

Abstracts for SAA 2021 seminar on “New Directions for Shakespeare and Psychoanalytic Studies”

Andrew Barnaby
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Wondrous Strange: *Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*, and Early-Modern Psychotheology

The larger project of which my seminar contribution is a part is called “Working Through: the Comic Endings of Shakespeare’s Tragedies.” Its core concept is that Shakespeare’s tragedies (messy and unruly as they so often are) are only truly completed in a subsequent comedy. In psychoanalytic terms, I argue, Shakespeare must “work through” the problems not yet resolved in the tragedy: *Romeo and Juliet* completed by *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *Hamlet* by *Twelfth Night*, *Othello* by *Measure for Measure*, *King Lear* by *The Tempest*, and *Macbeth* by *The Winter’s Tale* (that one might seem hard to explain, so I won’t bother trying). For the seminar I will focus on the movement from *Hamlet* to *Twelfth Night* with special focus on the notion of psychotheology as theorized in Eric Santner’s *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life*.

Nicholas Bellinson
St. John’s College, Annapolis

“Yet there is Method in’t”: Hamlet as analysand

From its inception psychoanalysis has taken *Hamlet* as a central case study; major analysts including Freud, Jones, Klein, and Winnicott have offered interpretations of the Prince’s behaviors *qua* neurotic symptoms, illuminating both the character and psychoanalytic theory. This paper reflects on possible sources of Hamlet’s enduring appeal to psychoanalysts – for example, his tantalizing revelations to and concealments from his would-be observers – by considering him playfully as an analysand *avant la lettre*. This line of thought raises difficult interpretive questions about the play – for example, to what extent are Hamlet’s judgments of his fellow characters introjected by them? – and gives us a framework for understanding our own frustration with such questions. At the same time, by considering Hamlet’s ambivalence about possible audiences to his internal drama, we can theorize for psychoanalysis the fantasy of being a Hamlet-like analysand.

David Sterling Brown
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“White Self-Harm: Minding Shakespeare and the Psychology of Racism”

This paper will consider whiteness in relation to at least one of the following core concepts: white self-harm; “herd invisibility; and/or the interdependent view of self. I am particularly interested in identifying and thinking through racialized problems in early modern English studies that need to be reckoned with. Furthermore, I will explore how the white identity, by relying heavily on interconnectivity among white people, is a constrained identity that lives with the perpetual pressure of upholding white ideals and maintaining allegiance to whiteness. Collectively, my observations indicate a great deal about white culture’s conflict with itself, a conflict that greatly undermines the liberal-progressive notion of human race solidarity since whiteness, understood as the standard human identity, is not at peace.

Drew Daniel
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The Gilded Puddle: Shakespeare’s Scatalogs

I draw my title from the name of a chapter in Patricia Gherovici’s monograph “Transgender Psychoanalysis”, “Freud’s scatalogs”; Gherovici’s interest there is the Freudian chain of symbolic substitutions in which “baby”, “penis”, “gold” and “feces” are linked and, in fantasy, regarded as equivalent. It is the basic intuition of this paper that certain images in “Antony and Cleopatra” offer something like a Shakespearean scatological imaginary which is roughly analogous to Freud’s networks of substitution. The “gilded puddle” of horse urine summoned to view by Octavius Caesar in (1.4.63) condenses such a network. I am interested in this fleeting moment of Shakespearean scatology (and others like them) not so much in order to verify a prior and freestanding Freudian intuition but to see the way that hierarchies of valuation are pressurized in this playtext’s frequent images of slime, ditches, graves, and excremental waste, both animal and human. This register is not simply an abjected underlining to the play’s supercharged aesthetic of perfumed winds, liquid pearls and aureate beauty, but is, itself, a significant site of poetic interest and energy. These are not (only) moments of perverse fantasy but also moments of expansion within the poetry’s capacity to imagine pleasure. It is my hope that the passing description of Antony drinking the stale of horses (1.4.63) from “Antony and Cleopatra” will be the moment for a consideration of the relation of abjection, waste, liquidity to ongoing project of racialized imperial masculinity.

Heather Hirschfeld
University of Tennessee

“The Psychoanalytic Study of Thinking on the Early Modern Stage”

In his 1962 essay “The Psychoanalytic Study of Thinking,” Wilfrid Bion proposed that “thinking has to be called into existence to cope with thoughts . . . thinking is a development forced on the psyche by the pressure of thoughts and not the other way round.”¹ Here I consider how the early modern theater might be understood to stage, *avant la lettre*, this specifically psychoanalytic notion of thinking and its central corollary: that the ability to think is a register of the ability to tolerate frustration. I begin by sketching Bion’s theory of thinking and its specifically psychodynamic principles of cognition. I then turn to a series of passages in which early modern playwrights call attention to their characters’ attempts to think. These efforts are heralded by the injunction to “bethink thee,” a now obsolete phrase that ushers in particularly intense and/or reflexive scenes of thinking. Finally, working from Mary Thomas Crane’s insights into the “cognitive subjects” of *Measure for Measure*, I turn to a moment of “bethinking” in act 2 to suggest that the “problem” of this so-called “problem play” can be read as what Bion calls a “disorder of thought.”

Eric S. Mallin
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Edmund, Edgar, Sigmund

King Lear resists psychoanalytic readings. Despite some successful early feminist accounts of the aged King’s infantile wishes and the family romance of sibling rivalry (Kahn, Adelman), the play exceeds any application of classic Freudian dynamics to its primal scenes. The expected configuration of desires that we can read through a psychoanalytic screen dissolves in the peculiar compulsions (which are to be distinguished from *desires*) of the characters. However, there’s an app for that: the idea of perversity. By reading *Lear*’s Edmund through Edgar Allan Poe’s notion of the perverse, we can move beyond constricting paradigms of psychological organization and arrive at a rich, Shakespearean understanding: an appreciation of persons and moments that bear witness to the clockwork sabotage of self-interest as the character understands it.

¹ Wilfrid R. Bion, “The Psycho-Analytic Study of Thinking,” *The Psychoanalytic Quarterly* 82.2 (2103): 301-310, DOI: 10.1002/j.2167-4086.2013.00030.x. This paper was originally published in the *International Journal of Psycho-analysis* 43 (1962): 306-310.

James J. Marino.

Cleveland State University

Civilization and Its Dysfunctions: *Titus Andronicus*

In Act Five of *Titus Andronicus*, Aaron extracts an oath from Lucius that he will not murder Aaron's baby, a demand that is at once absurd, for who would treat perjury as a more serious crime than infanticide, and unsettling, because Lucius Andronicus would. Aaron knows better than to trust his son's life to the play's Romans, whose fidelity to "popish tricks and ceremonies" coexists with their murderous aggression toward their enemies' children and their own. The play's villain is the best father in Shakespeare and its hero the worst father in Shakespeare, making the play's moral code deeply problematic.

Classic psychoanalytic criticism has shied away from *Titus Andronicus*, despite it having one of the only explicit representations of a maternal sex object, a woman troped as sexually attractive because of her motherliness, in Shakespeare's works. The play's pervasive depiction of fatherly violence against children cannot be explained away as merely Oedipal projection. Instead the Laius complex, the neurotic hostility toward one's own children that the Oedipal model was partly designed to repress and disguise, is made all too apparent. The play's Rome is built upon the sacrifice of sons, a symbolic economy of dead children.

More troubling for Freud's model, which focuses on allegedly biological and hence universal instincts and views civilization as disciplining and redirecting those instincts, *Titus Andronicus*'s civilized Romans are violent and mad. (If the Romans are not civilized, no one is; the word has a Latin root.) The allegedly "barbarous Moor" is psychologically sound, standing apart from the Romans' neurosis and putting the lie to Freud's racist misuse of anthropology. Freud insisted on construing non-European cultures as evidence of instinctive, "primitive" drives, not as cultures at all but demonstrations of nature before "civilization" allegedly took hold. Nearly all of Freud's worst ideas are refuted by the figure of Aaron the Moor.

W. Reginald Rampone, Jr.
South Carolina State University

Phallic Privilege in *The Taming of the Shrew*

In the past masculinity was naturalized in literary studies regardless of the historical period or genre from whence the male character emerged. Gradually, issues pertaining to male sexuality, gender, and masculinity became as ideologically significant as female sexuality, gender, and femininity. In *The Taming of the Shrew* the representation of Petruchio's tongue and body and how they are perceived by other characters may now be a matter of serious academic inquiry. As a consequence of this paradigm shift in literary studies, this paper will address the representations of Petruchio's tongue and body. Catherine Belsey famously suggested that the female tongue functioned as a penis for women who wished to express themselves powerfully.

This paper will suggest that Petruchio's tongue functions not only as the penis but also more significantly as the metaphorical phallus as it functions as the apparatus by which Petruchio creates not only order but also control over Katherina and others.

Because of the ideological significance attributed to Petruchio's body and phallicized tongue in *The Taming of the Shrew*, Lacan's psychoanalytic conception of the phallus and penis is extremely useful in a discussion of the representation and sexualization of his tongue and body, especially his genitals and buttocks. As Sean Homer argues in his treatment of Lacan's analysis of the phallus and penis:

For Lacan, the importance of Freud's insight into infantile sexuality was not whether or not girls have a penis and boys fear that theirs will be cut off, but the function of the phallus as a signifier of lack and sexual difference. The phallus in Lacanian theory should not be confused with the male genital organ, although it carries these connotations. The phallus is first and foremost a signifier and in Lacan's system a particularly privileged signifier...

Indeed, it is a particularly privileged signifier, as we will see it inaugurates the process of signification itself. (54)

Consequently, Petruchio's body and his tongue function largely as eroticized objects of both female desire and discomfiture as Petruchio is the true possessor of the Lacanian phallus. Therefore, it is imperative that Petruchio's body must remain clothed in order to maintain his phallicly empowered status while at the same time that his tongue takes on phallic potency in the course of the play.

Gabriel A. Rieger
Concord University

“Crawling between earth and heaven”: Psychoanalysis, Sadomasochism, and Subjectivity
in *Hamlet*

My essay opens by recounting William Camden’s account of the public mutilation of John Stubbes, whose right hand was amputated as a punishment for seditious writing. Camden recounts how “Stubbs, having his right hand cutt off, put off his hat with his left, and sayd with a loud voyce, God save the Queene....” The mutilation of Stubbes speaks to a culture in which the semiotics of status, of elevation and degradation, were ubiquitous, but to a modern audience, Stubbes’ embrace of his own mutilation and degradation, of his own bodily dissolution (*i.e.* the loss of his hand) reads as fundamentally masochistic. Indeed, there is an established critical tradition of reading early modern culture, and especially early modern texts, through the lens of masochism, as well as psychoanalysis more broadly. Historicist critics have traditionally been unreceptive to psychoanalytic theory; the conflict between the two methods being symptomatic of a larger conflict in reading, *i.e.* how is the critic to understand subjectivity in renaissance tragedy? The tragic literature of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century, of which *Hamlet* (arguably the quintessential renaissance text) will be our representative, evinces a clear ethos of what Cynthia Marshall calls “shattering,” and yet this shattering seems not to be an end unto itself. As we shall see, identity dissolution in the tragedy leads inexorably into identity construction, *i.e.* Greenblatt’s notion of “self-fashioning.” This essay, then will undertake a reading of *Hamlet* which

applies both psychoanalytic and Historicist theory in order to examine Hamlet's (and the age's) embrace of dissolution as means of constructing subjectivity, in so doing posit potentially productive new directions for the application both theories.

Adam Rzepka
Montclair State University

“That dim monument”: *Romeo and Juliet's* Cryptonomies

Romeo and Juliet is built around an insistence on morbid and memorial enclosures that binds its internal structure closely to its performance legacy, inspiring in its audiences, as John Channing Briggs has noted, a “compulsion to repeat.” My paper will argue that this compulsion draws its force from a topological fantasy in which the spaces of the crypt and the theater are conjoined as sites of living death and unfinished mourning. In *Romeo and Juliet*, passionate desire is bound not just to death but to a living death, from Romeo “already dead” in his unrequited love for Rosaline through Juliet's vivid, overpowering visions of being buried or entombed alive. In this sense, each performance of the play is part of a work of endless mourning, both for its protagonists and for the audience, which is reminded by the Prologue of the fate that most playgoers already know the lovers will meet (and have met, and will continue to meet).

I'm exhuming parts of this analysis from previous work in order to give it an explicitly psychoanalytic framework: I intend to measure *Romeo and Juliet's* cryptic enclosures against a theoretical legacy that extends from Freud's study of mourning and melancholia through Maria Torok and Nicholas Abraham's work on the cryptonomic dimension of melancholy to Derrida's skeptical preface to that work. This series of psychoanalytic critiques and counter-critiques performs its own kind of repetition compulsion, circulating, like the particular reanimations the play invites, around the fundamental fantasy of encryption.

Jessica Tooker
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Empathizing with Coriolanus

Coriolanus is known within the Shakespearean corpus for being boorish, irascible, unlikable, rough and a harbinger of death on the battlefield. However, despite these off-putting qualities, Rome's greatest war hero inarguably stimulates the empathy of audiences onstage and off by movingly exposing his humanity to its members. Deeply impacted by what Silvan Tomkins calls the "nuclear script and scenes" of an individual life—pivotal directives for responding to the plotting of one's existence—Coriolanus demonstrates his adherence to these controlling psychoanalytic constructs turned key theatrical mechanisms as they inexorably shape his identity, interactions with others, and his famously complex relationship to his mother, Volumnia. This paper argues that the audience's empathy for the protagonist is stimulated by its psychic involvement with Coriolanus's navigation of the affective, emotional and bodily ramifications of the nuclear script and scenes which contour his life, warrior status, and tragic existence as a man who is oftentimes challenged to deny his humanity in order to concretize himself as a glittering son of Mars.