

Artful Shakespeares—SAA 2016 New Orleans
Seminar leader: Kaara L. Peterson, Miami University of Ohio

Abstracts and Participants

Nicholas Jones, Oberlin College
“*King Lear* in its Time: Historicism through Early Modern Painting

Reading *King Lear* in the 1960s, I focused on its bleak and apparently random cruelty. The play seemed to exist exclusively in a time contemporary to my reading, not in its own. New Historicist scholarship has since then opened ways of bringing it back to its own time. One such method of historicizing is to read the play in dialog with a painting from the Early Modern period. This essay reads *King Lear* in relation to Hendrick ter Brugghen's 1625 painting, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*. Earlier images of Sebastian tended to transcend the violence of his execution by arrows,



Hendrick ter Brugghen, *Saint Sebastian Tended by Irene*, 1625. Allen Memorial Art Museum, Oberlin, Ohio

showing the saint upright and even radiant. In contrast, Counter-Reformation artists depicted the debilitating effects of the torture, and added a woman named Irene (later Saint Irene) who nursed Sebastian back to life—only to see him martyred again. Ter Brugghen's painting shows a corpse-like Sebastian cared for by two women: one unties him from the tree to which he had been bound, while another (Irene) delicately removes an arrow from the saint's torso. Illuminated by a gentle sunset in an evocative landscape, the picture is a tender evocation of mercy in a situation of peril. Without assuming that Shakespeare was a crypto-Catholic, we can use ter Brugghen's treatment of the Sebastian iconography to foreground Shakespeare's repeated inclusion of ministrations in *King Lear*. Even in the dizzying swirl of perils (betrayal, civil war, treachery, madness, murder, execution, suicide), there are numerous glimmers of care: Edgar tends Gloucester, Cordelia tends Lear, and Lear dies tending Cordelia. The historical perspective on suffering and care given by the painting helps to bring *King Lear* back into focus as a product of its own time.

Russ McDonald, Goldsmiths College, University of London
“The Square Right the Circle Wrong: Elizabethan Aesthetics”

Humanist writers thought of architecture and rhetoric as cognate fields, and English architecture, an undeveloped discipline in the middle of the sixteenth century, proves uncommonly fruitful for defining the artistic inclinations of the Tudors generally. Scrutiny of its physical “texts” and the discourse surrounding them reveals the growing primacy of the straight line, a feature that attains dominance throughout the expanding visual culture. Most telling is the widespread devotion to rectilinearity, the deployment of the square or the rectangle in various arenas of creative production. As the century proceeds, with building developing a more or less distinctive style and other arts and crafts similarly expanding, the line becomes more and more visible as the basis for structural composition. My overriding aim is to relate the prominence of the linear in Elizabethan visual culture to the stabilization of the poetic line in the 1580s, specifically the poets' fixing on the iambic pentameter line in rhymed lyric and narrative poems, e.g. sonnets and *The Faerie Queene*, and in the new blank verse of the public playhouse, notably that of Marlowe and the young Shakespeare. Both the architectural and the poetic uses of linearity represent an effort at ordering the world and dividing experience into pleasing, memorable forms.

John Mucciolo

“Concordia” Compared: Meetings in Alciato, Whitney, Rubens, Velazquez, and Shakespeare

Explicating dramatic poetry and visual arts in terms of each other is a controversial matter. G.E. Lessing, for example, objects to correlating the two because “the coexistence of the physical object comes into collision with the consecutiveness of speech” (108). Panofsky, the extraordinarily erudite art historian, warns against using literary sources for the interpretation of pictures, before we have interpreted the literary sources themselves” (123). Flaubert dismisses the whole enterprise out of hand: “To explain one art form in terms of another is a monstrosity” (718). [1] With these caveats in mind, I will compare the visual arts and poetic drama. In this paper I will correlate Alciato’s and Whitney’s “Concordia” emblems and the use of the Concordia theme in paintings by Rubens and Velazquez, and in Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*. I will focus on Concordia’s main feature, the meeting of opposing forces as associated with Princely Virtue, especially its meaning and efficacy in Act 5 of *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*.

Kimberly Rhodes, Drew University

“Seeing Saints in the Forest of Arden: *As You Like It*, Act 2, Scene 1”

The First Lord’s ekphrastic description of his off-stage encounter with Jaques and the wounded stag in *As You Like It* embraces some of the same iconographic features and dualistic modes of visuality as early modern representations of St. Eustace and St. Hubert, in a context rife with Christian themes. In early modern visual culture, seeing *like* a saint implies the overlay of the natural and the supernatural; Christ appears to St. Eustace and St. Hubert in their familiar hunting grounds, the forest, and in the guise of their hunting quarry, the stag. In addition, the saints are moved by their visions to spiritual feeling. Changing visual conventions that favor naturalism and a more scientific approach to space led artists like Albrecht Dürer to depict St. Eustace in a familiar manner. Thus, *seeing* the saint involves the calibration of highly descriptive detail with strong feeling and supernatural sights. Jaques may not be explicitly saintly in *As You Like It*, but one might say that in the parlance of early modern visual culture he sees and is seen like one when he muses upon the wounded stag in the Forest of Arden.

Leslie Thomson, University of Toronto

“Like Curtains shadowing the Altar”: Discoveries in Religious Art and Secular Drama

On about 250 occasions in early modern plays a curtain or door is opened to effect a discovery that materially affects the plot. In this paper I want to consider how this use of the discovery in secular drama might have had its origins in—and allude to—rituals central to medieval Christianity. The pervasive influence of Christianity on early modern ways of thinking and seeing can probably not be overestimated nor fully appreciated today. In particular, the Nativity and Resurrection were fundamental to Christian worship and art, both of which used actions and images of discovery to represent and celebrate these “miracles.” These religious practices of course had their origins in the Catholic liturgy, but centuries of repetition would have created a legacy of images and ceremonies not eradicated from the common imagination by the Reformation. Indeed, even in the post-Reformation English church the practices and iconography of Catholicism did not completely disappear, and between 1553 and 1558 they had explicitly returned under Queen Mary. This paper offers a range of pictorial representations of or allusions to these practices, along with examples of visual business in plays that might be said to have been influenced by them, thereby adding a dimension of meaning likely not “seen” four centuries later.

Andrew Tumminia, Spring Hill College
“That Stirring Vertue”: Pyrrhus, Hamlet, and Painting

This paper explores Hamlet’s behavior through the theory of bodily movement described in Giovanni Paolo Lomazzo’s *A Tracte Containing the Artes of Curious Paintinge, Carvinge and Buildinge* (1584, trans. 1598). Lomazzo advances a fairly orthodox sixteenth-century conception of bodily motion reflective of humoral theory and (to a less enthusiastic extent) astrology. The familiarity of Lomazzo’s terms suggests that Shakespeare need not have read Lomazzo’s book to think of action similarly. Indeed, with a shared focus on the passions and corresponding gestures, Lomazzo’s *Tracte* and early modern stage acting share considerable overlap in aesthetic categories. For both, representation requires a certain synecdochical distillation of action to simple forms, which helps ensure legibility.

I approach Hamlet’s behavior through the play’s reference to Pyrrhus “as a painted tyrant” whose “like a neutral to will and matter” (2.2.260-61). I argue that these similes do not suit Lomazzo’s theory of painting; bodies depicted in paintings need to suggest movement, not stasis. But his theory does work for Hamlet, whose bodily disposition and language correspond well to Lomazzo’s description of a melancholic. Lomazzo’s theory simplifies some complexities surrounding Hamlet’s interpretation. When viewed from the perspective of Lomazzo’s *Tracte*, Hamlet acts exactly the way a melancholic is supposed to act. Lomazzo’s understanding of bodily movement can account for Hamlet’s unprecedented flurry of activity at the end of the play as well. Lomazzo notes the tendency of people to imitate the passions of those around them, including those rendered well in a painting by a skilled artist. Hamlet exhibits such empathic mimicry in each of his non-verbal outbursts of activity. Hamlet is never the initiator; he is the imitator.

Emily Vasiliauskas, Williams College
“The Architecture of Survival”

Petrarch was the first writer of the European Renaissance to articulate a conflict between a secular literary legacy and heavenly aspirations. In an imagined debate with Augustine in the *Secretum*, he insists that the two value systems can be reconciled, that he might enjoy both posthumous fame and Christian salvation. Ben Jonson, by contrast, felt that he had to choose. His notion of a literary afterlife registers the spiritual and social sacrifices his choice entails. Through readings of *The Masque of Queens* and several poems, I show how Jonson consistently represents survival through literary fame as more rigorously austere than most forms of religious asceticism, but with none of the compensations. What literature forces him to give up in life, including love, pleasure, and domestic attachment, he places in heaven. His own existence as a poet, both before and after death, resembles that of a caryatid: a column in human shape, eternally holding up the edifice of fame as a lifeless (if lifelike) object. In the course of the argument, I examine the iconographic history of the caryatid, from the Erechtheion to Inigo Jones’s drawings, via Renaissance editions of Vitruvius, in order to take the measure of Jonson’s innovative use of the figure. I also touch on a number of resonant themes in Renaissance studies and in literary criticism more generally: Stoicism, asceticism as a form-of-life (Agamben), and the existential conditions of authorship (Foucault, De Man).

Joseph Wallace, University of Birmingham
“The Dance of Death in *Measure for Measure*”

In 1833 the eccentric antiquarian Francis Douce wrote a book about a series of sixteenth-century woodcuts by Hans Holbein known as the “dance of death.” He claimed, almost as an aside, that Shakespeare might have been inspired by the dance of death when writing Duke Vincenzo’s “Be absolute for death” speech in act 3 of *Measure for Measure*. In this paper I use Douce’s suggestion as a starting point for a reconsideration of death in the play as a whole. From contemporary images of the dance of death, Shakespeare accessed a very powerful set of ideas about justice, equality,

and the value of human life. At the heart of the dance of death was the idea that death was an equalizer, a leveling force by which all people might be thought of as somehow the same. It was potentially a very radical notion, threatening the significance of social hierarchies. And yet Shakespeare flips this satirical discourse on its head. The supposedly radical ideas are put into the mouth of the ultimate figure of authority, the manipulative duke. The two prisoners, Claudio and Barnardine, resist the Duke's exhortations to acquiesce to their own deaths. In his desire to stay alive despite the comforts of death, Barnardine especially points the way toward an even more radical idea: that true equality might be the result of justice, or resistance, enacted in this world. *Measure for Measure* thus represents a reorientation of the horizons of radical equality, which stand in marked contrast to the way in which the duke invokes the dance of death. Shakespeare reveals these images to be a malleable source for rethinking social relationships.

H. Austin Whitver, University of Alabama

"Art Appreciation on the Early Modern Stage: Reading and Misreading Monuments in *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* and *The Winter's Tale*"

A number of art critics specializing in early modern monuments have observed a shift toward the inclusion of secular allegorical figures and representations of personified virtues on tombs in the last decade of the 16th century and the first decades of the 17th. These figures helped fill the symbolic space left by the long taboo saints and religious icons that had once adorned most monuments. In this paper, I would like to explore several instances of playwrights, a group who had long used the power of tombs to construct narratives on stage, keeping abreast of the evolving trends in monumentation by turning the deceased (or seeming deceased) into exemplar. In particular, I will focus primarily on two late plays, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy* and *The Winter's Tale*, works which orbit ideal heroines who are rendered archetypal manifestations of feminine virtues by the power of tombs. However, even with such streamlined artistic representations designed to highlight only the ideal, there is still a danger of misreading the monument and taking the wrong message. This is apparent with the monstrous misinterpretation of the Lady's tomb performed by the aptly named Tyrant. Understandably fearing such a grotesque misreading from the seemingly reformed but potentially inconstant Leontes, Paulina guides him to a correct interpretation of Hermione's monument, both before and after the unveiling. I will argue that this scene vividly demonstrates both the power of these idealizing tombs and their potential dangers, including the possibility that such a representation contributes to Hermione's reticence to speak at the end of the play.