

## 2020 SAA Seminar: Bad Philology

Leaders: Jenny C. Mann, Cornell University and Brian Pietras, Princeton University

### **“The Violence of My Affection”: Philological Violence in Early Modern Preaching**

**Gabriel Bloomfield  
Columbia University**

Writing in 1700, after a century and a half of evolution and controversy within Protestant English preaching practice, the sermon historian John Edwards had harsh words for those preachers he was convinced had been doing it wrong. “You shall see some [preachers] lie hewing and hacking at the Words,” he wrote, “and never contented till they have chopt them into the smallest Shreds.” It gets worse: the most violent preachers, those who dismantle the text word by word, “commit a Rape upon the Text [...] thus separated” and “rack and torture it, till it confess’d what he had a mind it should say.” In Edwards’s view, analysis—or what John Donne would call “anatomie”—is a destructive process that results in eisegesis: an interpretation not of the text but of the reader. But to “hack” apart a text, to isolate its words and explore them in detail, is also the work of philology—which makes such “hacking,” etymologically speaking, an act of “love.” This paper explores the counterpoised rhetorics of violence against and love for the text of scripture within the discourses of early modern preaching. Examining sermons, audiences’ responses to them, homiletic theory, and preaching manuals, I aim to excavate a long-forgotten byway in the history of interpretation, one in which the very principles and methods of literary analysis were at stake. This particular set of controversies about bad philology, I suggest, might have continuing relevance to our current thinking about the history of that philological practice that today we call “close reading.”

### **Trojan Universalism, or Dreaming World History in John Higgins’s *First part of the mirror for magistrates***

**Joseph Bowling, University of Wisconsin**

“Our philological home is the earth: it can no longer be the nation.”  
-Erich Auerbach, “Philology and *Weltliteratur*” (1952)

“Where knowledge is missing, affect stirs. Where ontology stalls, philology moves.”  
-Werner Hamacher, “95 Theses on Philology” (2010)

Michael Drayton’s writes in song 1 of the *Poly-Olbion* that the “*envious world* doth slander” Britain’s Trojan heritage “for a *dreame*.” In his “Illustrations”—printed in the 1612 edition—John Selden glosses this line as representative of “that universall desire, bewitching our Europe, to derive their bloud from *Trojans*.” Selden identifies the specific historiographical tradition that no longer “endures any nation, their first supposed Author’s name, not *Italus to the Italian*, not *Hispalus* to the *Spaniard*, . . . especially this of *Brute*.” For, Selden claims, his is an age that is

“critique,” no longer credulous, and thus dismissive of the long-standing tradition of bad philology that traced the name of the “nation” to its founder—e.g., *Brute* or *Brutus* as the etymological origin of *Britain*—a medieval practice the early modern reception of which scholars often treat as contributing to the discursive construction of early modern nationhood. In this paper, however, I want to approach this bad philology by taking seriously Selden’s description of it as a “universall desire,” a practice expressive not of national insularity but universalist longing, a practice motivated by principally by desire, calling our attention to the *philia* in philology. To do this, I turn to John Higgins’s 1574 *First part of the Mirror for Magistrates*, a prequel to William Baldwin’s *Mirror* project that includes complaints from the earliest Trojan-Britons. I turn to this text to read in it the “universall desire” Selden names and argue for a critical reconsideration not only of the Trojan origin stories, but of the place of ancient Troy generally in the historical imagination of early modern England.

**Philology in the Print Shop:  
Confronting Textual Alterity in Editions of Middle English Poetry**

**Megan L. Cook, Colby College**

This paper considers the vernacular philology practiced by early modern printers and stationers as they prepared Middle English texts for print. While, following the practice of scribes, they often intervened in their texts by emending, inserting, and modernizing, in this paper I am particularly interested in the notes they left for readers and dedicatees, explaining and often apologizing for the unfamiliar linguistic, poetic, and sometimes political and religious themes of these earlier texts. The philological study of what we now call Middle English was, at best, nascent during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, but late medieval English was recognized as both connected to and divergent from later forms of the language. In the compressed and often hyperbolic space of notes to readers and dedicatory epistles, commentators identify, explicate, and celebrate the increasingly difficult language of Chaucer, Gower, Langland, and other authors central to a growing sense of English literary tradition. While at times explicitly interested in language change and the development of metrical practices, printers and compilers also frequently cast earlier scribes or printers as corrupting agents, anticipating much later philologists’ interest in *mouvance*, variance, and fragmentation.

**Glossing Elyot’s *Dictionary***

**Stephen Foley**

Glossa, a glofc, or expolition of turk spech. from the *Dictionary* of 1538

Polonius offers a pedantic proof of Hamlet’s madness in the form of a definition:

I will be brief. Your noble son is mad.  
Mad call I it; for, to define true madness,  
What is't but to be nothing else but mad?

Polonius’s circular definition performs the *circulus ad probandum* of glossing, the explication of one word by another, from the Greek γλῶσσα (*glossa*), meaning tongue or language, and λαλέω (*laleō*), to speak, talk, chat, prattle, or to make a sound. Positive glossing, as seen in the fourth-

century commentaries of Servius on Vergil and its later extensions or in the *Glossa Ordinaria*, the compilation of patristic commentary on the gospels that became the standard of biblical interpretation from the 12<sup>th</sup> century, inevitably crosses into glossing as false explanation or glossing over, since the glosses do not agree. And in English usage of the sixteenth century, the word “gloss” crosses inexplicably with an unrelated Germanic word “gloss” representing a gleam or luster, and first appearing in print in Thomas Elyot’s *Dictionary* of 1538 as an English gloss of “cantharis,” the soldier beetle, “a greene worme shynynge with a glosse of golde.” Elyot’s *Dictionary* gives the name in English to that instrument of learning and represents the first sustained English work of philology in the vernacular, and a transformational one at that—ironically legitimizing the secondary vernacular tongue over the learned/learnéd language it prioritizes. Looking back at Elyot, we can see philology as an enlightenment future emerging from the Philologia of Martianus Capellanus. Looking through lenses like Jeffrey Masten’s “queer philology,” Patricia Parker’s “critical keywords,” Roland Greene’s “critical semantics,” or Jenny Mann’s “outlaw rhetoric,” can we also discover in Elyot’s work models of “bad philology” —philology before philology—that represent the future of the discipline?

### **Bad Philology, Alternative Histories of Criticism, and Sidney’s “Penetrancy”**

**Matthew Harrison, West Texas A&M University**

In the *Lady of May*, Sidney’s pedantic schoolmaster Rombus coins his own term for ‘enargeia’ when he asks for a poetic contest to be judged “according to the penetrancy of their singing...”. Unlike other terms that might figure the same effects—like liveliness (the Aristotelian ‘energeia’) or vividness (rhetorical ‘enargeia’)—penetrancy imagines poetry as violently invasive, overcoming the resistance of its auditor’s body and mind. Puttenham glosses “penetrate” (in his discussion of the “ink-horn terme”) as “to enter into with violence.” This impropriety may be part of Sidney’s joke: speaking (unbeknownst to him) to the Virgin Queen, the foolish schoolmaster asks which man can penetrate her. (Though the OED claims the sexual implications of ‘penetrate’ date to the 1950s, Shakespeare puns on them in *Cymbeline*: “Come on; tune: if you can penetrate her with your fingering, so; we’ll try with tongue too.”) But if Rombus’s neologism represents an indecorous failure of poetics in its blurring of the boundaries between the verbal and the violent, the textual and the sexual, it also captures something at the heart of Sidney’s theory. Again and again, Sidney imagines poetry’s “sweet charming force” as piercing, penetrating, ravishing, assault, whether in his own voice or those of his characters. Used by both Spenser and Shakespeare, Rombus’s ‘penetrancy’ is one of many early modern poetic terms that failed to blossom, nonflowering offshoots of the ongoing work of adapting classical and continental poetic terminology to the peculiarities of English verse. Yet these failed terms are also sites of sophisticated thinking about the relation of the aesthetic to the ethical.

Rombus is a literal philologist: a lover of words in themselves, coating his meaning in a thick dust of calques, malapropisms, and derivational affixes. What I want to suggest, for our work together, is that his dusty and absurd virtuosity isn’t mere static; insofar as he makes inadvertent meaning out of the haze of his erudition: I take him as a prototype of our work together.

### **Roger Ascham’s Bad Ideas, or Thinking Through Synecdoche**

## **Amanda Heinrichs, Amherst College**

Originally, I proposed two options for my contribution to this seminar, but I have come to land on a third: I will be discussing Roger Ascham's synecdochic use of Chaucer in *The Scholemaster*. In his educational treatise, Ascham inveighs against misleading poetic ornaments, and devotes particular attention to the fault of rhyming. For examples of this faulty practice, Ascham draws on Chaucer, Petrarch, and Sir Thomas More. Chaucer and Petrarch are cited as the rhyming author's "Gods in verses"; these two possess "worthie wittes" alongside unspecified faults, but their followers are like one Englishman who attempted to imitate Thomas More. Unluckily, this imitator was "most vnlike" Sir Thomas in "wit and learnyng," but followed More's fashion of "wearing his gowne awrye vpon the one shoulder." Rhymers who follow Chaucer are like fashionistas who follow More; all style and no substance.

Ascham locates Chaucer as a representative of writing "in English," just as he cites Petrarch "in Italian": these two vernacular authors stand in for the entire literary output of that language, in a textbook example of synecdoche. But Ascham has made a mistake. Chaucer and Petrarch wrote in regional dialects that would *become* a unified English and Italian; a dialect is made to stand in for a language that did not exist. Ascham thus creates English as a language and English as a literature through a misapplication of synecdoche. His didactic text popularized how to teach Latin; but it is through his misuse of a trope enacted but not named, an action without a corresponding existence in language, that he creates a national literary and linguistic identity.

If this seminar's purpose is to think through bad philology, to consider (mis)applications of the roots of words, I would like to argue (confidently and sweepingly, in the humanist tradition) for the humanist education as itself founded in a mistake about the historical facts of English as a language.

## **An Atomist Abcedarium**

**Jessie Hock, Vanderbilt University**

The Roman poet Lucretius is well-known for his wordplay and coinages. For example, in his great poem of nature and versification of Epicurean atomist philosophy, *De rerum natura* (*On the Nature of Things*, around 50 BCE), Lucretius refuses to adopt the Greek loan-word for atom (*atomos*), instead preferring terms like *semina* (seeds) and *elementa* (elements). Duncan Kennedy points out that the latter may or may not be an abecedarian coinage (*l-m-n-tum*) that Lucretius adopts to emphasize his analogy between atoms and alphabetical letters, the building blocks of the world and the building blocks of his poem. Early moderns and moderns alike have followed in Lucretius's footsteps by exploiting the resonances of and slippages between key atomist terms and names: Democritus is figured as a democrat, and the letter's-breadth distance between *voluptas* (pleasure) and *voluntas* (will) is easily elided. This paper suggests that Lucretius's insistent analogy between atoms and letters encourages a particularly flexible approach to linguistic figuration in the reception of *DRN*. I am interested both in early modern "bad philology" as it is practiced upon Lucretius, and in discerning whether this "bad philology" has affected the work of twentieth and twenty-first century philosophers and theorists.

Have the Lucretian terms and concepts we use today been irrevocably altered by the philological work—good or bad—done on them in early modernity?

## Spenser's Bad Spelling and the Poetics of Consensus

Victor Lenthe, Bilkent University

Readers since the eighteenth century have shared an intuition that something is going on with Edmund Spenser's spelling, but the scholarship remains split. My paper argues that his spelling was bad—rather than strange, estranging, or any of the other labels sometimes applied to it. This distinction is important, because badness is ideological in a way strangeness is not. Primarily a moral judgment, badness suggests a violation of rules one nonetheless acknowledges to be legitimate, just, and socially useful.

To show that Spenser's spelling is bad, I examine his departures from rules proposed by a man he clearly admired: Sir Thomas Smith, whose “graue and excellent wrytings” he cites in *The Shepheardes Calender*. Among these grave and excellent writings was a book proposing an ambitious spelling reform justified by reference to a supposed national consensus about social and cultural issues. Entailing a rejection of an ideal Spenser also apparently admired, the badness of his spelling signals a sympathetic but ultimately skeptical assessment of a concept pervading political philosophy both from his time and from ours. My paper thus contributes a reassessment of Spenser's political thought speaking to the past as well as the present.

## The Amazing Disappearing H, or: Shakespeare's Abominable Philology

Michael Lutz, MIT

Prince Hamlet claims to have heard some actors praised, though he “thought some of Nature's journeymen had made men, and not made them well, they imitated humanity so abominably [sic]” (*Hamlet* 3.2.30–34). In early modernity, the word *abominable*'s medial *h* was justified by a folk etymology from the phrase *ab homine*, “away from or contrary to man.” Shakespeare seems to have favored the spelling, using it almost invariably despite the spelling “abominable” (among others)<sup>1</sup> also being available. After the 17<sup>th</sup> century, at least partly due to those who Holofernes in *Love's Labours Lost* calls “rackers of orthography,” the medial *h* disappeared – his rival Don Armado, Holofernes specifically alleges, prefers “abbominable” (*LLL* 5.1.19–24).

We might wonder why the pedant Holofernes unpedantically veers from orthographical nitpicking to defend the *abominable*. What does he fear losing along with the disappearing *h*? Meanwhile, Hamlet's pun indicates something about his humanist philosophy: namely, humanity does not stand neatly apart from its cultural productions but is co-implicated in them, and not always for the better. My paper considers these moments of bad philology as indicative of multiple tensions within early modern humanism, marking not only a point of orthographic debate but casting into relief contradictions endemic to the field: even as humanism upheld *humanitas* as a self-evident and aspirational ideal, Shakespeare's abominable philology reveals how it is paradoxically sourced from notoriously unstable linguistic and textual artifacts.

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<sup>1</sup> The OED attests 29 variations of “abominable” before its standardization in the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

**A Guilty Conscience in Marlowe's *Elegies*?  
Mis-translation and the Christianization of Ovid**

**Benjamin C. Miele, University of Iowa**

Christopher Marlowe's abilities as a translator have faced withering critique. His translations of Ovid's *Amores*, the first into any vernacular, have been seen as "those of the schoolboy, careless or ignorant of idiom and too lazy to check his guesses with a dictionary," to quote Roma Gill. Although I do not seek to rehabilitate Marlowe's translating, I do want to note that scholarship on the *Elegies* has for the most part overlooked the value of Marlowe's mis-translating. What can Marlowe's mis-translations tell us when we use the discrepancy between the original and the translation to isolate something unique about Marlowe's poetics? In this paper I will argue that Marlowe christianizes Ovid in his *Elegies*, endowing Ovid's notorious persona with a guilty conscience that owes more to Christian commonplaces than Augustan Rome. This new perspective on Marlowe's mis-translations may encourage scholars to reconsider the supposed heterodoxy and atheism in Marlowe's dramas and later poetic works.

I will focus on Ovid's infamous elegy 3.7 from the *Amores* (3.6 in Marlowe's edition). Marlowe attributes the persona's failure in that elegy to a spiritual cause, while in the Latin the causes are primarily physical, namely, a "*Thessalico . . . ueneno*" or Thessalian drug provided by a "*saga*" or witch. Marlowe, though, departs from the original Latin throughout the elegy and identifies the conscience as a cause of the persona's failure. Needless to say, this is not present in Ovid. Using this discrepancy and others, I consider if Marlowe's mis-translations may be imposing a Christian world-view upon Ovid's elegies.

**Flaunting Dictionary's Method: John Harington and Alimentary Philology**

**Joseph Ortiz, University of Texas, El Paso**

John Harington's *A New Discourse of a Stale Subject* (1596) is mainly notorious as an indecorous attempt to promote Harington's invention of the flush toilet. The treatise, which is occasionally discussed by less squeamish literary critics, is generally described as an English version of Rabelaisian wit or an index of Elizabethan social stigmatization. Yet, for all its mustiness, *A New Discourse* is a virtuosic display of philological learning. This paper examines some of Harington's dazzling demonstrations of toilet humor, in part to show that the treatise's obscenity is often directly proportional to the reader's fluency in multiple languages. At the same time, at the root of Harington's obscenity is a profound meditation on humanist philology and translation. Whether impressing or offending, Harington never lets his reader forget that the fruit of his copious erudition is ultimately a material book—a physically crafted object that can be viewed, displayed, presented, transported, marked, disassembled, and (should the need arise) used as toilet paper. This hyper-materialist approach to philology taps into a counter-strain of Renaissance humanist theory, and it also

**"Complement" and the Construction of Gentility in Early Modern England**

**Matt Smith, University of Alabama**

The *OED* quietly records a new definition of complement in the late sixteenth century. The original sense of the word closely resembles its Latin etymology, *complementum* “that which fills up or completes,” whereas the modern sense of compliment, an “observance of ceremony in social relations,” develops in the late sixteenth century.<sup>2</sup> I trace how changes in the definition and use of complement map onto the construction of gentility in early modern England, and I suggest that the changing definition of complement parallels an increasing interest in etiquette, which is borne out in the period’s conduct manuals, rhetorical manuals, and dictionaries. As a case study of this transformation, I look to James Shirley’s *Lady of Pleasure* (1635) to explore the tension between traditional forms of gentility that emphasize moderation, and emerging forms of gentility that define their role primarily through etiquette. The definitions of complement indicate that a word’s use can illuminate how England’s social ranks define their role in society.

### **Learning to Spell: Instruction and Language Acquisition in *The Witch of Edmonton***

**Ali Webb ([mwebb26@lsu.edu](mailto:mwebb26@lsu.edu)), Louisiana State University**

Being or making a witch means having an education in witchcraft. In *The Witch of Edmonton*, Mother Sawyer learns as much about witchcraft as possible from Old Banks and she needs further instructs on how to “study curses, imprecations, / blasphemous speeches,” and “oaths” (2.1.116,113-4). What Mother Sawyer wants to learn is all language-based.

The Dog teaches Mother Sawyer a phrase in Latin to say when she wants to curse something: “Sanctibecetur nomen tuum” (2.1.176). “Sanctibecetur nomen tuum” is a distortion of the Lord’s Prayer (The Lord’s Prayer is “sanctificetur nomen tuum”; Hallowed by thy name). Mother Sawyer repeats the phrase once, then she alters the phrase to form her own composition: “Contaminetur nomen tuum” (Contaminated be thy name) After either constructing her own composition or misunderstanding the lesson, Mother Sawyer claims to be “an expert scholar” (2.1.181).

In Mother Sawyer’s Latin lesson there are traces of the language acquisition practices laid out by humanist theorist. For example, Juan Luis Vives insists on a competence before the language is used. According to Vives, he wants women in particular “to understand what she is saying in her prayers, whether she prays in a language she knows or if in Latin.” Since he insists on competence, Vives wants someone to “tell her beforehand what it means” (115). The Dog does not tell Mother Sawyer what her prayer means so both Mother Sawyer and the Dog have failed to meet the expectations of education but they have succeeded at the objective of education.

#### Works Cited

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<sup>2</sup> *OED*, “complement, n. I. 1 and 8b.”

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**Bodley's Philologist: Thomas James, Bad Philology,  
and the Value of Manuscripts in Early Modern England**

**Kevin Windhauser, Columbia University**

In 1611, Thomas James, the inaugural librarian of the Bodleian Library, published *A Treatise of the Corruption of Scripture*, an attack on what James claimed were thousands of textual corruptions, most of them intentional, introduced into the Bible and the writings of the Church Fathers by Catholic writers. The work was the culmination of a decade-long project undertaken by James at the Bodleian to collect and collate as many manuscript versions of early church texts as possible. While some of James's claims about the corruption of Catholic texts are theological, most are philological: in his index of "Bastard Treatises," for instance, James lists categories such as "scarce Latine," and "entitled to Greek authors, being first written in Latin." James's weapon throughout these philological attacks is the Bodleian's vast catalogue of manuscripts; he repeatedly attacks "papists" and "jesuits" by demanding to know if their "Roman copies" can measure up against his set of "very ancient manuscripts," frequently listing how many he has at his disposal to compare.<sup>3</sup> It must have been particularly disappointing for James, then, when Thomas Bodley himself declared his project could "not be reputed for any special validity."<sup>4</sup>

My essay examines the disagreement between James and Bodley about the value of his work--whether the philological discrepancies James identified constituted a devastating critique or a pedantic quibble--in the context of the Bodleian's influence on seventeenth century scholarly practices and early modern manuscript culture. James's endorsement of the brand of textual philology he practiced provided an impetus, I argue, for his push to separate manuscripts from printed books in the Bodleian's collections and to privilege the former by making them more difficult to access and more carefully supervised. Bodley's view of the practice as bad philology, meanwhile, led him to resist the differentiation of manuscript and print texts in the catalogue and the physical library space, preferring a traditional model of intermingling texts. James's eventual victory (due in large part to Bodley's death) led not only to the Bodleian's influential decision to segregate the two types of text, but played a small but important part in the privileging of manuscripts as "primary source" that remains a part of humanities scholarship to this day.

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas James, *A Treatise of the Corruption of Scripture* (London, 1611), 1-9.

<sup>4</sup> *Letters of Sir Thomas Bodley to Thomas James*, G.W. Wheeler, ed. (Oxford University Press, 1926), 198-9.