

“Perspective, Error, and *Poiesis* in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*”

Amanda Atkinson (Southern Methodist University)

This paper anatomizes the construction and effects of perspective in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in order to illuminate the dynamics through which limited perspective produces both error and *poiesis*. I understand the play as an assemblage of perspectives, each of which contains elements of truth unavailable to the others. The interstices between perspectives are spaces of ambiguity and uncertainty, compelling characters to supplement visual evidence with imaginative tissue, weaving them into coherent and seemingly truthful narratives. I define this process as both error and *poiesis* - an act of creation through which new images, ideas, and knowledge are constructed. By depicting an ecology of interrelated perspectives, Shakespeare illuminates the means through which these acts of *poiesis* and error are combined, resulting in endless metamorphosis and regeneration.

In highlighting the affinity between error and *poiesis*, I suggest that Shakespeare reinterprets a long history of poetic theory that understood poetry and rhetoric as a delicate balance between invention and observing formal conventions as well as the principles of balance, harmony, and order in all types of writing. The ancient Greeks understood artistic *poiesis* as making, but also as *imitatio*. This understanding of *poiesis* informed Elizabethan poetic theories developed by Sidney, Puttenham, and others. It also underscored the moral and spiritual critiques of poetry and the theater by those who cited poetry’s capacity for invention as central to its alluring deceptions. But while Plato and the social critics of the sixteenth century underscored the moral and spiritual errors of poetry and the theater, rarely, if ever, did critics or literary theorists highlight the links between *poiesis* and intellectual error. In doing so, Shakespeare offers a revised theory of poetic making that expresses the vicissitudes of aesthetic – and especially dramatic creation – in the late sixteenth century.

“*Hamlet*, Hebb, Aeneas: Shakespeare’s Compulsive Patterns”

Craig Dionne (Eastern Michigan University)

What were Shakespeare’s compulsive habits as a writer? It seems an absurd question because of the way the Renaissance taught students through *imitatio*, an institutionally enshrined emphasis on compulsive copying of the masters. (In one way Renaissance pedagogy could be seen as the longest longitudinal study of compulsive repetition). I want to consider the idea of repetition in Shakespeare as it relates to invention and thematic patterns but in the context of the “new unconscious” which emphasizes automaticity, the priming of involuntary action and implicit memory. I am interested in looking at theories of embedded cognition and theories of neuronal plasticity, including Donald Hebb’s theory of neuronal fusion—“what fires together wires together”—to discuss Shakespeare’s involuntary tics as a writer. In this paper, I discuss his use of hendiadys as a form of cognitive compression, and how recursion and compulsion work in his sonnets to expose his trust in implicit cognition. Then I turn to *Hamlet* and his fascination with Aeneas’ tale to Dido to explore how the pedagogical unconscious works in scenes of rhetorical compulsion. *Hamlet* is taken by Priam’s murder because it models a return to thoughtless action. Finally, in his advice to Gertrude in the closet scene we see him return to rhetorical theories of mimesis and implicit memory. *Hamlet*’s own precarious duties to the shreds and patches of compendium learning shape his arrested fealties as a student avenger.

Reconstruction, Invention, and Original Practices

Alexander Paulsson Lash (National Taiwan University)

This paper will ask what it is that is invented when early modern scripts are performed. To think about this question, I will briefly consider two scripts. One of them is well known to members of the SAA: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. At the moment the play was made available as a text for reading—as was the case with most plays at the time—readers were immediately reminded of the performances (“sundry times publicly acted”) that preceded the text’s appearance in the marketplace. The real invention, it would appear, was the play that was enacted on stages like that at the Theatre, and the entire field of early modern theater history is driven, to some extent, by the impossible desire to have access to that event—a desire which has inspired the movement to perform with “original practices” in theaters like the reconstructed Globe in London. A similar desire has begun to appear among early modern historians of science and technology, who have sought out texts that capture the processes—the performances, we might say—of inventing new knowledge. For a striking example, this paper will turn to a contemporaneous script that has been performed significantly less often than *Midsummer*: a 340-page manuscript, called on its spine *Choses Diverses*, and referred to by its cataloging number at the Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Ms. Fr. 640. Probably produced over the course of the 1580s in Toulouse, this is a collection of recipes for performing a variety of artisanal techniques, including making pigments and dyes, assembling swords and rapiers, and above all for life-casting plants and small animals. All the recipes in the collection have been reconstructed through the Making and Knowing Project at Columbia University. The writings that have grown out of this project have been especially attentive to the nature of invention in early modern craft practices. Invention appears here less as a singular event, where a technique or object arrives at its perfect state, and rather as a process of repeatedly testing, failing, and testing again.

Puritans, Plagiarists, and the Elizabethan Invention of Consensus

Victor Lenthe (Bilkent University)

My paper examines the Elizabethan invention of a political fiction: consensus. It is related to my current book project, which traces writers’ attempts to invent a vocabulary to describe this manifestly counterfactual idea. (Our modern word “consensus” does not enter the English language until later.) A small part of my story is a 1583 tract by the Puritan William Stoughton that appropriates the Latin word *consensus* in order to designate a collective type of agreement that was important to Puritan ideas about Church government. As I show in previously published work, Stoughton’s use of the Latin word *consensus* is inventive in the principle modern sense of the word invention. That is, since *consensus* in 1583 was simply the Latin word for consent or agreement, stretching its meaning to refer to a collective type of agreement was a creative use of language. That much I have already published. But in my SAA paper, I want to delve more deeply into what it means to say that an Elizabethan Puritan was inventing a political concept. As is well known, the early modern language arts used invention paradoxically to refer both to the process of making new material and to the process of finding material in authorized sources such as the Bible, Homer, or—in Stoughton’s case—canon law. By examining the canon law sources Stoughton cites in defining his novel idea of *consensus*, I will show that he presents himself as finding the concept in canon law rather than as making something new; that this self-presentation is built on a blatant misrepresentation of his sources; and that even opponents taking him to task for a host of other intellectual errors and academic transgressions were apparently not bothered by this act of plagiarism. These findings track somewhat on Roland Greene’s contention that English Renaissance culture did not distinguish clearly between invention as making and invention as finding. Yet Stoughton has unique importance as a concrete illustration of how this counterintuitive principle of Renaissance poetics

informed also aspects of Renaissance culture beyond the type of belletristic writing we ordinarily call poetry.

Cymbeline, or Hindsight

Richard Preiss (University of Utah)

This essay examines *Cymbeline* within the context of a larger thesis: that the genre we call Shakespearean “romance” arises out of, thematizes, and seeks to embody the cumulative, circular mnemonic effects of repertory reperformance that were a basic yet otherwise undocumented condition of early modern theatrical experience. In *Cymbeline*, that project is realized as the construction of a kind of extreme space-time curvature, in which events in some sense intersect with themselves: the play incessantly gets caught in temporal loops and reversals, staging actions or exchanges, undoing them, and then almost immediately re-staging them. The essay goes on to consider how this bizarre, unclassifiable dramatic assemblage of instant replays, recapitulations, afterimages, uncanny returns, and second chances (both moral and phenomenological) maps out something fundamental about the aesthetic theory that the romances seem concerned to develop.

“Hys practized knack”: Some notes on everyday method and comic technique

Jessica Rosenberg (University of Miami)

This paper examines minor epistemic forms (like the trick, knack, recipe, and device) in early modern English texts, asking whether it is possible to talk about a low-brow, or pragmatic, theory of method across these examples. Focusing especially on dynamics of perception, valuation, and classification, I consider these small, informal units of skilled action as both useful forms and as *mataeotechnia*, or vain art, across examples from drama (mostly comedy) and vernacular handbooks. In part, the paper aims to ask where Sianne Ngai’s recent theorization of the gimmick offers a useful conceptual tool for early modern texts, and where these earlier examples depart from the gimmick’s distinctly modern form. The core of the paper asks what it is that makes a trick or device legible as a unit of action or iterable as an acquirable skill. In the context of comedy, the perception of form is a knotty but generative one: uses of “trick” and “device” in this period fall at the boundary of product and procedure, both artifact and action. A question that I’ll do my best to answer: What exactly is in Sir Toby Belch’s nose when he “smell(s) a device”?

Invention and Revenge

Emily Shortslef (University of Kentucky)

Invention, in several senses of the term—the faculty and act of devising, the device or scheme both discovered and created through those processes—is integral to early modern revenge tragedy. From Titus Andronicus, who gets revenge on Tamora and her sons by “overreach[ing] them in their own devices,” to The Spanish Tragedy’s play-within-a-play, whose bloody conclusion Hieronimo promises “Shall prove the invention, and all was good,” to Hamlet’s conception of “The Mousetrap” (“about, my brains! / Hum, I have heard / That guilty creatures sitting at a play / Have by the very cunning of the scene / Been struck so to the soul that presently / They have proclaimed their malefactions”), revengers are depicted as driven, impassioned inventors who take pleasure and pride in their wits and their clever devices, as well as the ends to which they are put. (A pride parodied in the last moments of The Revenger’s Tragedy when Vindice gives himself away by boasting of his craftiness: “We may be bold to speak it now:

/ 'Twas somewhat witty carried though we say it"). My paper will explore the extent to which the genre of revenge tragedy, with its self-reflective scenes of invention, and its persistent linking of invention and plotting, refracts particular early modern fantasies of creativity, wit, and control. My tentative claim is that in conceptualizing and representing revenge as fundamentally inventive, revenge tragedies reveal a vengeful dimension of invention.

Crafting the Fleshly Text

Whitney Sperrazza (Rochester Institute of Technology)

My seminar paper will pair Aemilia Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum* (1611) with Andreas Vesalius's *De Humani Corporis Fabrica* (1543) in order to explore how Lanyer invents a somatic poetics that is distinctly woman-centric. "Somatic poetics," a concept I'm still working to theorize fully for my book project, refers to poetry that is simultaneously informed by embodied experience and imbued with formal cues that evoke/prompt bodily action as part of the reading process. Extending the poetics of incarnation (a concept wielded by Cristina Maria Cervone and Femke Molekamp) so central to devotional lyric in early modern England, Lanyer draws on the flesh-to-word project of early anatomists to structure her text as a vulnerable and permeable body.

In this paper, I will focus on several of Lanyer's prefaces and the famous frontispiece to Vesalius's *Fabrica*. Both poet and anatomist use their prefatory material to enact scenes of intimacy and knowledge, framed in particularly gendered terms. In fact, one might go so far as to say that Vesalius invents a particular kind of paratextual argument that Lanyer then retools. Vesalius's frontispiece puts women's reproductive bodies at the center of early modern anatomical study. Lanyer's prefaces situate women readers (and, particularly, their status as mothers and reproductive beings) as privileged listeners and experiencers of her devotional project. Reading these prefatory materials together, I will argue, reveals how central both women's bodies and women writers were to early modern knowledge making.

Invented Bodies: Tableaux Vivant in Seventeenth-Century Pageantry

Scott A. Trudell (University of Maryland)

A good invention fills a niche—that is, activates or affords possibilities for which there is existing cultural desire. We need not exclude human bodies from serving in this role, especially when—as was the case for early modern English children—those bodies are strongly associated with instrumental, artificial, and even nonhuman activity. This paper focuses on the invention of tableaux vivant populated by child performers in seventeenth-century English coronation entries and Lord Mayor's Shows. Derived in part from conventions surrounding *putti* in Renaissance visual art, these elaborate "devices" forming mythological scenes or architectural marvels were literally constructed out of children—ambiguously inhuman bodies ensconced within triumphal arches and scaffolded upon pageant floats. Focusing on the 1604 coronation entry for King James in particular, and connecting its use of tableaux vivant to other texts (plays, pamphlets, Lord Mayor's Shows) in which Thomas Dekker had a hand, my interest is in the desire to render children into grandiose iconographical spectacle, on the one hand, and the performative frictions and refusals that attend this process, on the other.

Invention's Defects: Mapping Movement in John Norden's Tables of England
Laura Williamson Ambrose (Saint Mary's College)

For this paper, I'd like to explore the limits of invention. My lenses are travel cartography and the proliferation of (sometimes seemingly incongruous) systems of spatial knowledge that emerged in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. Standing at the crossroads of these systems, literally and figuratively, was John Norden, the estate surveyor, map maker, chorographer, and sometimes devotional writer. From the perspective of this seminar, though, we might also add "inventor" to his list of attributes since, with the publication of Norden's book *England An Intended Guyde, for English Travailers* (1625), he offered readers no fewer than three "inventions": a genre (no guide of its kind had previously been printed); to quote Wendy, a "concept instrumentalized" (mileage tables organized by county); and even a word, "dimensuration" (because apparently "measurement" just didn't cut it). Interestingly, each page of the guide announces both the table's inventiveness and its defects. The latter, he suggests, should be overlooked since the tables themselves remain imminently "usefull and necessarie." The utility of these tables, I would suggest, extends beyond Norden's hope for readerly tolerance. His investment in exploring the edges of invention--the limits of each spatial system rather than their certainty--remind us of what Henry Turner and Jess Edwards have pointed out: that mathematics, geography, and other spatial arts were interpretive systems, radically rhetorical, ambivalent, and even flexible. Norden's defects are less failures than windows into interpretative possibility--an insight that I would argue has significant implications for how we understand the history of cartography more broadly.