

## Seminar 35. Shakespeare and the Modes of Satire

[ABSTRACT] Jonson's Breaches and the Typography of Action

SAA 2012: Shakespeare and Modes of Satire

Claire M. L. Bourne

English Department, University of Pennsylvania

This paper establishes how early modern stationers harnessed the non-grammatical potential of punctuation in order to render the physicality of drama legible to readers. Because stage action in the early English theatre was, as playwright John Webster put it, "significant," it comes as little surprise that playwrights and stationers often decried the shortcomings of print to reproduce the corporeal dynamics of performance. John Marston famously condemned the playbook of *The Malcontent* (1604) as a "trifle in reading" because it lacked "the soule of lively action." Despite such complaints, many of which initially revolved around printed comedies, textual evidence suggests that some playwrights and stationers were actively experimenting with parentheses and dashes as typographical proxies for action. At the center of this experimentation was Ben Jonson, who helped to develop a new kind of comedy—the satire of "humors"—that revolved around characters whose imbalanced humoral constitutions gave rise to monomanias, mannered verbal tics, and outrageous physical compulsions such as smoking and vomiting. The repetitive bodily movements which formed the basis of Jonson's comedy posed a difficulty for print. Instead of using detailed stage directions to describe these actions, Jonson and the stationers who produced the early quartos of *Every Man Out of his Humor* (1600), *Cynthia's Revels* (1601), and *Poëtaster* (1602) deployed parentheses and dashes to make visible on the page the physical excesses of Jonson's humorous characters. Jonson termed these marks "breaches," implying that their function was to mark—and make—breaks in the play's dialogue. The breaches created a way of seeing action in print, one that encouraged a kind of interpretive excess that mirrored the very physical excesses that they accounted for. Although Jonson's experimentation with "action punctuation" was limited to key moments in his dramatic satires, these marks, especially the dash, became more widely used in the printing of plays during the seventeenth century, functioning as indicators of deictic and other kinds of action that could not be spelled out in print—kissing, stabbing, pointing, bowing, signing, reading, hiccupping, and playing an instrument.

Abstract – David Currell

"*King John*: Mode, Genre, Text"

Shakespeare's heroic histories repeatedly feature a contrasting pair of warrior and satirist, a pair that carries with it conceptual pairs such as like high and low social station, and glorification and exposure. The technique of bifurcation in *King John*, *1 and 2 Henry IV*, *Henry V*, and *Troilus and Cressida* yields an evolutionary scale of character across which heroic and humane values increasingly diverge; the word *honor* is more sharply queried at the social margins the more it is mouthed at the political center. This paper argues that in creating Philip Falconbridge in *King John*, Shakespeare exploits a Marlovian technique of

satiric characterization best evident in *Tamburlaine*, and retunes the generic multiplicity of the anonymous *Troublesome Reign of King John*. The play furnishes the template for the more radical disjunctions between activity and critique in the later plays, something indicated in the fall in social status from the Bastard Falconbridge to the bastard Thersites: in *Troilus*, the lowest Homeric character condemns Homeric glory *per se* without the protective (if ironized) cushion of glamour and birthright possessed by Falconbridge.

### Suggested Reading

*Tamburlaine the Great* (1587)

*Troublesome Reign of King John* (1591)

The Satirist in Shakespeare – Jason Gleckman  
Chinese University of Hong Kong

With the appearance of Joseph Hall's *Virgidemiarum* in 1597, a spate of satires in English appeared on the literary scene. Shortly afterwards, by the time of Shakespeare's *As You Like It* (somewhere between 1598 and 1600), the figure of the satirist was familiar enough to be easily recognizable on the stage in the character of Jacques (probably pronounced Jak-es). In this seminar paper, I hope to explore (rather than simply repeat the work of others) some of the traits of the Elizabethan 'satirist' specifically from Shakespeare's perspective, which include being a 'malcontent,' an intellectual, and a melancholy person.

Clearly, in *As You Like It*, Shakespeare criticizes this satirist figure; he even makes the case that the longstanding tradition of the stage 'clown' is a superior form of humorist. Yet while it could be argued that Shakespeare's opposition to satire continues in the plays he wrote in the few years following *As You Like It* -- plays such as *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Othello* -- satire nonetheless looms large in these works. Moreover, the values and viewpoints of the cynical satirist seem difficult to dismiss in these later plays, given what Hamlet calls the "sea of troubles" facing people in early modern England.

Bill Kerwin  
University of Missouri

"They have been at a great feast of languages, and stolen the scraps":  
The Satiric Epigram, Chronotopes, and *Love's Labors Lost*"

I am researching the satiric epigram and its changing forms and uses across the sixteenth century (my major authors are Erasmus, Thomas More, John Heywood, Robert Crowley, Sir John Davies, John Harington, and Ben Jonson), and in this paper I will explore two connected ideas. First, I want to consider how Bakhtin's theories of dialogism help us understand the satiric epigram. The epigram almost always has a two-part structure, and so works wonderfully to expand Bakhtin's ideas of heteroglossia, demonstrating that this

short form shares with larger forms such as the novel an incorporation of multiple voices, and in particular a formal or received voice and a responding and refuting voice. More specifically, that polyphony often involves multiple times, so I will also consider Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, in conjunction with recent criticism on temporality in the Renaissance. The satiric epigram participates in a Renaissance "Folly" tradition that bears many of the traces of Mennipean satire, but it does so within a specific generic tradition, and with interesting approaches to time. Second, I want to consider the traces of this part of English satiric culture within one Shakespeare play, *Love's Labors Lost*. While Shakespeare never published epigrams, and mentions the form explicitly only once in his plays, I believe the dialogism present in the satiric epigram finds similar outlets in many speeches within Shakespeare's comedy on the "great feast of language."

Secondary reading:

Beyond Bakhtin and *Love's Labors Lost*, I suggest the introduction to Harris, Jonathan Gil. *Untimely Matter in the Time of Shakespeare*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Harris discusses the concept of "anachronism" as a critical template.

Jonathan Kotchian – University of Connecticut  
SAA 2012: Shakespeare and Modes of Satire seminar  
--Brains and Satire in *Troilus and Cressida*

This essay will examine in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* the intersection of two discourses that came into particular focus at the turn of the century: one surrounding dramatic satire and the other surrounding intelligence. As the flurry of verse satires in the 1590s was succeeded by satirical experiments in drama, questions of genre and mode became more pressing. Especially in light of the opportunity the theater afforded for playing simultaneously to multiple audiences, intentionally *difficult* satire – satiric meaning designed by the author to be understood by only some – became a particularly vexed category; how did poet-playwrights imagine and address an insider audience who could follow along? Joseph Hall's assertion in *Virgidemiarum* that "it is not for every one to relish a true and naturall Satyre" was echoed by Jonson's multiple appeals to a fit-though-few community of wise understanders. How and to what extent did Shakespearean satire fit into or respond to this discourse of satiric distinction?

I will suggest that, for several reasons including the lack of positions for educated men and the growing standardization of educational texts, ideas of comparative intelligence came into the cultural foreground around the turn of the century, as it became more important to distinguish between brains and blockishness. In *Troilus and Cressida*, we can see how satire against stupidity might have worked not only inside the play (against

misunderstanding characters) but also in the theater (against misunderstanding audiences). In particular, I intend to show how the interaction of genres in this “problem” play was informed by concepts of comparative intelligence, as epic and love story were satirically mocked as fodder for the stupid.

Adrienne Redding

Modes of Satire Abstract

Prof. William R. Jones

“Pray to the Devils, the Gods Have Given Us Over”:

Satire and the Iconography of Eden in *Titus Andronicus*

As part of a larger work positing theories regarding appearances of Edenic iconography in poetry and drama in both early modern and contemporary artifacts, this essay investigates Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* in order to consider those junctures within the play where Edenic appropriations and satiric devices intersect. *Titus*, the earliest of Shakespeare’s tragedies, with its reliance on diegetic classical references from Ovid and Virgil and its Roman setting, revolves around ideas of origin as it processes anxieties regarding authority. The play’s classical, epic referents, texts that are themselves concerned with origins and beginnings, are joined by tropes associated with that other great originary locus, the Garden of Eden. The convergence of these several authorizing gestures may be connected to areas of early modern cultural instability, particularly in regards to: the power of the individual voice; the question of whose voice gets to be heard; and the ways in which such communicative power negotiations involved gender, class, and race. Interestingly, satire, also intimately connected to issues of voice and power, brings along its own baggage regarding origins and authority. Dustin Griffin, discussing the history of competing satirical theories, notes that “[i]n Horace’s account of origins, satire began as a rural merriment and declined into cruelty before it was restrained by law (*Epist.* 2.1.139-55). His myth is an Edenic story of innocence, fall, and recovery” (18). In describing Dryden’s late Renaissance theories regarding the nature and origin of satire, Griffin reveals that an oppositional perspective makes use of the same imagery. He describes Dryden’s opinion that,

Like man in a state of nature, satire was fallen or “deprav’d”; indeed, natural satire (the “defamation of others”) began at the Fall, when Adam and Eve blamed each other. Such “satire” survives in his own days as “Invective.” It was not until satire became an “Art,” says Dryden, pursuing his agricultural/theological metaphor, that (like redeemed man) “it bore better Fruit.” (18)

While these theories are two among many, such connections between satire and Eden, as well as satire’s existence as a method of cultural critique, make it a valuable if unconventional lens through which to view *Titus Andronicus* and the ways in which the play both replicates and corrects its cultural and political context.

Yulia Ryzhik  
Harvard University

Abstract for *Shakespeare and Modes of Satire*  
at Shakespeare Association of America 2012 (5-7 April, Boston, MA)

### Railing and Malady in *King Lear*

Many of the 1590s satirists, such as Donne and Marston, present satirical railing as both a symptom of and a cure for the madness that results from the speaker's savage, though ultimately impotent, indignation with the vices and follies of the world he observes. Unlike for the author of pastoral complaint (which implies easing the burden of the mind), for the author of satire writing is more violently purgative. By whipping himself up into a rage verging on madness, the satirist works past his paralyzing frustration and spews forth the bile that chokes him. This paper, however, will consider not satirical speech as a form of madness, but mad speech as a form of satire, particularly in the scenes of madness in *King Lear*. Shakespeare's indebtedness to Samuel Harsnett's *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures* for Poor Tom's demonological vocabulary, as well as for the concept of feigned possession and exorcism, has been well documented (Brownlow, Greenblatt). It has also been suggested that Edgar's "mad" speeches contain allusions to *Eastward Ho* (Taylor), though stylistically these passages seem closer to Marston's *Scourge of Villainy*. What has not been noted, however, is the connection between exorcism and satirical catharsis. Finally, I would like to examine mad speech as a form of protected speech, akin to that of Shakespeare's licensed fools, such as Lear's Fool or Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*. What form of commentary does mad speech provide that satirical railing does not?

A few bibliographical references:

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Series 33.132 (Nov., 1982): 396-413.

John (Jack) Tobin  
University of Massachusetts-Boston

I am interested in viewing and reviewing the idea that Shakespeare, whatever his role as a satirist in certain of his plays and poems, is assuredly a lampoonist, a writer out to vex his target/s rather than to reform them. I have been rounding up the usual suspects, some of whom have alibis, in order to determine whether some in the group are recidivists and whether Shakespeare so habitually magnanimous does develop an increased skill in this often mean-spirited sub-genre. Among the prime suspects are, not surprisingly, Gabriel Harvey, Robert Greene, Ben Jonson, and on a higher social and political level, Lord Burleigh. In his targeting Shakespeare is often helped by the work of Thomas Nashe as I hope to make clear, perhaps to the point where we can label, not libel, the two as a comedy team, a duo never on stage at the same time, but the one having scripted some of the text of the other.

Eric Vivier  
University of Wisconsin-Madison

"Thyself upon thyself!":  
Satirical self-consumption in Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida*

In *Shakespeare and the Poets' War*, James Bednarz rejects Oscar Campbell's suggestion that Shakespeare had merely assimilated Jonsonian comical satire in *Troilus and Cressida*, and argues instead that Shakespeare rejects Jonson's aggressive self-assertiveness in order to uphold (at least implicitly) festive comedy: "The most important contribution *Troilus and Cressida* makes to the Poets' War is its delineation of how the satiric impulse had turned against itself in a self-subverting struggle for poetic mastery" (50). As provocative as this reading may be, its terms are limiting: its focus is comedy rather than satire, and it does not look beyond the passing blows of the Poets' War.

This paper will argue that Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* stages (in Joel Altman's terms) satire as an ethical, rhetorical, and social question. As in a number of works by Greene, Nashe, and Middleton, Shakespeare's satirists are embroiled in the world they castigate, but for Shakespeare this seems neither pleasurable nor productive. Rather, Shakespeare turns satire against itself in order to suggest that self-consumption is satire's impotent—and inevitable—end.