

**Shakespeare's Shameful Histories**  
**Abstracts**  
**SAA 2020**

“Let Shame Say What It Will: ‘The progress of shame in Hamlet and Henry V  
Mary Adams  
Western Carolina University

“Just what is the point of Ophelia in *Hamlet*?” I have often wondered in annoyance. She seems to suffer pointlessly and die pointlessly. But recent scholarship by writers like Lynn Enterline, John Wesley, and Tanya Pollard has suggested that Ophelia and characters like her have affective roles, inherited from a tradition of popular tragic female protagonists, that help male characters learn to experience feeling. Moreover, scholarship tells us, this experience of feeling (or “distraction” as Jonathan Baldo calls it) was thought to spread like a contagion through other characters, resulting in an upheaval in the community—from protagonist to onlookers to audience—connected to the play. The second-hand (or further) removed experience of female grief, I believe, evokes shame in male characters, not only because men fear the effeminacy of second-hand weeping, not only because they must confront their own helplessness in the face of that grief, but also because of what female suffering tells them about the inferiority of their own emotions. In plays like *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, characters already dealing with a kind of shamed ambivalence involving women are first infected by female feeling and then driven to extinguish, forget, and destroy it. I will explore the way speech or narrative triggers these reactions in male characters and in spectators within and beyond the play. I would like to start with *Hamlet*, a play through which this process has been more thoroughly explored, and then turn to history plays, especially the second tetralogy and *Henry V*--plays that closely preceded *Hamlet* in probable order of composition--where I would suggest process I lay out in *Hamlet* is more covert and less organized but still operating under the surface.

“Shaming Women in the Second Tetralogy”  
Barbara Correll  
Cornell University

Phyllis Rackin and Jean Howard state that in comparison to the First Tetralogy, with notorious women prominently represented, the Second Tetralogy marginalizes the few women who inhabit it: “From a feminist standpoint [sic], one of the most striking feature of the second tetralogy is the restriction of women’s roles.” Clearly, we find no shameless She-wolf of France with Katherine in *Henry V* or the grieving queen in *Richard II*. And it is certainly true that “There are fewer female characters; they have less time on stage and less to say when they get there.” But if we take the affective action of shame and shaming seriously and do not underestimate it, the female characters of the Second Tetralogy—the Duchess of York, that shrill-voiced suppliant in *Richard II*; the beastly Welsh women who mutilate the English dead on the battlefield in *Henry IV*; the linguistically challenged Katherine in *Henry V*—may prove to have more to contribute to readings or performances of these plays. My goal, then, is to reveal how women and shame function in the Second Tetralogy.

## “The End of Communal Shaming in *Henry VI, Part 2*”

Penelope Geng  
Macalester College

In early modern England, shame was concentrated in the “open” or public penance, a ritual of humiliation that combined elements of theater and ecclesiastical, common law, and communal justice. Recently, historians of crime have argued that the English public penance became obsolete in the early nineteenth century due to material circumstances such as depopulation and urbanization. While persuasive, the materialist explanation of the death of the public penance neglects to consider the role of literature—particularly the chronicle histories that were so popular in the 1590s—in rewriting the penance’s symbolic meaning. Using Shakespeare’s *Henry VI, Part 2* as a test case, and referencing Thomas Heywood’s *Edward IV, Part 2* as a supporting example, my paper argues that the history’s sympathetic portrayal of the female penitent challenges the traditional affective response to communal shaming. One of the central questions in law and literature concerns the legal impact of literature: Can an imaginative text alter “legality”? Can a literary movement challenge the legal status quo? In the case of the open penance, I argue that among the many achievements (aesthetic, political, theatrical) of Shakespeare’s celebrated play, it fundamentally changed the hermeneutics of the penance in the popular imagination.

## “*Cymbeline* and Shakespearean Histories of Shame”

Ali Madani  
Brown University

One of the many plots of Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* centers on a wager put to the exiled Posthumus Leonatus to test the chastity of his wife, Imogen. It bears more than a resemblance to Shakespeare’s early-career narrative poem *The Rape of Lucrece*. This virtue-testing narrative, of course, is not unique to Shakespeare or to the early seventeenth century: its outline was lifted from Boccaccio’s fourteenth-century *De Mulieribus Claris*, which was itself adapted from Ovid’s first-century account of Tarquin’s rape of Lucrece in *The Metamorphoses*. Many variations appeared between appearance of these two most recognizable iterations. In this essay, however, I consider this narrative unit in light of the construction of the category of Shakespearean dramatic romance and the seventeenth-century history play. If, as Edward Dowden, the nineteenth-century popularizer of the Shakespearean romance rubric, has claimed, romance nominates the ‘late-Shakespeare’ plays that transcend historical and geographic specificity, what might *Cymbeline* and its plot revolving around shame look like if critics were to utilize the conceptual tools developed in response to the history play? This essay considers the ‘shame’ of *Cymbeline* prior to the First Folio’s categorization of the play as a tragedy and subsequent editors’ re-categorizations as comedy, tragicomedy, and romance. How might grouping the play with Shakespeare’s others that dramatize regnal succession and the history of Britain’s rulers re-orient our understanding of shame’s historical machinations? What might the play’s nominal setting around the birth of Christ offer for our interpretations of the staging of shame in Shakespeare’s history plays?

“I am your majesty’s countryman”: Remembering the Welsh in Shakespeare’s Histories and Netflix’s *The Crown*

Vanessa Rapatz  
Ball State University

Season 3, episode 6 of Netflix’s series *The Crown* titled “Tywysog Cymru” (“Prince of Wales”) centers on Prince Charles’s 1969 investiture as “Prince of Wales.” In an attempt to be “more sensitive, inclusive,” the Prime Minister Harold Wilson suggests that Queen Elizabeth send her son to Wales to learn enough of the language to read his investiture speech in Welsh. This move pulls Charles away from Cambridge where he is thriving as an amateur actor, the one real way, Elizabeth suggests, he can express himself. While there is no evidence that Charles took on Shakespearean roles while at Cambridge, the series’ writers take creative license in framing the episode with Charles playing Richard II and delivering the infamous hollow crown speech of 3.2. The speech as excerpted comes to stand in for Charles’s own sense of alienation and loss of voice. In fact, the real Prince Charles prefers to align himself with Shakespeare’s Hal/Henry V as he suggested, in a BBC documentary that marked his 70<sup>th</sup> birthday, that he would throw off his political meddling once (and if) he becomes king. However, critics such as Sian Cain (the Guardian’s book site editor) have argued that he’s far more akin to Richard II, whose extravagant spending and misrule led to his deposition, the very move that haunts Shakespeare’s tetralogies and their rumination on lineage and legitimacy. *The Crown* episode combines these figures and concerns as we move from speeches that range in sentiment from “hollow crown” to “band of brothers” and back again.

The hollow-crown frame, taken without much context, threatens, like John of Gaunt’s deathbed speech, to be co-opted as a piece of propaganda that flatters a monarch as he reflects on his lack of autonomy and sense of kinship to people with whom his newly invested title aligns him. However, within this frame and at the heart of the episode is Charles’s relationship with his reluctant Welsh tutor Dr. Edward Millward, a professor at Aberystwyth University and a Welsh nationalist. In this seminar paper, I want to attend to the ways the history play bookends—*Richard II* and *Henry V*—are co-opted by Charles and the series’ writers in their depiction of English identity and politics, but I also want to focus more explicitly on the relationship between Charles and his tutor and the ways their dynamic calls up the marginalized histories of the Welsh, especially as depicted in the figure of Fluellen whom the fictionalized Charles seems to have forgotten from his Shakespeare studies. Charles’ ignorance of such important figures becomes a source of shame for the Welsh in this episode, which, much like *Henry V*, emphasizes the importance of native tongues and an English history directly tied to the Welsh state and the desire of that state to be recognized. While *The Crown* might seem a trivial lens through which to analyze Shakespeare’s “shameful histories” the episode’s performance frame, I will argue, allows us to attend to the seminar’s central question about the affect of shame as tied to our explorations of the past.

“My shame so dead, mine honor is new-born”: The Shame-Honor dyad in Shakespeare

M. L. Stapleton  
Purdue University

It might be difficult to imagine a single Shakespeare work that does not engage at least indirectly with shame as a concept or the act of shaming someone—understood as a public,

socially-constructed phenomenon as opposed to simple, private embarrassment, however mortifying. There is good reason to offer this supposition. Only one theatrical creation does not use the term or its derivatives, and even in that instance, the concept exists implicitly in at least one skein of dramatic plotting. Shakespeare's ten English histories as he probably wrote them could not function without shame or would not be themselves without it, as theatregoers and scholars have come to know them. For more spectacular instances, I think of the flyting match between Constance and Eleanor (*King John*); Katherine's surprise visit to the divorce trial to which she was explicitly not invited (*Henry VIII*); the Dauphin's untimely gift of tennis balls to the sovereign who will eventually destroy him (*Henry V*); the forced deposition of an incompetent monarch (*Richard II*) and the perceived illegitimacy of one considered his usurper (*1 Henry IV*). The three episodes of *Henry VI* contain so much of this motif that such thematism might be said to comprise a veritable Walk of Shame through the Wars of the Roses. Since the topic is so pervasive in the canon and I might get off track easily, I'll confine myself to pure Shakespearean lexicality, some of the 549 instances in which "shame" and its derivatives actually occur, with special emphasis on the historical.