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“Unthrifite waste”: Epyllia, Idleness, and General Economy

Abstract: “Unthrifite waste”: Epyllia, Idleness, and General Economy

Bradley Ryner argues that Renaissance drama presents economic models that constitute alternatives to contemporary economic writing’s preoccupation with the balance of trade and the stabilization of currency, writings that anticipate the development of classical political economy. But another genre, the epyllion, may also contribute to less deterministic modes of economic thinking in the early modern period and to considering ways that early modern texts can not only reflect but actively address their historical contexts, opening the question of what Bataille theorizes as general economy. Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* and Spenser’s complex reaction to the Ovidian fashion, not in his *Amoretti* and *Epithalamium* but in Book 2 of *The Faerie Queene*, reveal an interest in the place of unproductive expenditure, waste, and loss as part of the incomplete agenda of the past. At a time when Protestant values of thrift, discipline, productivity, along with the humanist ideal of the *vita activa* were dominant values in sixteenth-century England, Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* poses a challenge to an emerging capitalist society and culture. Marlowe’s epyllion seems to celebrate idleness and waste, not only in his characters’ actions but in the composition of *Hero and Leander*. Spenser, on the other hand, while condemning them, also struggles with the excesses of his own text.

Suggested reading: Georges Bataille, "The Meaning of General Economy" and "Laws of General Economy," in *The Accursed Share*, 1, Robert Hurley, trans. (NY: Zone Books, 1991), 19-41.

Nora Corrigan

Title: Lucrece, Hamlet, Gender, Art, and the Fall of Troy

Abstract: This paper will explore the relationship between *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Hamlet*. Differences of genre and gender have often obscured how alike the two protagonists are. Lucrece and Hamlet are reluctant revengers, forced by circumstance to bring down a king; both possess intelligent, probing minds and take temporary refuge from the revenge imperative by grappling with grand philosophical questions. Significantly, both protagonists are also profoundly moved by artistic works that portray the fall of Troy – a painting in Lucrece’s case, a play in Hamlet’s. The plot is put on hold while they not only contemplate these works, but attempt to interact with and manipulate them, trying on identities of characters in the mythological narrative. This imaginative work permits them not only to explore their own grief and perplexity, but also to temporarily free themselves from the constraints of gender, imagining themselves as characters of the opposite sex with a different range of permissible responses to their situation.

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“Regardless of his gouernaunce”: Spenser’s *Muiopotmos* and the Politics of Insect Habitation.

Shakespeare Association of America, March 2016

As part of a larger project on insects and habitation, this essay will read the representations of place, habitation, and sovereignty in Edmund Spenser’s *Muiopotmos*. That mini-epic, with its meditations on openness and enclosure, on tyranny and freedom, on the paradoxes of a garden’s natural artifice or artificial nature, provides ample opportunity to read the projection of human enterprises on the world of insects. On the margins of a genre that often takes up etiologies and etymologies, Spenser’s entomological poem takes on a number of political overtones as it meditates on “delight with liberty” and the threats of a “greisly tyrant.” I am at work on a larger piece that considers early modern poets’ treatments of insect habitations as models of human government and will use the opportunity to write about Spenser’s treatment of the butterfly and the spider in this neglected mini-epic in terms of their political valences. Some questions I will consider will include: what value might Elizabethan readers find in considering the application of human political formations onto the lives of insects? What significance do the embedded Ovidian narratives of a competing etiology for the butterfly – a punishment from Venus or a punishment from Minerva – have for understanding the conflict of the spider and the butterfly in Spenser’s mini-epic? And finally, what does the representation of these two bugs’ natural habitats reveal about Spenser’s view of the ideal political state? A preliminary thesis will be that Spenser associates political liberty with limited enclosure and open air and links tyranny to a web of ties that bind too restrictively.

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Ramachandran, Ayesha. “Clarion in the Bower of Bliss: Poetry and Politics in Spenser’s *Muiopotmos*.” *Spenser Studies* 20 (2005): 77-106. Print.

Keith A Gabler
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“the selfe same action”: Feeling the Materiality of Poetry in John Marston’s *The*

Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image

It is only recently that critics have begun to take John Marston at his word that *The Metamorphosis of Pigmaliions Image* (1598) is a deliberately bad piece of poetry. These critics have argued that Marston’s epyllion is a satirical comment on hackneyed Petrarchanists and the narcissism inherent in their acts of poetic creation. I add to this discussion by focusing on Marston’s depiction of Pigmalion’s sensorial interactions with his work—those moments when he ogles and fondles his statue—suggesting that Marston intends us to read these as instances of reading. Employing the erotic, sensuous language typical of the Elizabethan epyllion, Marston presents *Pigmalion* as a cautionary tale that details the consequences of reading poetry for the surface beauty of its rhetoric rather than the abstract truth it is meant to represent. While historical phenomenologists have tended to prioritize the experiences of theatrical spectators, I hope to highlight the level at which the act of reading was a physical, sensorial activity in early modern England.

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John Garrison
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SAA 2016 Abstract

Love and its Shadow: Campion's *Umbra* and Spenser's Amoret

Abstract

This paper examines Thomas Campion's minor epic *Umbra* (1619), focusing on how its depiction of sexuality both draws upon and diverges from the literary traditions that inform the epyllia. The Latin poem is striking for its frank depiction of same-sex erotics that are markedly absent in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, as well as for its depiction of the self-shattering effects of desire, even for the gods. The paper also examines the influence of the the tale of Amoret in Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590/1596) upon Campion's poem in order to throw into to relief the darker implications of the later poem. Ultimately, I argue, Campion's epyllion not only innovates the classical tradition but also meditates on how engagements with literary history amplify erotic experience.

Jim Ellis, "Imagining Heterosexuality in the Epyllia," *Ovid and the Renaissance Body*, ed. Goran Stanivukovic (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 38-57.

Martin Korenjak, "Short Mythological Epic in Neo-Latin Literature," *Brill's Companion to Greek and Latin Epyllion and its Reception* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2012), 519-536.

William P. Weaver, *Untutored Lines: The Making of the English Epyllion* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

Victoria Muñoz, The Ohio State University

European Epics, Big and Little: The Revival of Classical Narratives in Early Modern England

Abstract:

Sometimes called “minor” or “little” epics, epyllia occupied a prominent position within the Elizabethan literary market through such works as Thomas Lodge’s *Scylla’s Metamorphosis* (1589), William Shakespeare’s *Venus and Adonis* (1593), and Christopher Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* (1598). Epyllia were formally and thematically distinct from prose romances. However, their heightened sexual content and fluid generic qualities tracing back to classical epics linked epyllia to prose romances in striking ways. In fact, epyllia came into fashion during the late 1500s and early 1600s, which was also a period of revival for romances, especially Spanish prose romances. Within England, English writers were reading and borrowing material from such works as Jorge de Montemayor’s *Diana* (1559), Diego de San Pedro’s *Castle of Love* (1492), Garci Rodríguez de Montalvo’s *Amadis of Gaul* (1508), and others. Surprisingly, however, English epyllia generally do not engage with these widely popular Spanish works, many of which drew heavily from Ovidian erotics. Recounting the larger proliferation of Spanish literature in England, which introduced certain Italianate forms, I attribute the relative divorcement of English minor epics from Spanish influences both to the controversial status of Spanish romances in England and also to the belatedness of all Spanish romances, big and little. Nonetheless, however removed epyllia may have seemed from these prose romances, the poetic conversations that epyllia prompted as a form of response to longer epics also formed part of a larger European conversation about the uses and purposes of romance, spurred on by the Spanish vogue. Adopting the “destabilization of the source” proposed by such critics as Valerie Wayne and Lori Newcomb, I also place the English epyllion in conversation with the similar *Polifemo* by the celebrated Spanish poet, Luis de Góngora, in order to illustrate that the cross-pollination of Italianate forms across Europe encouraged appropriation from classical epics as a form of cultural self-fashioning.

Working Bibliography:

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Epic Oenone, Pastoral Paris: Undoing the Virgilian *rota*

Prospectively, this paper will suggest that Heywood's *Oenone and Paris* (1594) is a deliberate response to Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, whose first three books had appeared only four years earlier. Most criticism of Heywood's epyllion reads it primarily as a response to Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, yet I find a remarkable number of distinct echoes of *The Faerie Queene* that suggest Heywood's real target may be Spenser himself. Interestingly, the most explicitly Spenserian allusions are given to Oenone rather than Paris, and these moments seem to read *The Faerie Queene* as more about love than about war, and more as pastoral than as epic. At the same time, Oenone's speeches in the poem seem designed to remind Paris (and the reader) that he is not only an epic figure but also a pastoral figure who appears prominently in the *Shepherds Calendar*. Thus, Heywood's allusions to Spenser in *Oenone and Paris* have the effect of making it seem as though Spenser returns to pastoral in the *Faerie Queene* rather than moves beyond it (as the opening stanza famously announces). Is Heywood implying that, at least for English poets, the Virgilian *rota* is an impractical model? Or is he asking what it means to revise—as he seems to think Spenser has revised—Vergil and the epic? More generally, to what extent are the epyllia of the 1590's a reaction, perhaps even a post-traumatic one, to the 1590 *Faerie Queene*?

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- Maggie Kilgour, "New Spins on Old Rotas: Virgil, Ovid, Milton," in *Classical Literary Careers and their Reception*, eds. Philip Hardie and Helen Moore (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)
- Patrick Cheney, *Marlowe's Counterfeit Profession: Ovid, Spenser, Counter-Nationhood* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997)

Jane Raisch, Comparative Literature, UC Berkeley “Rethinking ‘Minor Epic,’” SAA
2016

“The Ancient Modern History of Hero and Leander:” Musaeus and Marlowe on the Borders of Hellenism

My paper explores Christopher Marlowe’s *Hero and Leander* as an early form of fictive realism, one grounded in its connection to the place and space of the Hellespont. Placing Marlowe’s poem in conversation with both the Greek epyllion by Musaeus and later, seventeenth-century adaptations of the story, I argue that this experiment with a kind of realism ultimately pits the erotic world of the human lovers *against* the erotic world of the divine. In so doing, the poem stages the gradual irrelevance, and even maliciousness, of direct divine influence, offering, in its place, a more “everyday” – even proto-novelistic – image of sexual desire.

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Echo-critical Poetic Narcissism in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*

In Renaissance poetics, Narcissus is often as important a figure as Orpheus, and in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, Shakespeare develops a poetics of narcissism. The basic building block of poetic beauty in the poem is the simulacrum. Mirror images abound in the poem's subject matter, structure, and formal elements. The poem is bookended by descriptions of Adonis the boy and Adonis the flower, and these descriptions share a common language. The differences between the boy and flower are thus covered over in narrative. The two seem to collapse into sameness. The flower, as a figure for the boy and for the poetry that makes such a transformation possible through figuration, all seem to be in possession of an irresistible beauty. But still there is Echo, the other half of Narcissus's story in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. In Shakespeare's epyllion, she remains a figure of resistance in spite of her love of the irresistible. She deconstructs the art object's sovereignty from within, insofar as she opens up a space in which we might look and listen for those who lack a grammar with which to respond.

I see Narcissus in the poem's aesthetics, and hear Echo in its opening up of the possibility of a peculiar kind of ethics. In his "Defence of Poesie," Philip Sidney says, "True poets must teach and delight."¹ Narcissism inheres in the most delightful moments in Shakespeare's poem, and narcissism is perhaps the condition for one's uninhibited enjoyment of the poem. If Narcissus delights, does Echo teach, and if so, what might we learn from her? Derrida suggests that if we read for Echo, we must read for what is "left hanging, open, unsettled and unsettling."² In this essay, I attempt to read *Venus and Adonis* from both sides—Narcissus's and Echo's—in an effort to explore the critical undertow that destabilizes but does not displace the poem's aesthetic cachet.

Secondary Sources

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¹ Philip Sidney, "The Defence of Poesy," Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1831., p. 17.

² *Rogues*, xii.