

SAA Seminar 35 – Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile Abstracts

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Othello and the Stitching of Exile

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“Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile”

“Sure there’s some wonder in this handkerchief;
I am most unhappy in the loss of it.”
Othello, 3.4.100-101

By the end 3.3. of *Othello*, Iago has planted the idea in Othello’s mind that Desdemona has been unfaithful, and this threat of infidelity becomes especially acute when Iago claims he has seen Cassio with Othello’s handkerchief. Indeed, he has seen him “wipe his beard” (3.3.439) with it, a gross lie that catapults Othello into a rage so intense he can’t speak coherently. Othello tests Desdemona in the next scene to see if she still has the handkerchief, and when she cannot produce it, he elaborates upon the object’s extraordinary history, from the “Egyptian” (3.4.56) who gave it to his mother to “subdue” (3.4.59) his father, to his mother’s dying wish that Othello gift the handkerchief to his wife, to the final details about the item’s construction, including “hallowed” (3.4.73) silkworms and dye from “mummy” (3.4.74). Othello’s speech effectively communicates to Desdemona the irreplaceability of this love token and centers the object’s (and by extension Othello’s) north African origins. It materializes Othello’s past and the home he left behind to become commander of the Venetian army and “the Moor of Venice.”

In order to help students connect with the complex and shifting symbolism of this handkerchief, I ask them to imagine they had a family heirloom handkerchief akin to the one Othello gave Desdemona as a “first remembrance” (3.3.291). After they have imagined their heirloom and sketched its design, I teach them the basics of embroidery, and they stitch their vision, bringing their imagined history into material reality.

Because I teach at a Jewish day school, many students respond to this prompt with intergenerational histories of exile. We read *Othello* as an immigrant story but, interestingly, the handkerchief and its connection to Othello’s former homeland (amongst other things) provides a pathway for Jewish students in my classroom to meditate on their personal relationship to exile as students living in diaspora but who, mostly, would never use the word “exile” to describe themselves. Through the reflective exercise of stitching their heirloom handkerchiefs, students engage in a process of recovering exilic experience.

Annotated Bibliography

Morrison, Toni. “The Foreigner’s Home” in *The Source of Self-Regard: Selected Essays, Speeches, and Meditations*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2019. pp. 5-13.

Morrison's essay grapples with questions of belonging in an increasingly globalized world. She asks: "To what do we pay the greatest allegiance? Family, language group, culture, country, gender? Religion, race? And if none of these matter, are we urbane, cosmopolitan, or simply lonely? In other words, how do we decide where we belong? What convinces us that we do? Or put another way, what is the matter with foreignness?" (8). Morrison reckons with these questions through a reading of Camara Laye's novel *Le Regard du Roi* (*The Radiance of the King*), specifically considering literary tropes of Africa and how Laye's novel responds to those tropes. To frame this reading, Morrison writes "African and African American writers are not alone in coming to terms with these problems [of belonging], but they do have a long and singular history in confronting them. Of not being at home in one's homeland; of being exiled in the place one belongs" (8).

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Abstract

Malcolm's Exile in *Macbeth* and the "Crescentia" Legend

The traditional narrative known to folktale scholars as "Crescentia" (ATU 712)¹ functions as an intertext for the events following Duncan's murder in *Macbeth* that lead to Malcolm and Donalbain's exile. "Crescentia" is widely attested during the Middle Ages, and it circulated in both literary and oral forms into the twentieth century. It is itself a tale of exile. The heroine—whom I will call Crescentia although she goes by many names—takes refuge in a home in which she cares for her host's child. A villain murders the child and leaves the bloody dagger beside the sleeping heroine, smearing her with blood in order to frame her. The villain then threatens her with death, but her host, the dead child's father, instead merely sends her away. The parallel with *Macbeth* is clear up to a point: the Macbeths kill Duncan and place the bloody daggers with the king's drugged grooms in order to frame them. The villain Macbeth, however, succeeds in murdering the framed men, although it is clear Macduff would have prevented their deaths as the host in "Crescentia" prevents the framed heroine's death. Malcolm and Donalbain, not the grooms, are the ones who flee into exile. Crescentia eventually finds refuge in a land where she is able to heal the sick through prayer and laying on of hands. This may well have suggested (to Shakespeare or his audience or both) Edward the Confessor's power to heal the King's Evil as discussed in 4.3, the long scene in which Macduff visits Malcolm in England. Crescentia finally reveals the identity of the true murderer and redresses wrongs, as Malcolm sets the kingdom to rights at the tragedy's end.

The Macbeths' plan to frame the grooms is exceptionally silly, and varies from the source narrative in Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The stratagem depends on the belief that anyone would stab the king in his bed, then lie down to sleep in that very chamber clutching the murder weapons and covered in royal blood. In "Crescentia," in fact, the stratagem does not work. In a few versions, the heroine points out the imbecility of such a plan. In most versions, even the murdered child's grieving parents cannot believe in Crescentia's guilt and ask her to leave only because the sight of her will remind them of their loss. When the Macbeths first articulate their intention to frame the grooms, an audience familiar with "Crescentia" might suspect that the naïve gambit will fail. When Macbeth does manage to kill the innocent men and suspicion lights on Malcolm and Donalbain, the play picks up the thread of "Crescentia" it seemed to have dropped. Malcolm goes into exile in the land of a holy healer and in turn heals sick Scotland. The audience ultimately sees the promise of the folktale fulfilled. The play's variance from "Crescentia" emphasizes the wrongness (that is, the difference from traditional narrative) of Macbeth's initial success in framing first the grooms and then the princes, and the rightness (the accordance with traditional narrative) of Malcolm's victory and succession as king.

Annotated bibliography entry

¹ In the standard reference work, *The Types of International Folktales*, each tale type is designated with the prefix ATU and a number.

Burnham, Douglas. "Language, Time, and Politics in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*." *Displaced Persons: Conditions of Exile in European Culture*. Ed. Sharon Ouditt. Burlington: Ashgate, 2002. 21-32.

"who is the true exile in *Macbeth*? Certainly the play includes accounts of Malcolm, his brother, Macduff, Banquo's son, and others all fleeing Scotland. But the real exile is Macbeth, precisely because...he is never 'at home' with his actions, with his rule, or with himself." (24-25)

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SAA SEMINAR: 2022
Staging Exile

Of Ovid and Goats

Ben Jonson's *Poetaster* and Shakespeare's *As You Like It* were written, by most critical estimates, within twelve months of each other, probably in late 1599 or in 1600. One of the curious connections between these two plays is that they both make use of Ovid as a historical personage, rather than merely mining his work for narrative material or seeking to engraft the poetic spirit of Ovid into contemporary literature. In Shakespeare's case, this moment marks a turn from Ovid as poetic and stylistic *paradigma*—the mode of Ovidianism that shaped his works of the 1590s—to a different brand of Ovidianism that sees Ovid as an actual, particular human being who suffered the miseries of exile. This shift in his thinking about Ovid in turn marks the beginning of a preoccupation with the experience of exile—of being a “displaced person,” of learning what it means to be separated from homeland and loved ones—that comes to permeate Shakespeare's late plays. In my paper I would like to focus on this moment of transformation in Shakespeare's idea of Ovid by looking at how Jonson's *Poetaster* represents the exile of Ovid as “based on a true story” but ultimately lapses into melodrama. What Shakespeare does with Ovid in *As You Like It* is more complex. With a brief exchange of witticisms about Ovid and goats between Touchstone and Jacques, Shakespeare manages to make a joke while simultaneously invoking a reaction in the audience that is more profound: is it genuine *pathos*? Is it ersatz tragedy? or is it just a clever quip? This essay will examine these competing representations of Ovid's exile while trying to bring into sharp relief how Ovid among the goats may initiate transformative moment in the Shakespearean imagination. At least in terms of how he imagines Ovid.

Bibliography:

Claassen, Jo-Marie. *Displaced Persons: The Literature of Exile from Cicero to Boethius*. U. of Wisconsin P, 1999.

Kingsley-Smith, Jane. *Shakespeare's Drama of Exile*. Palgrave, 2003.

Picone, Michelangelo. “Ovid and the *Exul Inmeritus*.” In *Dante for a New Millennium*. Fordham UP, 2003. (389-407).

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SAA 2022

Seminar: Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile

Abstract (200-300 words)

Histories Remembered: A Diasporic *Richard II* at Shakespeare's Globe

In 2016, long-simmering British Euroscepticism mobilized a disaffected “left behind” demographic and capitalized on the 2015 refugee crisis to achieve a successful referendum vote to exit the European Union. Infamously catering to fears that uncontrolled numbers of non-white refugees would swamp Britain, the Vote Leave campaign tapped into atavistic nationalism’s nostalgia for imperial greatness and imagined ethnic homogeneity. In so doing, the Vote Leave campaign strategy nursed xenophobia targeting not just the outsider and stranger but also black and brown diasporic citizens already calling the sceptred isle home. Three years later, Shakespeare’s Globe Theatre staged a production of *Richard II* coinciding with the originally scheduled date for the United Kingdom’s departure from the European Union (March 2019). Crafted in light of that deadline, the Globe’s *Richard II* modeled an inclusive and interrogative form of Shakespearean history-making attentive to the identities comprising twenty-first-century Britain. By casting diasporic women from the former British Empire, co-directors Adjoa Andoh and Lynette Linton excavated and centralized complex and interdependent narratives constituting an often-forgotten part of the nation’s historical continuum. Just as the diverse group of actors bore their personal histories onto the stage, so the costuming, props, and musical instruments (all originating from the many lands occupied and exploited by Great Britain) made the colonial-imperial history appear as a palimpsest legible underneath, through, and over the medieval Wars of the Roses. Universalizing so as not to diminish the particular, the production invited the audience to abstract out of its historiography the trans-historical strategies of power and nation-building dramatized by *Richard II* and, importantly, to reckon with the specific iterations of those strategies throughout Britain’s colonial-imperial rule. Andoh and Linton’s production deployed the nation-defining historiography of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* to remember the colonial legacy and to insist on the postcolonial exile’s right to call Britain “home.”

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SAA 2022
Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile

ABSTRACT

“These words are not mine”: Bravura Theatre’s Multilingual *Hamlet* and the Myth of Canadian Multiculturalism

This paper takes as its subject the 2015 adaptation of *Hamlet* produced in Winnipeg, Canada, by the independent theatre company Bravura Theatre. Conceived by and starring the Brazilian-born Canadian actor Rodrigo Beilfuss, Bravura’s *Hamlet* reimagines the play as a multilingual, multicultural text, a patchwork of English, Portuguese, French, Italian, and Korean. Reading the production within the contexts of the Canadian government’s ostensible espousal of multiculturalism and of its history of forced assimilation of its Indigenous, Francophone, and immigrant populations, the paper argues that Beilfuss appropriates *Hamlet* as the vehicle for a semi-autobiographical portrait of linguistic and cultural loss bound inextricably to the immigrant experience in Canada. Tying its linguistic variety to marginalized identities, the production proposes, I argue, a doomed utopian fragmentation as a rebuke to Canada’s self-congratulatory myth of its multicultural national identity.

Readings:

All of *Borrowers and Lenders* 3.1 (2007): “Canadian Shakespeares,” but especially:
Drouin, Jennifer, “Nationalizing Shakespeare in Québec: Theorizing Post-/Neo-
/Colonial Adaptation.”

<https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/borrowers/article/view/2267/2219>

Moore, Don, “Re-imagining Ethics, Rethinking Rights, and Canadian Adaptations of Shakespeare: Daniel David Moses’s *Brébeuf’s Ghost* and the Specters of the Human.”

<https://openjournals.libs.uga.edu/borrowers/article/view/2266/2217>

Makaryk, Irena. "Introduction." Irena Makaryk and Diana Brydon. *Shakespeare in Canada: A World Elsewhere?* University of Toronto Press, 2002. 3-41.

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Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile

Chiseling darkness, writing in light: Caliban as Moses

Although Prospero is the literal exile in *The Tempest*, Caliban becomes a figurative exile. He is not physically forced from the geospatial location of the island, but he is spiritually, linguistically, and emotionally severed from the island in ways that make him feel like he is no longer at home. As a paradoxical exile in his own island homeland, Caliban became useful later in literary history; Caribbean authors appropriated him for their own means to describe modern Afro-Caribbean identity. In particular, Kamau Brathwaite (1930-2020) re-imagines Caliban over several poems: “Caliban” from *The Arrivants* (1973) and “Letter SycoraX” from *Middle Passages* (1993). I will show how Brathwaite uses Caliban to rewrite the biblical exodus story in a metaphorical way, focusing on finding a linguistic promised land rather than a geospatial one.

In defining the idea of linguistic exile/homecoming, I will build on the work of Edward Said in *After the Last Sky*. He argues—taking Palestinian writing as his case-in-point—that the literature of exile is marked by certain elements of style such as fragments, dislocations, self-interruptions, etc. He sees these stylistic markers as informed by and reflections of the psychological-cultural experience of exile. I will consider how Shakespeare’s own character anticipates this “style of exile,” which is part of the reason that he becomes such a fruitful object of study for Brathwaite. Brathwaite’s version of the character, however, innovates the idea of a “style of exile” to consider how it can also become a marker of a hopeful future homecoming in addition to a marker of a tragic experience of exile. Through the character of Caliban in “Letter SycoraX,” Brathwaite writes in what he calls a “nation language,” which is a term that he prefers over dialect. He aims to capture the sounds of English as it is spoken (but not written) in the Anglophone islands of the Caribbean. The choice to write in nation language legitimizes it as something worthy of being written, and it helps to turn the figure of the exile (Caliban) into a figure of a cultural leader (Moses or Aaron) who will lead people out of exile to a new linguistic home.

Annotated bibliography:

Brown, Stewart. “‘Writin in Light’: Orality-thru-Typography, Kamau Brathwaite's Sycorax Video Style.” *The Pressures of the Text: Orality, Texts, and the Telling of Tales*, ed. Brown. Centre of African Studies, University of Birmingham, 1995, pp. 125-136.

Brown interviews Brathwaite and establishes the term “nation language.” He shows how the speaker of Caliban in the poem, “Letter SycoraX” uses a computer’s word processor to translate the oral/aural experience of speaking/hearing nation language into the visual experience of reading. Brathwaite calls this translation between the visual/oral the Sycorax Video Style. He relies heavily on fragmentation, disruptions, enjambments, and “broken” styles.

Said, Edward W. "States." *After the Last Sky: Palestinian Lives*. Columbia University Press, 1999, pp. 11-49.

Said considers what it means to be in states of exile, including how that manifests in writing: "Since our history is forbidden, narratives are rare; the story of origins, of home, of nation is underground. When it appears it is broken, often wayward and meandering in the extreme, always coded, usually in outrageous forms... scattered, discontinuous, marked by artificial and imposed arrangements of interrupted or confined space, by dislocations and unsynchronized rhythms of disturbed time" (20). Said writes specifically about Palestinian people, but we might consider if his ideas could extend to other people writing from exile.

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“The world to me is but a ceaseless storm”: *Pericles*, *The Porpoise* and exile as a site of resistance.

Pericles stages exile as an escape from uncovered secrets when the protagonist solves the riddle of the unnamed princess and her father’s sexual abuse. The plot device allows for the titular character to travel around the Mediterranean, involved in various adventures until his nemesis (and the princess) mysteriously die. Exile in the play appears temporary and gives Pericles much needed time and space after his unfortunate exposure of the King’s secret.

Mark Haddon’s novel *The Porpoise* repurposes exile in several ways: the main character Darius, is forced onto a boat in the English Channel, the princess character is kept prisoner by her father, isolated by both his wealth as well as his abuse. Exile becomes a site of resistance which circulates through the novel and connects it to the imagery of the Mediterranean as a focal point for our contemporary thoughts on migration and asylum.

I’d like to examine exile as this area in which we are both agents and victims of what Suparna Roychoudhury calls “perturbations” (2015). Haddon’s characters move through different versions of this state and for different reasons, not all of them negative. As Shakespeare does in *Pericles*, Haddon presents exile as a trope for understanding the other as well as ourselves.

Haddon, Mark. *The Porpoise: A Novel*, 2019. Print.

Roychoudhury, Suparna. “Mental Tempests, Seas of Trouble: The Perturbations of Shakespeare’s *Pericles*.” *ELH*, vol. 82, no. 4, 2015, pp. 1013–1039.

The article connects motifs of storms and the sea with Shakespeare and his contemporaries’ views of suffering via internal and external forces.

Abstract

Tonhi Lee

A World Elsewhere?

The Non-Representation of Migration in *Othello*

Critical studies of *Othello* that address the play's engagement with the phenomenon of migration tend to focus on the Othello's liminal position as the "Moor of Venice." In so doing, they emphasize one subset of human migration, namely, immigration, to the effect that the interpretive question invariably revolves around whether the migrant-hero is assimilated or expelled from the social body from which he finds himself estranged. What has not been considered is the potential of migration as a form of utopian practice: how migration is undertaken when it becomes possible/necessary to imagine a future beyond a particular society. Such is the case in *Coriolanus* whose titular character announces that "there is a world elsewhere." But this possibility of a world elsewhere is suppressed in *Othello*. While Othello's wide-ranging action is retroactively recounted through narration, the process of migration itself is not represented as a form of dramatic action in its own right. Instead, the play comes close to conforming to the neoclassical principle of unity, with its action confined first to Venice, and then, to the island of Cyprus. Meanwhile, the rest of the world recedes from our attention, creating a sense of claustrophobia and the illusion that there is no way escape from the imprisonment of patriarchal domesticity.

As a domestic tragedy (and thus, a precursor to the bourgeois domestic novel), *Othello* depends on the non-representation of migration for its tragic effect: it suppresses the emerging reality of migration within a neo-classical (or proto-realistic) dramaturgical paradigm, which affects a certain "imprisonment of the eyes" within a bounded space-time—enough to prompt critical debates about its supposed "double time." In this, I suggest, play constitutes not only Shakespeare's closest approximation to an Aristotelian tragedy, but a tragedy of Aristotelianism.

Bibliographical Entries

Jean E. Howard, "Objects and the Displaced Subject: Shakespeare's *Othello* and Salih's *Season of Migration to the North*," *The Shakespearean International Yearbook* (Routledge, 2017), 217-233.

Peter Erickson, "Race words in *Othello*," *Shakespeare and Immigration* (Routledge, 2016), 169-186.

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Working Title: “The Prodigal Heir”

Shakespeare’s dissolute Prince Hal – the dynamic central figure throughout much of the *Henriad*’s major tetralogy – is the most enduring of the many “prodigal sons” that populated the stage throughout the Elizabethan era. The controversial prodigals were an expansive archetype, but as Michelle Dowd has argued, in aggregate they represented a growing preoccupation with the process of self-actualization, or what Stephen Greenblatt has famously called “fashioning.” Though the prodigal was often conceptualized as a disruptive figure – the profligate heir who throws his inheritance into jeopardy – in this project I investigate the ways in which Shakespeare examines how a figure may also be “tamed,” his anarchic energies intercepted and redirected into reification of the social order.

In *1 Henry IV*, I contend that Prince Hal integrates (and hence contains) prodigality as an essential element in the realization of his royal inheritance. It is, after all, important to remember that Hal is not merely a man. As the Elizabethan reader would know quite well, he is to become King Henry V, and Tudor theories of kingship posited the ruler as not merely a material being, but also as manifest avatar of the kingdom itself. Hence, we must invoke this conceptual framework to fully understand the implications of the royal Hal as a prodigal son. In doing so, I hope to contend that as an actualizing king, Hal can – indeed, must – remake not only himself, but also the England (and the subjects) that he rules.

Annotated Bibliography

Dowd, Michelle. "A Gentleman Must Wander: Inheritance, Travel, and the Prodigal Son on the Jacobean Stage." *Renaissance Drama*, vol. 42, no. 1, pp. 113-137.

Jack, Alison. "The Prodigal Son and Shakespeare." *The Prodigal Son in English and American Literature*, Oxford UP, 2019, pp 27-36.

Tromly, Fred B. "'Deep Defiance' and the Rebel Prince." *Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised*, University of Toronto Press, 2010, pp. 93-125.

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"A Gentleman Must Wander" (Dowd)

Dowd examines the complicated nexus of travel, actualization, and inheritance in the Elizabethan imagination. According to Dowd, travel was simultaneously figured as both an important rite of passage and a highly destabilizing force that threatened a precarious peace that had only recently been won upon Elizabeth's succession. This article also appears in Dowd's *Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage*, which incorporates a great deal of information on the laws, norms, and expectations surrounding inheritance in different social classes – including young royalty – that I have found indispensable to my project.

Fathers and Sons in Shakespeare: The Debt Never Promised (Tromly)

In this comprehensive overview, Tromly considers father-son dynamics as they manifest across class, family, and context in Shakespearean drama. Of particular interest is Tromly's examination of Prince Hal and his function in the imagined world of *1 Henry IV*.

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SAA 2022
Shakespeare and the Staging of Exile
Seminar Abstract

Hamlet and the Subject of History

Hamlet as a play, arguably, sets off a long historical imaginative project of “modernism,” i.e. the gradual liberation of the individual from historical forces. Richard Halpern moreover construes this project as an ultimately closed loop of imaginative possibilities regarding our ability to read the text, which is subject either to its own historical time and place (roughly New Historicism) or able somehow to break free from such constraints (roughly Cultural Materialism). For Halpern, this “new” binary is simply an ideological reprise of an interpretive dichotomy pitting ancient against modern, which came into existence as early as Shakespeare. However much we try to convince ourselves that we are on the verge of something new, we are haunted by the “same-old same-old” interpretive ghosts.

It is my claim that in order to break this restricting bifurcated approach in reading a text like *Hamlet*, we must listen to voices that risk putting the play and its main character into exile. W.W. Greg’s infamous reading of the dumb show is merely a prelude. Indeed, in a remarkable critical act of historicizing, Terrence Hawkes argues that to commit to Greg’s reading risks putting the play beyond rational comprehension thus removing *Hamlet* from its inaugural place initiating something like the ever greater achievement of degrees of freedom over the course of the next four hundred years or so. Building on Hawkes, it is my claim that only by undermining *Hamlet*’s position as the crown jewel of a “rational” Western imaginative project of individual liberation from historical forces can new interpretive possibilities be unleashed. The play itself must go into exile, or exile itself from the gargantuan post-facto interpretive tradition in which it remains submerged.

References

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- Hawkes, Terrence. “Telmah.” In *That Shakespeherian Rag*. Routledge, 1986, pp. 104-131. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315018430-13>