

“The Queen’s Gambit” Seminar
ABSTRACTS
SAA 2023

Sarah Crover, “The Serpent and the Raven: Tamora, Cleopatra, and the Spectre of the Foreign Queen”

Tamora and Cleopatra are not Shakespeare’s only dangerous foreign queens, but they are among the most catastrophic in their ability to destabilize empires. Whether threatening to “sink Rome” or “massacre them all” these women are given almost supernatural powers of cunning and seduction that seem as linked to their monstrous sexuality as to their outsider origins. Both have powerful and destructive influence over Roman emperors and an apparent unconcern for the consequences to anyone when it comes to satisfying their own governing impulses of desire and revenge. Noting, as others have, that the Roman empire is frequently employed as a thinly veiled analogue for the emergent British empire, I argue that while Tamora and Cleopatra in these plays may be commentaries on historically recent female rulers (Catherine de’ Medici, for example), they are more importantly nightmare imaginings of what might occur if such a queen were to be set loose on English soil. Ultimately, I argue that Cleopatra and Tamora are misogynistic and xenophobic phantasms that reveal an emerging obsession with English purity.

Michelle Ephraim, “Shylock’s Monkeys and the 1567 English Lottery”

Shakespeare’s two source texts for *The Merchant of Venice* are well known: *Il Pecorone* (the pound of flesh) and *Gesta Romanorum* (the casket test). Shakespeare adds the term “lottery” to describe Portia’s casket-selection process, yet scholarship has paid scant attention to Shakespeare’s use of the word in cultural context: the 1567 lottery event that was Elizabeth I’s attempt to generate revenue for London’s maritime reconstruction.

Elizabeth’s fundraising venture shapes two related concepts in *Merchant*: lottery and exchange. Shakespeare’s audience would have been familiar with the 1567 lottery’s transactional organization. Players paid for individual lots, each of which they marked with a unique, personalized poesy. The phenomenon of England’s first lottery illuminates *Merchant*’s emblematic associations; in the play’s discursive system, Shylock’s famously cryptic reference to “a wilderness of monkeys” would have evoked a central image used in the lottery’s publicity campaign and, ultimately, may be understood to stand for the matter of Elizabeth’s fertility, concerns about which inspired the novel 1567 event.

I hope to show both that Shakespeare’s representation of Shylock as a sexually impotent man stands for Elizabeth’s own reproductive deficiency, and also that *Merchant* ultimately acknowledges such acts of displacement by revealing its system of bogus symbolic exchange.

Tamara A. Goeglein, “George Puttenham’s Emblematic Queen Elizabeth I. Or, the Portrait of the Artist as his Queen.”

The dedication to George Puttenham's *Arte of English Poesie* (1589) states that it "was by the author intended to our Sovereign Lady the Queen, and for her recreation and service chiefly devised." An emblematic portrait of the queen appears opposite the volume's dedication: Queen Elizabeth sits in a near-frontal pose, mouth closed and eyes wide open, framed within a motto that, translated from the Italian, says, "To her who resembles herself and no one else." What makes Puttenham's engraving an emblem is its motto, customary in royal emblems with their mighty proclamations of singularity. What makes it a metaemblem, as I will explore in my seminar paper, is that Puttenham is *attributing* self-resemblance to his Sovereign rather than her claiming it for herself. This reversal shifts the *context of utterance* from the engraved Elizabeth speaking out on her own behalf (i.e., "I resemble myself") to Puttenham's speaking about her (i.e., "To her . . ."); this reversal thus shifts the *context of pointing* from the inside out (i.e., the Sovereign looking out at her subjects) to the outside in (i.e., her observing subjects looking in at her). These subjugating reversals open up what I would call a second-order, or meta-emblematic, discourse on Puttenham's dissembling courtly poetics, which positions him as resembling his Sovereign.

Elizabeth Hodgson: "Pandora's Book: Scriptural English Queens"

Two English women writers, one queen and one aristocratic woman writing to a queen, both manage to make English Protestantism a new nationalizing force when they crown the Bible with an English diadem. Katherine Parr, Henry 8's last royal consort, in her 1547 *Lamentations of a Sinner* uses the conventions of penitence to cast herself as a noble leader of anti-Catholic scripturalism in England. Mary Sidney Herbert, Countess of Pembroke, generates nationalistic readings of the psalms in her 1559 verse Psalter to create an Anglicized and imperialist reading of the Hebrew psalter. Both centralize the role of the queen, though different queens, in making an Englished biblical faith *the* faith.

Allison Machlis Meyer, "Historiography's Gambits: French Queens in The Chronicle Abridgments of Richard Grafton and John Stow"

Navigating the source material of preceding historians and a recursive process of compilation and revision, Richard Grafton and John Stow engaged in a war of printed words in the 1560s through the rapid production of dueling chronicle abridgments. This paper reconsiders the import of the infamous feud between these writers by examining the shared origins of their abridged histories' accounts of two medieval French queens, Margaret of Anjou, queen consort of Henry VI, and Isabella, queen consort of Edward II. Though the full-length chronicle histories of Grafton and Stow display strikingly different approaches to portraying these women, these representations of the two so-called "She-Wolves of France" were not borne out of static and discrete historical perspectives. For example, Stow's account of Isabella's queenship in his 1560s abridgments is in fact nearly identical to Grafton's laudatory portrait in his own abridged histories, but over successive editions Stow gradually revised his depiction of Isabella, eventually transforming her into the fierce and cruel woman featured in his 1592 *Annals*. In this paper, I discuss how this evolution emerged from the historiographers' own investments in national history, their relationship to each other as contemporary competitors, the debate over historiographic methods, and the pressures of the commercial print market. Attention to the

often-overlooked shared origins of these contentious abridgments raises questions about how gendered representations of queenship in narrative history mobilize misogynist rhetoric, categorize Englishness and foreignness, and participate in early modern debates about historical veracity.

**Vimala C. Pasupathi, “Queen!...a syllable, a sound, a breath, / An empty notion”:
Royal Amazons & Radical Governments in England & English Drama**

My paper will examine depictions of Amazonian Queens in two plays, Jasper Mayne’s *The Amorous War* (1638-48/1658) and Henry Birkhead’s *The Female Rebellion* (1657/1679/1682), works whose proposed dates of composition and revision span nearly five decades. Penned, printed and/or (possibly) performed between the start of the Wars of Three Kingdoms under Charles I and the death of Charles II, these works follow a broader pattern that persists in much of the drama (including closet plays and pamphlet dialogues) from this time in which Amazons stand in for radical innovations to government set in motion by English men. These plays in particular feature representations of the mythical female race that help underscore the intersections of gender, race, domestic military affairs, and colonial enterprise in the nascent British empire. My paper will consider these plays’ relationship to one another (each is associated with Oxford University, and both contain references that suggest later insertions or revisions) and their relationships to the specific contexts in which they were composed, circulated, and recirculated. What do Amazons and their Queens enable for playwrights in times in which the institution of monarchy and its modes of succession are failing or under threat?

Don Rodrigues, “The Queens’ One Body: Queer Natality and Trans Euphoria in “The Phoenix and Turtle”

In “The Phoenix and Turtle,” a female phoenix physically conjoins with her male lover, a turtledove, resulting in a hybrid creature that defies the laws of physics; this prompts an outcry by personified Property, “appalled” at the impossible synthesis, after which the phoenix-turtle perishes in a “mutual flame.” Critics have focused significant attention on the possible identities of these birds, with most agreeing that the phoenix refers at least obliquely to Queen Elizabeth, while the identity of the turtledove may represent personalities ranging from the Earl of Essex to Sir John Salusbury, patron of the volume in which “Phoenix” first appeared. In this paper I want to start with the obvious: this poem stages a gender transition, one where a mortal male effectively becomes queen. Building on Colby Gordon’s observation that transitioning, in the minds of transphobes, “amounts to a hubristic assault on creation itself,” I argue that this poem stages a form of trans creation or queer natality that places the experience of transitioning in euphoric contrast to irrational laws that govern the social and natural worlds. The double-sexed phoenix-turtle, a product of nature, demonstrates by its very existence that sex may be forged through will or *techne*, thereby necessitating a revision in natural law itself. I explore how this conception of trans creation may productively reanimate older arguments over “the king’s (or queen’s) two bodies” as it applies to this poem, and I consider the possibilities of applying this framework to the sitting queen / “king” herself.

E. Rose Grant, “Queenly Prerogatives: The Place of Sexual Consent in William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* and Elizabeth Cary’s *Tragedy of Mariam*”

This paper explores the sexual consent of queen characters in Elizabeth Cary’s *The Tragedy of Mariam* and William Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus* by focusing on the factors that shape their capacity to consent. Like their historical counterparts, Elizabeth I, Mary I, and Mary Queen of Scots, Cary’s Queen Mariam and Shakespeare’s Queen Tamora do not fit within the simplistic legal binary of *feme covert* and *feme sole*. They are both married women and princesses with, albeit dubious, claims to thrones that entail their own distinct legal privileges and restrictions. As married women, Mariam and Tamora challenge the idea that consent to marriage entails consent to sexual relations with their spouses. Their strategies of resistance differ; Mariam chooses celibacy, while Tamora chooses to pursue an adulterous affair. Yet, even when their sexual partners appear to be consensual choices, both queens’ capacity to consent is restricted by their political obligations which might discriminate against the suitability of a sexual partner based on such factors as class, race, and marital status. Tamora and Mariam not only speak to early modern concerns about whether a woman’s sexual consent matters, but also whether a queen, burdened and/or enriched with political status, has the capacity to consent.

Kay Stanton, “The Gertrude Gambit: Agency, Power, and Ambiguity”

Was Gertrude so bewildered and helpless after the death of her husband King Hamlet that she naively succumbed to the sinister persuasions of Claudius to marry him just weeks after the royal funeral? Or was she instead a conniving and lusty adulteress, co-plotting the murder of King Hamlet in order to marry and rule with Claudius? Was she a victim or vixen? Feminist readers would like to find agency rather than passivity in Gertrude, yet the path of agency seems paved with the disturbing implication of conspiracy with Claudius. To be “good,” Gertrude needs to be passive; to have agency, she needs to be “bad.” And yet, even the readers that wish to make Gertrude “bad” refrain from following that path as far as it could go, as they seem to regard the implied premarital affair as having only started soon before the murder. King Hamlet was a warrior king; his famous victory over King Fortinbras took place on the day Prince Hamlet was born. Hamlet speaks of his father with a kind of hero-worshipping distance, not the loving familiarity characterizing his relationship with Yorick, who was his adult playfellow. He seems to have seen his father rarely, which means that Gertrude would have also. Since King Hamlet was an absent husband, his young wife Gertrude might have turned to Claudius for affection not just months but years prior to the murder of King Hamlet. In fact, it is possible that the Gertrude-Claudius affair began at least nine months before Prince Hamlet was born; in other words, Claudius might be the actual father of Prince Hamlet. This paper will explore both the passive victim and scheming vixen possibilities for Gertrude but will ultimately show that her self-definition lands between these poles. She may have attributes of each characterization, but her primary mode, which does yield her agency, is as the Queen of Ambiguity.

Elizabeth Steinway, “Visualizing the Royal Womb: Queenship, Power, and Maternity on the Early Modern Stage”

When Queen Anna of Denmark gave birth to her sixth child in 1605, it was the first time that a royal infant had been born in England in nearly 70 years. The event was highly anticipated and the celebration of Anna's maternity stood in marked contrast to the previous reign of the unmarried and childless Queen Elizabeth I. These historical examples speak to the reality of how a queen's reproductive body serves as both a figurative and literal manifestation of royal futurity. From conception to childbirth, the stages of a queen's pregnancy are a matter of public concern; it is her womb that ushers forth potential heirs to the throne. The body of the queen is thus a productive space to examine how early modern theories of reproduction manifest on a larger stage, both theatrically and politically. The womb, in particular, is represented as either conducive to the health of the nation or hostile to its stability. By examining contemporary reproductive discourses that increasingly focused on understanding and visualizing the womb, this essay argues that the dramatic representation of royal pregnancy plays a significant role in the relationship between queenship, power, and maternity.

Megan Vinson, "Billy Shakes' White Chicks"

In this paper, I explore how Shakespeare represents issues of female will through material and temporal entanglement. Tamora in *Titus Andronicus*, Desdemona in *Othello*, and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale* are three of Shakespeare's tragic heroines whose willfulness, particularly their sexual willfulness, is ideologically tied to a sense of family and state across time. In each play, there is an anxiety over how these women physically share their bodies because of how female chastity sustains and helps reproduce the social systems of white, patriarchal humanism in the early modern period. Building off scholarship that has already examined how women's wills and bodies are entangled with ideological issues of chastity, I consider how each of these characters respond to the bodies they materially share with different temporal outcomes. Tamora and Desdemona experience faced-paced, tragic time, which is where Hermione begins. Yet in the expansion of time, Hermione's story transitions from tragedy to romance. Hermione chooses a nonhuman, unchaste self that is shared across multiple kinds of bodies. Other scholars have noted this about Hermione's character, but are wary of connecting Hermione's nonhuman body to the romance ending because it is an abject, nonhuman body. I suggest that unlike Tamora and Desdemona, its Hermione's willingness leave the confines of humanist womanhood that allows her to create a family after tragedy.

Lanier Walker, "My Name in Parchment: The Politics of Signing in Elizabethan England"

In *Selling the Tudor Monarchy*, Kevin Sharpe argues that the Tudors maintained their legitimacy and authority "through careful acts of representation--in words, images and spectacular performances that did not simply reflect or enact power but helped to construct it." This paper considers the sign manual, or royal signature, as one such representation. I argue that even before becoming queen, Elizabeth I used her signature as a type of self-portrait through which she displayed the legitimacy of her claim to the throne. After Mary I's death, Elizabeth changed the formal features of her signature, and in doing so revised the image of herself that she projected to those around her. Indeed, as a literal endorsement itself, Elizabeth's sign manual was an ideal vehicle with which to encourage others to endorse the public identity she and her signature

projected. And yet, at points during her reign, Elizabeth attempted to downplay the significance of her sign manual by framing it as nothing more than “my name in parchment.” This paper explores how Elizabeth deployed a material mark meant to confirm and stabilize meaning as a tool with which to create flexible and sometimes contradictory representations of herself.