

SAA 2023: Imagining Antiquity (Session Two)

**Seminar Leaders:
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ABSTRACTS

The Source and End of Life in *Coriolanus*

Jeff Doty

What makes *Coriolanus* “Shakespeare’s most political play” is its restriction of the meaning and scope of human life to the political. According to classical political theory as summarized by Aristotle, this is how it should be: politics and ethics are mutually supportive practices that aim at the fulfillment of the good for humans. But Rome’s equation of virtue with military prowess – to be publicly rewarded through the honor of consulship – creates several problems. At the political level, there turn out to be two competing Romes, one of the patricians and the other of the citizens, who disagree about what constitutes service. And at the ethical level, when Volumnia pleads to Martius to flatter the people, honor seems corrupt. For Martius, how could honor be won through dishonorable means? Whereas Shakespeare’s other tragic protagonists could certainly deal with the hollowness at the center of Rome, Martius – shaped so completely by Volumnia into Rome’s soldier – is cast into a void. Critics often see Martius’ resistance to self-disclosure – his silence, as compared to other soliloquizing leading characters – as a sign of a lack of inwardness. I argue instead that Rome offers him no other ethical or religious foundations on which he can draw speech. His silence is a symptom of the tragedy that besets him.

Rome Out of Time: Shakespeare, Jonson, and Empire

Philip Goldfarb Styrt

Both William Shakespeare’s and Ben Jonson’s depictions of the late Roman Republic and the Empire show an imperial power (in the small-i sense) whose influential citizens have a strangely anachronistic relationship to time. In Shakespeare, the noblest Romans are forever fighting the last battle, imagining themselves engaged in pre-imperial, pre-factional politics that no longer function in the present moment of the play. In Jonson, his schemers and their opponents make the opposite historical error, perpetually using rhetoric and ideas that fling them from the Roman past into Jonson’s contemporary Renaissance present, despite his detailed citation of Roman sources. In both, then, we see that Rome’s imperial management runs into difficulties because of the inability to focus correctly on the problems proper to their particular time and place.

In this paper I argue that these chronological issues reflect a skepticism in both Shakespeare and Jonson towards the Roman imperial project, and by extension towards the efficacy and value of empire in their own time. I suggest that for both Shakespeare and Jonson this inability to correctly address contemporary problems is representative not of a distinctively Roman failing but of a fundamental issue with empire. I propose that this issue is part of a larger skepticism of empire both authors express in relation to the burgeoning English imperial project, sounding a note of caution against too much enthusiasm for imperial expansion.

Reading Like A Schoolboy: Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage*

Heather James

Christopher Marlowe's *Dido, Queene of Carthage* is a brilliant, scholarly, and highly theatrical response to Vergil's epic by Elizabethan playwrights and actors and addressed to Elizabethan audiences, which are called on to remember how they first encountered Ovid as schoolboys: Vergil came first in the curriculum and Ovid second. The play continually pivots from Vergil to Ovid, each time sharply separating the meanings and pleasures of myth from the moral uses assigned to it in imperial Rome. The play effectively divides in two the *translatio imperii studii*que, the program of classical translation meant to herald the joint triumph of humanist study and the state. The Troy legend, as the political myth of origins of imperial Rome disseminated to emergent nation-states of renaissance Europe, has no traction in *Dido*: it exists to be eroded. The humanist pedagogical project of the *translatio studii*, on the other hand, gains vitality, volatility, and variety when it is separated from the ideological uses that direct the poetry of state in Augustan Rome. Marlowe's *Dido* is a dramatic, Ovidian letter written to the Elizabethan elite on the subjects of Vergilian *pietas* and Ovidian liberties.

Ravenscroft's *Titus* and the Indigenization of Antiquity

John Kuhn

This paper focuses on an unusual scene in Ravenscroft's adaptation of *Titus Andronicus* in which a Roman emperor swings in a hammock. Though scholars have long known that early modern explorers and culture-makers deployed the analogy of antiquity to understand New World cultures (Greenblatt, MacCormack, Grafton), little work has addressed the opposite phenomenon: when indigenous figures or technologies are imported into or used analogically to think about Europe's own past. This essay is an initial attempt to think about this phenomenon.

Representation and Sovereignty in *Coriolanus*

Joseph Mansky

Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (c. 1608) marks an inflection point in the history of political representation. The early seventeenth century saw a new skeptic of parliamentary representation emerge on the national stage: King James VI and I. For the king, certain MPs' pretensions to popularity made them "Plebeian Tribunes" speaking speciously in the name of the people. In what may well be his last tragedy, Shakespeare likewise looks to republican Rome to probe the dissonance at the core of representative politics. There is plenty of material in *Coriolanus* to support the king's view of the tribunes (and their early modern imitators) as power-hungry demagogues. While late sixteenth-century resistance theorists hoped that representation would decorously channel popular sovereignty, James invokes the tribunes to suggest that it might also subjugate the people altogether. Yet this is by no means the only vision of representation in the play. Echoing politic thinkers from Machiavelli to Bodin, Shakespeare probes the place of the people in the early Republic. At the core of the play is the paradox embodied by the Roman tribunes, the paradox running through King James's quarrels with parliament: that representation is both a technology for producing popular power and a tool for taming it.

Antony and Cleopatra and Bonduca: Triumph, Trophies, and Dead Weight

Karen Marsalek

This essay examines several modes of staging the soldierly body in two plays from the King's Men's repertory, modes that both invoke and escape the conventions of the Roman triumph. The first occurs in *Antony and Cleopatra* 3.1; Ventidius arrives, "*as it were in triumph....the dead body of Pacorus borne before him.*" Despite the stage direction's diction, the presence of the corpse works against the suggested circumstance, as Roman triumphs exhibited living prisoners of war and images—not bodies—of the dead. Impressive-looking captives and effigies emphasized the even greater splendor of the triumphator; the bleak parade of Pacorus' corpse is thus a kind of anti-triumph, simply a dead "weight" Ventidius must "convey" to Antony. Though often cut, the scene foreshadows Antony's death in 4.15. Reduced to a dying "weight" and hauled up by Cleopatra to her monument, he nonetheless has deprived Caesar of a triumphal captive.

John Fletcher's *Bonduca* (c. 1614) also threatens its British characters with Roman triumph, and reveals Fletcher's engagement with Shakespeare's play. Its warrior heroines evade captivity through their suicides "*above*", which recall those of Cleopatra, Iras, and Charmian on the monument. Of greater interest to me, however, are the suggestions of Shakespearean stagecraft in the death of the boy hero, Hengo. Lowered from a rock by his uncle Caratach and then pulled up again after he is shot, Hengo dies in Caratach's arms as Roman soldiers approach. The physical mechanics of Fletcher's scene are less complex than the oft-discussed raising of Antony to the monument, yet appropriate for the child soldier, killed before he could attain Antony's heroic stature. The likelihood that Burbage played both Antony and Caratach adds additional resonance to the dramaturgical echoes, as Caratach ends the play fated for the triumph that Antony escaped.

"The Scourge of Homer": The Reception of Zoilus in Early Modern English Culture

Joseph Navitsky

As the infamous detractor of Homer, the fourth-century BCE Greek grammarian and rhetorician Zoilus provided early modern writers with a potent archetype of the envious critic. But the role of this notorious "Homeromastix" in English letters has yet to be fully examined despite what his story might have to tell us about the growth of English literary culture and critical discourse. On the one hand, Zoilus could, and did, regularly appear in simplistic figurations alongside his divine—and more creative and menacing—counterpart, the minor Greek god of criticism, Momus. But on the other hand, because of the elevated status of his principal target, and because Zoilus' work was widely acknowledged by such contemporaries as Aristotle as well as later Continental writers, he served as a more concrete and professional embodiment of literary criticism for early modern English writers than Momus.

My objective in this paper is to further outline the particulars of the Momus–Zoilus relationship while beginning to offer a more complete history of the reception of Zoilus in the early modern period. To be sure, Zoilus figures more prominently in the epigram and prose satire traditions than in the theatrical texts that are the focus of this seminar. Still, he makes numerous appearances in the era's many public debates over the value and moral utility of drama itself. And his place in the era's growing sensitivity to verbal violence means that his name and reputation came to inform contemporary understandings of authorial legitimacy in significant, yet largely unrecognized, ways.

Remembering Turkish Aeneas: *Translatio Imperii*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the Early Modern Map

Lauren Robertson

The map of Asia Minor in Abraham Ortelius's *Theatrum orbis terrarum*, the atlas that ushered European map-making into modernity, visualizes time as well as space. Included with the map of the Anatolian peninsula is an inset illustration that magnifies a portion of the North African coast; labeled here is the city of Tunis, and surrounding it, the ruins of its prior instantiation as Carthage. This image manifests Ortelius's famous characterization of geography as the "eye of history," allowing the observer to gaze on the ancient city's destruction and remaking in Tunis's modern image. What interests me about this page of the atlas, however, is the labeling of another historical city that goes comparatively unremarked: just a few inches to the left of the inset illustration of Carthage, neatly marked on the west coast of the Anatolian peninsula, is the city of Troy. No ruins surround it, just as there is no mention of its catastrophic burning and destruction during the Trojan War. The ancient city, long leveled and lost, quietly reappears within a landscape that has changed around it, enveloped by the Ottoman Empire's westward expansion.

This essay links the racializing consequences of Troy's quietly stubborn refusal to disappear from early modern maps to *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the figure of Antony, I shall argue, the Turkish origin of the legendary Trojan Aeneas is made manifest. Tethered to an Eastern world through the past's intrusion on the geography of the present, the Turkish, Trojan Antony ultimately hits close to home, forcing a reckoning with the story that the early modern English liked to tell about their own descent from Aeneas himself.

Fat Ham's Black Classicism

Donovan Sherman

This essay builds on recent and foundational work on race and *Hamlet* to suggest that blackness not only attends but is *produced* by acts of insistent white witnessing. This observation becomes thrown in relief by *Fat Ham*, the recent Pulitzer-prize-winning adaptation of *Hamlet* by James Ijames, which refutes Shakespeare's insistence on the spectacularizing of blackness. I claim, furthermore, that *Fat Ham* accomplishes this by turning to an unlikely source: Aristotle's *Poetics*, a dramaturgy that rejects *Hamlet's* modernity (and, by extension, modernity's whiteness) even as it stems from a philosopher who notoriously espoused a system of natural slavery that would negate *Fat Ham's* humanity and artistry. Ijames's play thus subverts *Hamlet's* white gaze by reimagining an antiquity that can bypass both modernism's fetishization of white individuality and classicism's ideological foundations of enslavement. This mode of engagement falls in the tradition of Black classicism, a project that stretches from Phillis Wheatley through W.E.B. DuBois, through the *Black Athena* debates of the 1980s and 90s and to the present day with scholars like Da-el Padilla Peralta and Rankine himself. It is a mode of reimagining antiquity that offers us, as early modernists, a lens through which we can reevaluate Shakespeare's complex relation to classical forms—forms that, so the story goes, *Hamlet* leaves behind in its modernizing trajectory of anointing white subjectivity. *Fat Ham* brings that totemic work down to earth, all while reassessing the older, potentially radical yet nefarious dramaturgy that gave *Hamlet* a background against which it can be defined.

**Shakespeare's First Style:
Pathopeia and the shape of characters in the *Henry VI* plays**
Goran Stanivukovic

Critics are accustomed to explain and write about dramatic characters in Shakespeare's plays in the first instance in terms of motivation, themes, and ethics, but not in relation to the rhetorical form that comes before and that shapes these features. In my paper, I propose to explore the origin of the character in Shakespeare's first style, both individual and collaborative. In early modern rhetoric, form is meaning, a way into cognition, a demonstration of action, as well as a tool of persuasion and emotional expression. In this deeply literary and lyrical first style of dramatic writing, to invent a dramatic character means testing the efficacy of rhetoric to create something new in drama. I will illustrate this on the three parts of *Henry VI* and on the rhetorical element, *pathopeia*, which is preponderant in these plays. *Pathopeia*, defined by Cicero and elaborated upon by the English neo-classical remodelers of his rhetorical system of figures and tropes, is a rhetorical element that expresses vehement emotions and interior perturbations. This complex rhetorical tool has a great creative potential for the formation of dramatic character, and for drama generally. I argue that the arrangement of the parts in *pathopeia* shapes voice, sound, and tone of the dramatic character. *Pathopeia* is the main vehicle into the literariness of these history plays, and into history as a private, intimate, and emotional—interior—world of the character.

***Tempus* and distemperature: Marlowe's Lucan and the Anthropocene**
Sarah Wall-Randell

So when this worlds compounded union breaks
Time ends and to old Chaos all things turne:
Confused stars shal meete, celestiall fire
Fleet on the flouds, the earth shoulder the sea
Affording it no shoare, and *Phoebe's* waine,
Chace *Phoebus* and inrag'd affect his place,
And strive to shine by day, and ful of strife
Dissolve the engins of the broken world.

Marlowe, *Lucans First Booke* 73-80

One of the ways in which early modern writers used texts from antiquity was as a way of situating themselves in time. Virgil, Seneca, and Ovid existed in a “then,” relative to which Spenser, Shakespeare, and Marlowe inhabited a “now,” whether that “now” represented a major falling-off from a former golden age or a fitting inheritor of it. (Debates in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries about the age of the Earth meant that the absolute positions of then and now were not fixed, but having at least two points meant that a line could be drawn.) How, though, do early moderns use classical sources to understand the intersection of cyclical time (seasons, typology) and the unidirectional arrow of history, natural versus human chronology? Like Lucan, in whose *Civil War* the narrator laments that “to old Chaos all things turne” when Caesar and Pompey clash, early modern poets associated intramural human conflict of all kinds with disorder in the natural world -- the Scottish thanes' horses eating each other when Macbeth kills Duncan, the seasons getting out of sync when Titania and Oberon are feuding -- and Shakespearean ecocriticism has considered such images of chaos as expressive of human degradation of the environment. In order to read the earth's response to human strife in early modern poetry as part of an

awareness of the coming anthropocene, it is necessary to think about how Marlowe and Shakespeare placed themselves in time. In this essay I will focus on Marlowe's translation of Lucan and attempt to use the reception of this chaos trope to think about time and earthly brokenness in early modern poetry.

“Rapturous Chapman”

Jessica Wolfe

This paper takes as its starting point George Chapman's probable introduction into English of the words 'rapture' and 'rapturous', considering the complex Greek and Latin (and pagan and early Christian) genealogy of his language of ecstatic, sudden seizure or transport. The paper will then examine from a more wide-angle view several key ideas shaping Chapman's eclectic, and keenly Hellenic, Christianity, in particular his conception of εὐθυμία (euthymia: cheerfulness, contentment, or tranquility of mind) and of ἐλευθερία or freedom. I will conclude with some thoughts about the importance of integrating biblical and theological history into the field of classical reception studies, focusing on the way that early modern writers understood the linguistic, philosophical, and cultural continuities between pagan and early Christian Hellenism.