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Caroline Shakespeare Abstracts
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Christopher Koester

“‘[T]oo much conceiving’: Shakespeare’s Influence and the Maternal Imagination in Milton’s Epitaph and *Comus*”

In his article, “Subversion and Wonder in Milton’s Epitaph ‘On Shakespeare,’” Paul Stevens notes parallels between the imagery of Milton’s poem and the plot of Shakespeare’s late romance, *A Winter’s Tale*. Stevens uses these parallels to argue that, throughout his literary career, Milton sought “to fulfill the religious possibilities of Shakespearean fancy” (388). To make this claim, however, Stevens must gloss the “conceiving” of Milton’s fourteenth line to mean imagination, not pregnancy, despite the fact that pregnancy is also a major concern in *A Winter’s Tale*, and one that is related to the play’s obsession with the power of an overactive imagination. Nor is “conceiving” the only word in Milton’s epitaph that could be read to mean procreation: other such phrases include “labour of an age,” “son of memory,” “heir of Fame,” as well as more abstract phrases related to the early modern theory of the maternal imagination. Beginning with Milton’s epitaph, then, my paper contends that Milton unconsciously negotiates his relationship with Shakespeare as one between a pregnant woman and a negative outside influence, the very sight of whom has influenced her (pro)creation. Much as Leontes accuses his wife, Hermione, of carrying a bastard child in *A Winter’s Tale*—an accusation that presumes an early modern audience familiar with the idea of the maternal imagination—Milton believes the “shame” of his “slow-endavoring art” to be the effect of his “too much conceiving” of Shakespeare. While the first part of my paper reads Milton’s epitaph alongside Shakespeare’s romance, the second part uses my findings to reconsider Milton’s masque. I contrast the porous, susceptible Milton of the epitaph to the self-secure and chaste Lady of *Comus* in order to show that Milton’s masque is his (ultimately failed) attempt to reassert authorial autonomy, uncorrupted by outside agents.

Heather Wicks

Kill thee in a kiss: Death and Desire in Shakespeare and Ford

My paper takes up questions about Shakespeare's impact on Caroline theatrical practices and plays. More specifically I will examine his influence on the tragedies of Ford, especially his depictions of women in death, both in performances and play-texts. I hypothesize that Shakespeare's well-known tragic heroines, like Juliet and Desdemona, and their eroticized deaths helped shape later cultural productions of the sex/death nexus prevalent to early modern drama. I will start with *Romeo and Juliet*, and its cultural legacy, as a pivotal point of reference to examine the nexus of desire and death and its realization through erotic interactions with women's dead bodies. Then, I examine the ways the sex/death nexus manifested in the Caroline period, especially as dramatists like Ford were both influenced by and pushing back against Shakespeare's work.

Ford in particular purposefully engaged with Shakespeare's work, perhaps most obviously with *Tis Pity She's a Whore* and *Love's Sacrifice* as he rewrites *Romeo and Juliet* and *Othello*. My paper focuses on Ford's treatment of the erotic depictions of female death, comparing it to Shakespeare's treatment of desire. For instance, in the tragic ending of *Tis Pity*, Ford offers his lovers an erotic reunion in death clearly echoing the romantic paradigms of Shakespeare's earlier tragedies. However, while Ford clearly alludes to the final moments of *Romeo and Juliet*, he rewrites the typical *liebstd* suicide to fraternal murder. While Ford offers the hope of heavenly reunion to his lovers unlike Shakespeare, these lovers will not be mythologized as their Shakespearean counterparts in the *liebstd* tradition. The cost of desire in Ford is death without the ideal even as the heroes reach for it. The judgment is passed out over Annabella's dead body as the play's last words declare her a whore. Where Shakespeare appears to use the sex/death nexus to engender the ideal, Ford uses it to test our very notions of it.

Meredith Beales

The Decline of British Legendary History on the English Stage in the Caroline Years

Early in his career John Milton created a list of “British Trag.” possible plots for plays based on events from pre-Norman British history. Yet the author of *The History of Britain*, (likely begun in 1649, and one of many early modern chronicles which describe ancient British history), did not, in the end, write any of these tragedies. The Caroline period witnessed a decline in credibility of the legendary history of Britain, that collection of legends first popularized by Geoffrey of Monmouth in the twelfth century. My paper examines how the professional theatre responded to the decline in credibility of the legendary or Galfridian history of ancient Britain, which (I argue), accelerated after the death of James Stuart.

Most scholars who address the topic of British legendary history on the early modern stage place the high point in the representation of ancient, unified Britain during the Jacobean period. While this consensus ignores the presence of Elizabethan plays set in ancient Britain, such as *Gorboduc* (1561) and *King Leir* (ca. 1594), it also disregards the post-Jacobean popularity of Jacobean plays such as Fletcher’s *Bonduca* (printed 1633) and Middleton’s *Hengist, King of Kent* (surviving MS from the 1630s). These plays, along with Shakespeare’s *Lear* and *Cymbeline*, are printed and revived long after the king credited with “claim[ing] Arthur’s seat” had died. This paper will attempt to recover the print, and, if possible, performance history of ancient Britain on the Caroline London stage.