SAA Seminar: Fiction in Shakespeare
Aaron Kunin and Henry Turner
Seminar Abstracts (all)
March 2, 2015

James Beaver (Brown University)

"Ashes, Allegory, and 'the Vnchenchable Fire': Spenser and the Art of Material Mediation"

This paper takes up the seminar's topic through a study of allegory and *The Faerie Queen*. My approach to Edmund Spenser's "continued Allegory, or darke conceit" is guided by George Puttenham's definition of allegory in *The Arte of English Poetry*: "properly, and in his principall virtue, *allegoria* is when we do speak in sense translative and wrested from the own signification, nevertheless applied to another not altogether contrary, but having much conveniency with it, as we said before of metaphor." Both Spenser and Puttenham develop their understandings of allegory from a classical heritage which defined it as an extended, or continued, metaphor. As Frank Whigham and Wayne Rebhorn gloss Puttenham, and an etymological study bears out, metaphor literally means "bearing or transporting across a boundary," the Latin word for it being *translatio*. The concept of boundary in metaphor and allegory, then, is central to our understanding of each: the *translatio* that each performs—the "wresting" in signification described by Puttenham—articulates or produces the boundaries or borders by which the "natural" and "artificial" significations are determined. How, we might ask, do these translations and boundaries, implicit in allegory, inform conceptions of "reality" and "history," or, conversely, fiction and the imaginary?

To consider this question, I turn to Spenser's "Faerye land," examining how it establishes itself as a translation of the Tudor dynasty, articulating a distinct boundary with the Elizabethan world which Spenser inhabits while positing its own existence as a necessary supplement to that world. In this context, I am particularly interested in Guyon's reading of the "*Antiquitee of Faery* londe" (II.xi 60.2), in the castle of Alma in Book II, Canto X—specifically, the moment this chronicle of the British monarchy "abruptly" ends (II.x 68.2), when Spenser's narrator acknowledges both its incompleteness and his own inability to continue reciting the "ample volume" (II.xi 70.3). Here, at the (material) limit points of the archive and its transcriber, Spenser's narrator recounts the story of Prometheus's creation of Elfe, "the first author of all Elfin kynd" (II.xi 71.2), and then traces the lineage from this fictive creature to his living queen. Spenser inserts his text's—and "Faery land"'s—foundational place in English history precisely at the moment when he highlights the material contingencies which render an archive unstable (i.e., the damage to the book, the labor required to transcribe it), as if to highlight that the "wresting" which allegory accomplishes is enabled by the performative dimensions inherent in any staging of history. Using this moment as a starting point, I will consider the Prometheus myth in relation to various critical models of allegory (Anderson, Quilligan, Teskey, Berger) in order to ask what kind of fiction allegory—and *The Faerie Queen*, in particular—makes available to our readings.

Liza Blake (Univ. of Toronto)

"The Ground*s* of Fiction*s*"

This paper will respond to the disciplinary questions raised in the seminar description, where the ontological status of "fiction" or fictional texts potentially direct or orients our disciplinary approaches thereto. This paper will be part historical/literary analysis, and part present-directed argument. In it I will examine the wildly contrasting positions of Francis Bacon (and those in the Royal Society who carried on his scientific projects) and Margaret Cavendish on the question of art and artifice, where "artifice" is, if not exactly a stand-in, at the least a close cousin to "fiction." One of Margaret Cavendish's most cogent critiques of the project(s) of Bacon and the Royal Society revolved around his (and their) strategic redefinition of "art" and its cognate terms "artifice" and "artificial": while Bacon authorizes his understanding of *artifice* as a continuation of natural practice, Cavendish condemns it as a practice that goes against Nature rather than continuing her own work. Both ultimatley argue for the importance of fiction, though to very different purposes and in very different ways. I will argue in this paper that what is at stake in the discussion of *artifice* in these authors is the future of the disciplines that we now think of as science and literature: Cavendish offers one possible future for their interrelation, while Bacon (and the Royal Society) offers another. This will build into a more contemporary argument: perhaps the best way to rethink disciplines (and interdisciplinarity) today would be to return to the fraught, complicated, and rich discussion of artifice happening on the early modern literary and scientific scene.

Drew Daniel (Johns Hopkins University)

"Gross Patchery: *Timon of Athens* and the Matter of Fiction"

The word "fiction" surfaces directly in *Timon of Athens* in the midst of Timon's address to the Poet in Act V, where it is quickly placed into a dialectical relation of antithetical interdependence with "nature", (a doublet perhaps already familiar in standard oppositions between "art" and "nature" rendered over-familiar via the famous set speech of Polixenes on the topic in "The Winter's Tale"): "And for thy fiction, / Why, thy verse swells with stuff so fine and smooth / That thou art even natural in thine art." (5.1.82-83) In the context of this play, so attuned to the poisonous hypocrisies of polite society, the problem of fictionality becomes ethically acute: if humanity is fundamentally regarded as deceptive, dissembling and false, then this "unoathable" predilection to falsehood justifies Timon's misanthropic judgments upon his fellow citizens, and sanctions his withdrawal from the polis in the process. Misanthropes thus require fictionality as a foil to their lonely authenticity. Yet this putative opposition between Athenian falsehoods and misanthropic truths pressurizes the flagrant counterexample of Timon's own noticeable practices of deception, hyperbole, ironic flippancy, and deliberately false speech throughout the second half of the play. So the first question I'd like to pursue would simply ask: what are we to make of Timon's misanthropic falsehoods, and how do they complicate the opposition between this isolated figure and the social fictions from which he has subtracted himself? Going further, there's a possibly compelling conceptual problem that lurks here in the richly various sequence of material images of the "stuff" of deception imagined throughout the play (alternately "fine and smooth" (5.1.82) at one moment, and mere "gross patchery" (5.1.95) the next). Falsehood is at once figured as insubstantial and as all too grossly material (the key image here is "bombast", or stuffing). Thus the referential capacity of language to indicate fictional matter even as it denies its substantiality potentially discloses a curiously virtual dimension of literary representation as such.

Doug Eskew (Colorado State University-Pueblo)

"The Spanish Tragedy and The God of Fiction"

In this paper, I look at three kinds of fiction-making. First, I question moments in the scholarly enterprise in which argumentation requires a fictional basis, a fiction of knowing when unknowing predominates. Second, I investigate the Thomist notion of analogy of being (*analogia entis*) and its claim that the infinite being of the divine is ultimately unknowable. Analogy bridges this gap between the infinite and finite, creator and creature, *logos* and *physis:* even if we cannot say what the divine *is*, we can say what it is *like*. Finally, I explore analogical theology of the early modern stage. If Aquinas was right, and the closest to knowing the realm of the infinite is to compare it to something it is not, does that kind of dramatic irony at the center of the theological enterprise presume a theological irony at the center of the dramatic enterprise? The theater, after all, as an imaginative space, is an infinite realm whose primary connection to the finite realm of human activity is analogy—a "fictional analogue of the world." *The Spanish Tragedy* would have us believe that at its center is an infinite, deified space occupied by Hieronimo, who, enclosed in layers of fiction (an audience watching an audience watching an audience watching a playlet), stands as a theatrical analogue of a deity who remains "profoundly unknown." Even after Hieronimo tells his onstage audience in direct language of the murder and revenge he has accomplished in his play-within-a-play, they continue to be profoundly confused, demanding that he speak more. But the God will not speak, cannot speak. And they will not listen, except when he is making fiction.

Jay Farness (Northern Arizona University)

"Character Fictions"

Fiction and *feigning* both derive from L. *fingere*, "to fashion or form" (OED), so for a "fiction" seminar, we might as well throw *fashion* into the mix, too. *Feign* and *fashion*, as verbs, can remind us how we get to *fiction*—also how regularly fiction comes embedded in transactions, in interpersonal motivations, and in human performances. This is especially the case with theatrical fictions where we experience not only "as 'twere the mirror [held] up to nature," but the multi-layered rhetoric (and theatrical ontology) of holders holding, and trying to be, mirrors for spectators both onstage and in the galleries.

There is lots of information in Shakespeare about paradoxes on both sides of the fashioning: (1) the imitation or representation of imaginary realities—fiction with its worlds—and (2) the imitating or representing of imaginary persons—the feigners or fashioners. It's the second fashioning that I'm interested in but with a further restriction: I want to focus on the characters, rather than the playwright, as the agents of this character fashioning.

Concepts of "role-playing" and "self-fashioning" capture some of this character invention. Hence, some character fictions might involve role-playing characters who undertake temporary impersonations, usually in response to misfortune, felt injustice, or personal crisis. These characters (Hal, Iago, Edgar, Kent, others) show some pleasure or relief in the liberating possibilities of their impersonations. They share in a thrill of spying, eavesdropping empowerment that a social mask allows. But the idea of role also implies a larger design, an end for which the role is a means that will help them forge their own stories with triumphant endings—endings that aim more at changes in other people's estimate of them than at some climactically reconstructed self. The idea of "self-fashioning," on the other hand, appears to aim at a more permanent makeover, not a temporary or strategic alteration of self, but a modeling or "forming" of human clay patterned on courtesy books, cultural exemplars, or enviable rivals.

Neither of these concepts quite describes the volatility of theatrical or high-society social situation often conveyed by the plays—how impersonation, whether in one's own character or in some alter-ego, demands continually improvised, high-stakes performance. It's a truism worth minding that fictional people in Shakespeare are what they enact: they are performances, not essences, and this applies to characters, too, in imaginary social and situational milieus, not just to players on the theater stage. (One imagines professional company players happily embracing the possibilities.) To explore the intentionality of these performances, I draw on Aristotle's idea of ethos—"character"—in rhetoric, where the speaker's art demands the ad hoc construction and projection of an admirable or credible persona. For this artful speaker, ethos (e.g., "honesty") is always to some degree a simulation (and therefore not exactly "honest"). This sounds to me more like what at least some celebrated Shakespeare characters are doing—*in the moment*, from scene to scene, moving through a series of shifting, disconnected, auditor-attuned speech performances—rather than exemplifying the more stable constructions implied by a fashioned self, by a determinate role to play, or by modern prejudices about character consistency. With such performers, "a necessary question of the play . . . then to be considered" is always in jeopardy.

I explore and try out these ideas with reference to *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and an influential passage of Castiglione's *Courtier*.

Stephen Foley (Brown University)

"The very comment of the soul"

To look at the relation of fiction, diction, and judgment for this seminar, I propose the textual and lexical lemma of "the very comment" of the soul:

> There is a play tonight before the king.
> One scene of it comes near the circumstance
> Which I have told thee of my father's death.
> I prithee, when thou seest that act afoot,
> Even with the very comment of thy soul
> Observe mine uncle.

Hamlet's instructions here share with his instructions to the players an interest in proving relations between imagination and judgment, feelings and senses, ethos and pathos, act and intent, and all of these categories circulate among overlapping discourses--poetics, ethics, and law.

But what is the comment of the soul? The gloss that is passed down repeatedly is: "the most intense direction of every faculty." The usage here goes to commentary. Commentary draws within its embrace the revelation of the Word as well the discovery of *litterae humanae* as the scholia of continuing scholarship restore the losses of ignorance in time. The goal of commentary is truth, but the work of commentary is the discovery of error. Otherwise it risks being a misleading "gloss".

The textual variant in "the comment of thy soul" re-enacts the potential confusion of usage along subjective lines. "*Thy* soul" is the reading of the First Folio. The quartos read "*my* soul." So the textual variants reproduce confirmations of collective judgment—or the threat of a merely subjective truth.

This redoubled observation multiplies in theatrical performance the observer who is the complex site of rhetorical *enargeia* in history and oratory. As Erasmus writes: "by description of a thing when we do not relate what is done, or has been done, summarily or sketchily, but place it before the reader painted with all the colors of rhetoric, so that at length it draws the hearer or reader outside himself as in the theatre." The copious indulgence of renaissance letters in rhetorical schemes and tropes participates in the emergence of literature (and fiction) as categories. And copia does so by opening up a space for the pleasure of words in and of themselves and thus looks like a spectral premonition of the romantic and modernist celebration of lyric as a nonfictional mode where poetic language dances beyond transparent communication into a world where language is an end in itself.

To begin with words: "Knowledge is of two kinds," writes Erasmus in *De ratione studii*, "of things and of words, that is, of intentional matter (res) that may be better or worse, true or false, and of language as a grammar (verba) that can be described and learned." Or perhaps as one encounters words in time in L=A=N=G=U=A=G=E poetry where "writing is an aid to memory" and discovers

> since memory
> of many things is called
> experience
> but what of what
> we call nature's picture

Hamlet's method is likewise one of rhetorical discovery. His intervention into the case of Claudius takes places through an initial act of rhetorical invention, followed not by the insertion of changed character or action but of a speech of some twelve or eighteen lines. The play's the thing, but the right words come first. In a miracle of humanist method, or a parody of it, the speech is one already written, and by Vergil. "One speech in it I chiefly loved, 'twas Aeneas's tale to Dido…"

David Hershinow (Princeton University)

"Political Fictions: Realist Character, Literary Didacticism, and Shakespeare's Cynics"

This essay considers both the limits and the possibilities of dramatic character, particularly as character serves as a catalyst for real-world ethical and political action. Working to complicate the assumption that fictional characters show us how to live well, or that such characters serve as practical examples that guide us toward particular political ends, I consider the ways in which literary character can prompt ethical identifications that amount to political fictions. To this end, I consider Shakespeare's response to the early modern reception of Diogenes the Cynic, first as it dovetails with contemporary debates over the pragmatics of effectively delivering honest counsel to a flattery-prone sovereign, then as it additionally overlaps with representations of intellectual melancholy. Courtiers like Thomas Wilson and John Lyly, who felt especially caught between the aspirations and the frustrations of unvarnished truth-telling, sought to invoke the Cynic way of life as a compelling alternative to courtly pragmatism, as a means of obtaining unprecedented legitimacy and persuasive force when delivering painful truths to an unwilling sovereign interlocutor or a hostile public.

In this essay, I touch briefly on the way Shakespeare's Diogenes-inspired portrayal of Lear's Fool serves to diagnose the problem of character that fundamentally informs this aspirational fantasy, a problem in which the tendency to refract certain politico-ethical ideals through the edifying lens of narrative and figural representation leads to the conflation of aesthetic and political categories of judgment. From there, I argue that Shakespeare explores the lines of affiliation between the Cynic-inspired fantasy of unstoppable critical agency and his period's romanticized portrait of intellectual melancholy. Drawing support Robert Burton's similar appropriation of Diogenes in his preface to *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, I show that Shakespeare has Hamlet lay claim to a specifically Cynic form of thoughtful sadness, one that posits contemplative self-enclosure as public activism's final frontier. Hamlet, I argue, forgoes an action-oriented effort to set his time back into joint and, instead, further disjoins himself from time. Hamlet contemplates his way out of time in order to view worldly happenings from an incorporeal vantage, a perspective from which he can pursue his critical agenda against Claudius and a rotten Denmark by claiming to see the inevitability of things as they have been, are, and are going to be. As I go on to show, this critical orientation becomes integral to an influential branch of modern philosophy—the philosophy of history—that emerged out of the intellectual hotbed of German Romanticism, a movement that was itself shaped by its participants' intense identification with Shakespeare in general, and with the character of Hamlet in particular. Shakespeare invites this ethical identification with Hamlet's Cynic melancholy, and in this sense he intentionally solicits the philosophical tradition in which thinkers adopt Hamlet's posture for themselves. That being said, it must also be noted that Shakespeare ultimately insists on the fictional status of this ethical stance. After linking both Hegel's and Marx's philosophies of history to the legacy of Cynic melancholy, I show how Shakespeare's ultimate interest in problematizing this stance allows us to turn the tables on Hamlet's modern philosophical reception: instead of using modern philosophy as a lens for better understanding an early modern Hamlet, I use an early modern Hamlet as a lens for better understanding the conditions and limits of modern philosophy.

Wendy Hyman (Oberlin College)

"*Cymbeline* as 'self-figured knot'"

I am interested in several different facets of "fiction" in Renaissance literature. The first has to do with variable or comparative elements of fictionality within works that are, themselves, already fictional. That is, I am thinking about the way in which certain inset forms might signal something like a shift in key to the extra- or supra-fictional. Patricia Parker has examined the work lyric does to dilate and interrupt romance; I am likewise interested in the evocation of, say, myths or romance motifs as signal operations—fictions that flip a switch for the reader sometimes dramatic characters themselves.

Putting it this way makes it seem as if fiction is always about genre [as a footnote: it would be fascinating to discuss why fiction has, in contemporary parlance, somehow come to be understood as almost exclusively the domain of *prose*]. But I think that at the most extracted level, even the toggle between metaphorical language and the denotative "plain tale" (to quote Prince Hal) might work the same way. Every word, every utterance, offers itself along a varying spectrum of fictionality or facticity, and readers' mental operations track alongside the most "imaginative" functions of literary art. In that way, what seem to be questions of genre and rhetoric have metaphysical implications. Does that "play-within-a-play" exist some otherwhere? How far away can a vehicle travel to a tenor without falling off a cliff? Does a dramatist evoking an Ovidian myth not bring the pagan/ancient/ metamorphic world into apposition with the Renaissance present? Do these simultaneous presents have implications for fiction's interventions into temporality (do we map these wrinkles in time along more than one vector)? I am fascinated by the seminar leaders' proffering "that fictions are somehow not of our world," and wonder with them the extent to which this is a question of physics or matter ("if, when we read works of fiction, we believe that we are studying worlds composed out of materials like our own..."). Fiction, then, becomes an invitation to get really and truly lost—a kind of ontological unvectoring.

I will be exploring this topic in relation to one of the most fictional of fictions, Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*. The play seems to offer a comparative study of several different kinds of fiction-making, what with its 27 plot resolutions, its over-determined symbols, its dream visions, its multiple Ovidian myths, its grandiose scale, its floundering bildungsroman, its riddles, its arras hanging, its metaphors that come to life ("his meanest garment!"), its heroes already of another time (Posthumous) and anotherwhere (Imogen/imagen). My starting point will likely the evocation of the vanishing point—wherein Imogen imagines watching Posthumous disappear on the horizon—as a placeholder for that beyond which we cannot imagine or see. I want to consider this in (chiastic) relation to that spot on her breast—the actual, seen thing that points to what *isn't*. If space allows, I also want to map these questions spatially and temporally. I am particularly interested in the presentation of Imogen a figure (an image) halfway between those of Diana and Cleopatra. Those myths and tapestries in turn, provide further fictions that allow us to "see" everything that eludes Iachimo and Posthumous.

Victoria Kahn (University of California, Berkeley)

"A History of Fiction: Some Vignettes"

In *Nobody's Story* and "The Rise of Fictionality," Catherine Gallagher argues that fiction as we now understand it began in the eighteenth century, specifically, with the novel. Gallagher argues that what defines the genre of the novel is not realism per se, not the pretense that the pages before us were found in a dusty attic, but the invitation to identify with a fictional character, a character who is nobody in particular, that is, nobody historical, but rather simply invented. She admits that one can find defenses of fiction earlier than the eighteenth century. But, Gallagher insists, the expectation of and identification with fictional characters only becomes widespread with the emergence of a capitalist economy, with its instruments of credit and practices of speculation, and a corresponding shift in epistemology not only in matters of finance but in all realms of human interaction.

In a slightly different vein, Terry Eagleton argues for both the historical specificity of the category of fiction and its transhistorical usefulness. According to Eagleton, the category of fiction arose historically "to distinguish a form of imaginative writing that was becoming increasingly realistic from factual reports. You do not need the distinction as long as literary works are blatantly non-factual." But he also claims that "Fiction is a question of how texts behave and of how we treat them, not primarily of genre, and certainly not [a question] of whether they are true or false" (111). He later modifies this to suggest that any reader can fictionalize a text, whatever the author may have intended. Fiction on this revised account is not a question of how texts behave but instead a product of the reader's activity.

One can sympathize with the desire of students of the novel to claim fiction as their own, as an explanation for the emergence of a new genre. But fiction as make-believe has always been with us. The history of philosophy and of literary theory suggest it is better thought of diacritically, as the antithesis of philosophy or of theology when these disciplines are understood as making true propositions about the world and/or the next. I explore this claim by focusing on Plato, Augustine, Sidney, Hobbes, and Kierkegaard.

David Landreth (University of California, Berkeley)

"Richard IV's Counterfactual Conviction"

Among the many oddities of Ford's *Perkin Warbeck* is that its title character never answers to his name--at least, not to the name that the title, and sooner or later every other character in the play, considers to be his. Rather than accept King Henry's mercy by announcing the truth of the plebeian and diminuted name "Perkin Warbeck," the character insists--even from the stocks, even facing the gallows--that he is Richard Plantagenet, the younger of Richard III's two murdered nephews, and the rightful King Richard IV of England. As the title declares, it is axiomatic to the play's historical reality that this royal identity is a fiction. But simply to assert a reality principle, a What Really Happened, as the object of the play's representation would be to beg the most interesting questions posed by the play's own existence, as well as those posed by the unequal contest of historical realities within the play. Let's break down those interesting questions as follows: 1. Why represent history on the stage around 1630 at all--why write and produce a history play? As the play's prologue freely admits, the great fashion for staged histories was long past, and though many of those plays survived in print and in repertory, few new history plays had been written in the past three decades. 2. If a history was called for, why present the history of a fiction, named for a nonentity? A play called "Perkin Warbeck" might almost as well be called "Nobody." Perkin himself accomplished no great deeds; Henry Tudor's great deed, the dethroning of Richard III and establishment of his own royal house, was already accomplished, and he was settling into a long reign as a grasping, risk-averse technocrat; the whole episode is memorable only as fraud, featuring neither individual heroism nor national-historical determination. And 3., if this is the history of a fiction, why does Perkin-Richard insist even to his dying breath that it isn't, even though he could save his life by avowing his fraudulence?

I'd like to coordinate these three questions upon one another through a further round of questions: which concepts of the past's truthfulness or factuality support the play's diegetic reality? Which such concepts might support the idiosyncratic reality of Richard IV, which contravenes that of the play as a whole? And which support the play's existence, which depends on the conflict between these two versions of historical reality? In addition to considering the categories through which the play sets early modern historiography and dramaturgy at odds--such as acting and counterfeiting, citation, haunting, and atavism--I'd like to draw in the category of the counterfactual, as it's been developed in recent criticism and historiography of alternative history and historical multiplicity.

Sonya Loftis (Morehouse College)

"Narrative Violence: The Act of Reading in *Titus Andronicus*"

Titus Andronicus is obsessed with storytelling. In a play that focuses on incredible violence, in which characters work mayhem and murder with inconceivable savagery, it may seem incongruous that the revenge hero has his mind forever on books. Titus continuously compares his life with the narratives of Rome's past. His daughter is Lucrece, Philomela, Virginia. His sons are the children of Priam. His noble house is the stronghold of Troy. Indeed, Titus's lofty allusions permeate the play even in its most debased and violent moments, and while some might find incongruity between his literary learning and his violent world, it is possible that the former is a defense mechanism for dealing with the latter. Analyzing the play through the lens of hermeneutical phenomenology, this essay examines the intertwining of narrative and identity in *Titus Andronicus*, examining the way that characters such as Titus and Lavinia struggle to construct their own personal stories from a plot of political and familial violence. His status as a "summoned self," in Paul Ricoeur's sense of the term, leads Titus to believe that he is the figure who can reunite the dismembered pieces of Rome's body politic. Ultimately, Titus's struggle toward "narrative selfhood" leads him to embrace a violent and destructive identity, as his need for revenge, his desire to kill his own daughter, and his attitude toward his sons are all bound up in the classical texts that he uses as models for his own life's narrative.

Kevin Pask (Concordia University)

"Implausible Fictionality in Shakespeare"

Fiction almost always means *prose fiction*, novel or short story, in contemporary usage. (A glance at the shelves of a bookstore, or indeed the shelves dedicated to the theory and history of fiction in a university library, will confirm this.) What then is theatrical fiction? Renaissance theatre was at least as concerned with the problem of impersonation on the stage—*mimesis* in Plato's distinction between imitation and narrative—as it was with questions of the fictionality of plots. In, for example, Hamlet's apparent dismissal of a "fiction…a dream of passion," his concern seems to be primarily with the inauthenticity of the actor's passion, which is amplified, though not necessarily generated, by the fictionality of the performance. (The problem would have been much the same for Hamlet if the actor were performing the role of a historical figure.) Working from this observation, my paper for the seminar will examine the relationships between fiction, mimesis, and narrative in Shakespearean drama. In particular, I will investigate the extent to which Renaissance drama adapts the chorus of Greek tragedy to rather different ends—the creation of a narrative (and implicitly authorial) voice within mimesis. Shakespeare uses a (singular) chorus more frequently in both history plays and tragicomedy, less so in the classical modes of tragedy and comedy. Is this, then, a reflection of the proximity of history plays and tragicomedy to narrative genres, history and prose romance? I am most interested in the role of the chorus in the extravagant fictions of the "romances," *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, in which the chorus is used to call attention to elements of romance fictionality in the plots. Is, then, Shakespeare already adapting narrative form to theatrical ends? If so, how might that change our account of fictionality, now almost completely dominated by narrative (novelistic) fiction?

Travis Williams (University of Rhode Island)

"Failure of the Imagination in The First Player's Speech"

Critical attention to the Player's speech in *Hamlet* mostly concentrates on its vivid description of several moments from the fall of Troy. Much less common is critical attention to the other type of mental imagery potentially conjured by the speech in an audience's mind: the theatrical performance of the play from which we are told that the speech is excerpted. Active and successful imagination is such a commonplace of critical assumptions about how drama functions that failure has few examples or a vocabulary to understand them. This paper investigates the non-appearance of the theatrical image correlated to the Player's speech. My tentative explanation for the imagination's failure is the dissonant, illegible, and inconsistent metatheatrical details that surround and ought to support the speech and the creation of the theatrical image. While an audience may not be able to create an imaginative image of a theatrical performance of Aeneas' tale to Dido, it does have an opportunity to re-imagine the recent history of the London theatre world. The theatre audience is thrust into a competition of theatrical tastes that force it to recall long-past enmities among London poets and to begin to question Hamlet's reliability as the audience's privileged agent in the play. Hamlet's presence as encourager, participant, and critic is the most important difference between the speech as a replica of its original dramatic moment and what we see in *Hamlet*. His filter is everything, and it may be contaminated by illegibility and a deepening rift between his and the audience's interpretation of dramatic moments and how to respond to them.