friendship as a "knot of love" that can "never [be] undone" (1.3.41-44), memorializes her dear friend, Flavina, who died when they were both only eleven years old. Her nostalgic recounting of their closeness concludes with the assertion that "the true love 'tween maid and maid may be / More than in sex dividual" (1.3.81-82). Emilia believes that she will never love a man as much as she loved Flavina. The critical readings that focus on Emilia's grief over losing this

love—platonic and sexual—have precluded any further attention to female society in this play. However, if we step back from focusing on Emilia and Flavina’s admittedly tragic story, we can attend to the vibrant narrative of female alliance that pervades the play. This narrative is not an elegy; female community is not “always already lost,” even in a world of conquered Amazons.

I argue that, by drawing attention to the vestiges of Amazon community, and putting this community in conversation with the Theban widows, Shakespeare and Fletcher open up a whole landscape of female alliance—Amazon and otherwise. But this community is not all-inclusive. We see the bond between Hippolyta and Emilia, and between the sisters and the Theban widows; but the lonesome Jailer’s Daughter, (who appears so very much an English figure, plagued with the lovesickness of medieval and renaissance fancy, rather than the devout virginity or warrior honor of the Amazons), is left out, exposed to the questionable care only of men. This essay will seek to uncover how female alliance is ethnically coded in a play populated by Amazons, Thebans, and one lone Athenian (mad)woman. I will focus on the choices Shakespeare and Fletcher made in re-rendering their source material, both from English and Italian versions of the Greek tale, and from other extant Amazon stories.

Yves Peyré (Université Paul Valéry – Montpellier 3) – Homeric Voices in *Antony and Cleopatra*

As he adapts Thomas North’s translation of Jacques Amyot’s French version of Plutarch’s *Lives* for the stage, Shakespeare imaginatively reactivates Homeric themes in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Most of these Homeric elements, which are present in Plutarch’s text, meet with Ovidian and mainly Virgilian rewritings. The dialogues between Shakespeare’s play, Plutarch’s *Lives* and Homer’s epics – an intertextual conversation from which Latin authors are not excluded – will lead me to reexamine the question of heroism in relation to genre in the texts under scrutiny.

Sarah Van der Laan (Indiana University, Bloomington) – Circean Transformation and the Poetics of Milton’s Masque

Milton’s decision to make Circe the mother of Comus has long tempted critics to map traditional allegories of Odysseus’ encounter with Circe onto *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle*. Yet such projects struggle with the incongruity of presenting the Lady as an Odyssean figure of pure reason, or with the substitution of chastity for reason as the opposite of the appetites Comus represents in such a scheme. This allegorical tradition, though popular in the Renaissance, was not the only reading of *Odyssey* 10 available to Milton, however. Another tradition, derived from Augustine and widely diffused through the paratexts of Renaissance editions of both the *Odyssey* and the *Metamorphoses*, treats Circe as a locus for discussions about the nature of human transformation and the human power to effect metamorphoses. These discussions range from the metaphysical to the practical, from reflections on the ability of any mortal (or demonic) creature to effect transformations to curiosity about the mechanics of changing men into pigs. The Circe who presides over Comus’s revels is not merely a figure of human appetite, then, but a figure who interrogates the possibility and the permanence of his victims’ transformations and the experience of transformation itself. Embedded in a masque, a genre that places metamorphosis and unveiling at the heart of its poetics, this discussion reflects on the nature of Renaissance intertextuality and interrogates Milton’s own engagement with Renaissance practices of *imitatio* and *aemulatio*, as well as the potential for the reformation of the masque and its participants.

Leah Whittington (Harvard University) – Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, Plutarch and Greek Tragedy

It is now a matter of scholarly consensus that Shakespeare’s renewed engagement with North’s Plutarch in late 1590’s had a transformative impact on his conception of drama. Cynthia Marshall is one of several recent readers to observe that the return to Plutarch marks “the establishment of our culture’s prevailing model of character as one that is at once intensely performative and putatively interiorized;” with *Julius Caesar*, Marshall argues, Shakespeare moves from the “richly inventive but largely plot-driven plays of the 1590’s” to the “deeply characterological dramas that follow.”¹ Part of the allure of Plutarch lay in the very organization of his text as pairs of *Lives*: tightly structured, highly literary comparisons of the virtues and vices of great men. But in addition to providing a wealth of classical material already shaped into character-based narratives, Plutarch’s *Lives* were deeply imbued with the representational strategies of ancient drama. Recent critics have demonstrated that Plutarch constructs many of his *Lives* on the patterns of Athenian tragedy, using a tragic lens to mould the material of his stories of great men. This paper makes a case for Shakespeare’s contact with ancient Greek drama through the mediation of Plutarch’s *Lives*. I argue that in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare takes the structuring principles of ancient drama – sensing through Plutarch some of the patterning devices of Greek tragedy – and develops them into his own story of a man undone by the same qualities that define his greatness. While evidence for Shakespeare’s direct contact with Greek drama continues to be elusive, Plutarch functions as a literary mediator who enables Shakespeare to fashion his *Coriolanus* along the lines of Sophocles’ *Ajax*: an unyielding war-hero who can only break, not bend.