

Brandi K. Adams

### **A Renaissance Book (History) in Time?**

Often, but not always paired with readers, books in English Renaissance drama are centers of necromancy, metaphors for the body, and at times, characters' closest companions. They are more than the props that were never listed in Philip Henslowe's diaries. Books ground readers including Faustus and Hamlet to social and political landscapes not necessarily depicted onstage. In the context of the material book, Stephen Orgel has suggested, "If readers construct books, books also construct readers."<sup>[1]</sup> While Orgel uses the physical properties of a book and the markings left behind by readers to delineate that relationship, it is possible to extend his argument to include readers and books in English Renaissance drama. Readers and books construct one another in plays, define each other, and at times help construct the culture that is fashioned within the play itself. Within drama or when onstage, readers invoke books (and learnedness) as a marker of literacy, mastery, certainty, history, and teleology. Perhaps most powerfully, books permeate and affect a scene with cultural significance.

What happens when one thinks about the book on stage in English Renaissance drama as a part of Hans-Georg Gadamer's theories of poetics and hermeneutics in which "we are born into a world that is 'already interpreted, already organized in its basic relations'" in conjunction with ideas promulgated by The Renaissance Project (that the Renaissance is unfinished and ongoing)? By considering the work of J.K. Barret on *Time and Literary Culture in Renaissance England*, new theoretical work on The Archive and archival practice, and Allen Thiher's work on Heidegger's, Gadamer's, and Foucault's conceptualizations of historicism(s), this paper proposes that it is not only possible, but necessary to consider the study of representations of books as a part of an open project that allows scholars to consider and reconsider the roles of books and reading backwards and forwards in time in our present moment.

[1] Stephen Orgel, "Afterword: Records of Culture," in Andersen and Sauer, *Books and Readers*, 282-90, on 283.

Amanda Atkinson

## The Errant Renaissance and Contemporary Stagnation

TL; DR: This paper identifies a concept of valuable error in Renaissance models of learning and growth. I situate this model of errant learning in conversation with aspects of contemporary culture in order to ask what might be gained by a renewal of these models of thinking and human nature.

Renaissance humanists conceived of human life as a Neoplatonic process of becoming enacted through a triadic relationship between the self, the world, and the divine. This Neoplatonic Christian ontology occasionally intersected uneasily with Lucretian materialism, which likewise posited an ontology of ceaseless metamorphosis, albeit without the overarching coherence of a divine framework. Marsilio Ficino, for example (who famously denounced his own Lucretian juvenilia) writes in *On the Nature of Love* that

Everything that changes in body and soul is preserved, not because it remains absolutely the same - that is the privilege only of divine beings - but because what wastes away and disappears leaves behind something new, similar to itself. It is surely through this remedy that mortal things are made similar to the immortal. (224)

Ficino's account of metamorphosis is both positive and progressive: change occurs within a divinely-ordered context in which metamorphosis is an advancement toward the divine. Neoplatonism and Lucretianism dovetail in the Renaissance conception of error as an intellectual or spiritual wandering - a process characterized by dialectics of truth and confusion, failure and success, through which knowledge/spiritual understanding/virtue are developed incrementally. This conception of human growth as a process of error is exemplified in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, Sir Thomas Browne's *Hydrotaphia*, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

I situate this humanist sense of errant individual and collective history in conversation with a contemporary phenomenon I describe as stagnation: the sense of character as a Sisyphian series of duplicated patterns, moments, and behaviors that can never be revised. Narratives of stagnation pervade popular culture (see, for example, the "why am I like this" trope; T. Swift's "Anti-Hero"), but the conception of fixed character is far more dangerous than these examples suggest. In his 2022 book *The Persuaders*, Anand Giridharadas notes that a key assessment driving the Russian bot campaign prior to the 2016 election was the Russian intelligence finding that American society was characterized by the pervasive tendency to "writ[e] people off - assum[e] they would never change their minds or ways, dismiss them as hopelessly mired in identities they couldn't escape, viewing those who thought differently as needing to be resisted rather than won over" (3-4). Other recent research suggests this calcification plays a very real role in politics, and Ezra Klein cites the calcification of political opinion as a primary factor contributing to the current political environment.

My research moving forward is animated two key questions: 1) what might be gained by a renewal of this errant model of learning and 2) how might this model be enfolded into our pedagogy as teachers of Renaissance literature?

This project is informed by a few recent readings that are, in different ways, engaged with the meandering, errant character of individual and collective intellectual history. Jenny Mann's *The Trials of Orpheus* (2021) explores Renaissance engagements with the Orpheus myth, revealing (among other things) how the myth was keyed to an understanding of sublime rhetorical power as a link between antiquity and a Renaissance present. Mann describes how in Renaissance engagements with Orpheus (much like our own engagements with the Renaissance), time seems to meander - to fold in on itself like the Greek key design that in ancient Greece signified the oscillation between past and present, turn and return, and other antithetical contraries. Steve Mentz's *Shipwreck Modernity* (2015) traces actual and tropic shipwrecks in the seventeenth century and beyond, making the claim for the shipwreck as a metaphor for the dynamics of modernity, in which the past is subsumed and disintegrated only to re-emerge through a process of "composture" in which old ideas are reworked for the present. And finally, Mark C. Taylor's *Erring: A Postmodern A/theology* (1984) defines errancy as the condition of atheist postmodernity. He asserts at one point that "the time and space of graceful erring are opened by the death of God," because it is only with the death of God that mankind is freed from the narrative of life as a progress from sin to redemption and can accept and enjoy his errant condition (150).

Heidi Brayman

### **Projecting *King Lear***

This paper reads Lear's "Birds i' th' Cage" prison speech as a visually and acoustically privileged moment in Jean-Luc Godard's *King Lear*, which premiered in 1987 and had a fraught brief second theatrical release in 2002. Set in a world recovering from an apocalyptic disaster at Chernobyl in which "everything disappeared," Godard's film stages the recovery of *King Lear* by William Shakespeare Junior the Fifth, played by Peter Sellars, who shares a script credit with Godard, Norman Mailer, and Tom Luddy. Inspired by the timing of Godard's premiere in the wake of the historical Chernobyl disaster, I put the film in conversation with Sarah Ruhl and Matthew Aucoin's opera, *Eurydice*, which coincidentally premiered in Los Angeles in February 2020 as the covid pandemic was just coming into view. Adapted from Ruhl's 2003 play, the opera centers Eurydice in its retelling of the Orpheus myth, conflating with it the Ceres-Persephone myth reimagined as a father-daughter story. Central to my attention in this short version of the project is the moment when Orpheus drops a folio of Shakespeare's plays into the underworld, prompting Eurydice's father to read the prison speech to her from *Lear*. My consideration of the use, place, and adaptation of this particular speech in film, playtext, and opera concludes with a brief reading of one of the volumes identified in our seminar leaders' initial provocations: Paisley Rekdal's deeply Ovidian *Nightingale* (2019).

Nan Z. Da

### **The Chinese Comedy of *King Lear***

This talk is drawn from a manuscript-in-progress called *The Chinese Tragedy of King Lear*, a literary-critical study of the similarities between the mechanisms of harm in *King Lear* and under Maoism. "The Chinese Comedy of King Lear" in particular studies the nature of the comical and comedic aspects of *Lear* and the work of wit and reconciliation in China and abroad from the 1970s to the 1990s. This period of time which we once perceived as the lead-up to a Renaissance but now can see was only its short-lived appearance bears out Samuel Johnson's remark that the commonsense rule that comedy alleviates tragedy doesn't apply to *Lear*. This qualification of the nature of comedy in Larian tragedies also clarifies the relationship between comedy, atrocity, and reversion. It is an intellectual commonplace that the quality of comedy indexes the quality of parrhesiastic speech and the quality of human communication (and thus the better it is the more likely you're living in a Renaissance). This talk asks, through the example of the aftermath of Maoism, the determinative role that highly evolved forms of comedy play in ending free and open periods of cultural flourishing.

Ambereen Dadabhoy

### **Heritage Politics as a Renaissance Project**

I have been thinking a lot about the heritage politics of "the Renaissance," as an idea and an ongoing project (imbricated in the aesthetic and political), especially if we are rooting and routing it through Europe. By heritage politics I mean both the interest in and preservation of the past in service of cultural authenticity, legacy, and purity. In the case of the Renaissance as we have in all likelihood have studied it, this means preserving and maintaining a Eurocentric vision of the world of the late-fifteenth to mid-seventeenth centuries (broadly). Such a vision, while not intentionally or chauvinistically Eurocentric, must necessarily be so by virtue, again, of our chosen academic field, early modern English literature and Shakespeare studies. National literatures are of course provincial in language and geography. Through their national focus they contain and reflect the ideas, attitudes, and biases as well as the forms, conventions, and aestheticism of the time and place of their production. They are two-faced in being both inward and outward looking, because they retain in their being the celebration of the nation, its language, and people, but also the nation's uncommon ability to be universal, a stand in for all of humanity. When our object of study in the 21st century is the artistic production of the English language in its Renaissance, then this literature bears the burden of the British imperial project in its nascent and formal structure. With this preamble, in my work for this seminar, I would like to focus on how possession and dispossession shape our ideas about "the Renaissance," specifically through geographic and material registers. I would argue that these two terms are deeply related to the heritage component of Renaissance studies and our inquiry in "the Renaissance Project" because ideas of sovereignty (both personal and political) underscore period's aesthetic and cultural productions.

Alice Dailey

### **Another Time: Grief and Criticism at the Edge of the Renaissance**

In 2017, while I was writing a book on death in Shakespeare's history plays, my mother died from a toxic exposure to mold. She was an English teacher, an avid reader, and a pathological liar. My grief was inflected by decades of living with Renaissance literature, and as I taught and wrote about this literature in the months that followed my mother's death, distinctions between its pastness and my present—its fictitiousness and my reality—became less certain. That literature, it turned out, provided one of the central idioms through which I processed my loss.

From this loss came an alternative, parallel monograph about death and literature—a kind of autobiographical companion to the history plays book that explores the convergence of my mother's death with my scholarly and pedagogical selves. My intent is to share an excerpt of this project for our SAA seminar. At the heart of this work is not a speculative theory about the openness of the Renaissance as a period but a lived experience of that openness that I attempt to document through a range of representational forms: narrative, taxonomy, drawing, manipulated text, photography. This autotheoretical project represents the consciousness of the literary critic as a hybridic formation shaped by a Renaissance temporal aesthetic that synthesizes the past and the present, the counterfeit, literary, and real. Not only a voice but an agent who materially cuts, folds, and remakes, the project's grieving critical subject punctures and reconstitutes the limits of the Renaissance.

Heather Dubrow

### **Prologue: Projecting Questions**

The organizers of our panel, Professors Colleen Ruth Rosenfeld and Tessie Prakas, conceived my presentation as an introduction to and preview for our session. Hence its first section presents a wide range of questions immediately relevant to how the Renaissance is perceived and represented, such as the characteristics attributed to it and the choice of "Renaissance" rather than, say, "early modern." The second section explores in more detail three procedures central to the Renaissance in its many forms but also significant elsewhere in our universities and beyond them: first, positing progress narratives and other approaches to temporality; second, labelling and categorizing; and third, relatability.



Sharon Harris

### **The Interregnum and Restoration's Renaissance of the Masque and Its Music**

Many critical assessments of English Renaissance drama have idealized it as foundational to the English literary canon (cue Shakespeare), as staging the birth of the self and modernity, and as exemplary of renewed humanist potential and learning. In contrast, critical assessments of Restoration and eighteenth-century revisions and adaptations of English Renaissance dramatic works have chided them as “imitative and derivative” or even a “gross vulgarisation” of the original.<sup>1</sup> In part, these reactions seem to stem from the Restoration's approach to drama that blends scripts, music, dance, and spectacle into new intermedial objects. These dramatic pieces are more than a salad of discrete media categories. As the intermedial bricolage that they are, however, these pieces may defamiliarize the Renaissance works from which they came for modern readers, so much so that they tax modern critics' powers of appreciation and reinforce notions of periodization, including and especially the end of the Renaissance.

I wish to examine the processes of re- and inter-mediation through new uses of the masque in Interregnum and Restoration contexts. We can rethink the masque as a vehicle for extending and adapting a Renaissance art form in new contexts. What had been an elite, courtly genre became fragmented and distributed for dance, entr'acte entertainments or interludes, and music concerts. Popular uses of dance and song during the Interregnum provide nostalgic continuity and pathbreaking innovation from the Jacobean and Caroline eras into the Commonwealth and Restoration.

My framing is influenced by several essays in *Early Modern Histories of Time*, ed. Kristen Poole and Owen Williams. In this volume Mihoko Suzuki observes equivalencies between the Restoration and Renaissance in reviving literary culture (238). Gordon Teskey notes that the word “period” connotes language and print, among other things; our discipline's emphasis on language and text may inhibit our ability to hear resonances across traditional boundaries of periodization, resonances that emerge when tracing (and listening for) how dramatic music was recycled and adapted. In this sense, Heather Dubrow's essay models other ways to think across historical demarcations. She demonstrates how space theory and spatiality offer an alternative to received narratives of periodization. I experiment with music and performance as additional alternatives to these narratives and submit the play and pun of the masque/mask as a means for considering what relationships between Renaissance and Restoration drama might be otherwise obscured.

<sup>1</sup> Paulina Kewes, *Authorship and Appropriation: Writing for the Stage in England, 1660–1710* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 3 and George C. D. Odell, *Shakespeare from Betterton to Irving* (2 vols, New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1920), vol 1, 79.

Paul J. Hecht

### **In These Times: New and Reborn Music from Chicago**

This paper will attempt to construct a theoretical and methodological bridge between old literary texts and new music from “the Chicago scene.” “Scene” is a term used by musicians and critics to refer to a geographically-defined area of activity that embraces many genres and musical pursuits. I am interested in illuminating the dynamics of cultural production in this place, in this time, and I have selected a few examples designed to highlight the richness of these dynamics, among which I also hope to expose some common threads. The music I have selected highlights the scene’s racial, gender, sexuality, nationality, and immigration-status diversity, and also the range of personal and institutional relationships that inform the music. What I take as the question of this seminar is the portability of an open-ended concept of “renaissance,” to describe the way this art and these artists situate themselves historically, and what pedigrees or genealogies they claim (or can be claimed for them). I further explore whether the historical dynamics of cultural production from, say, the late sixteenth century in England, have things to tell us about these productions of the moment, and vice versa.

Recordings I plan to discuss:

Cortiñas, Gustavo. *Kind Regards/Saludos Afectuosos*. Desafío Candente Records, 2022. Edith Judith. *Bones & Structure*. Ruination Record Co., 2022. Isaiah Collier & The Chosen Few. *Cosmic Transitions*. Division 81 Records, 2021. McCraven, Makaya. *In These Times*. International Anthem, 2022.

### Tragic Clocks and the Renaissance of Imperialism

This paper proposes that the European Renaissance has been intimately bound up with the project of imagining an imperial future. I locate an especially rich site for exploring how the retrieval of ancient cultural products shapes imperial ideologies in the genre of tragedy. Throughout its long history, tragedy has staged profound conflicts over time, imagining divine or universal temporalities that are posed against particular moments of violence and destruction. Similarly, to establish a new colonial order can be understood as the incorporation of local temporalities into the supposedly universal temporalities that empires enforce. In staging the destruction of such local temporalities, the genre of tragedy can provide a vantage from which we can critically reflect on the rise and continuing power of empires in our own time.

I am drawn to these questions by a pair of clocks that appear in two tragedies which stage conflicts over imperial rule. The first of these is well known to members of the SAA: the clock that anachronistically strikes as Brutus and his fellow conspirators prepare to murder their imperious ruler in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. Scholars have become quite comfortable with seeing this anachronism as a sign of Shakespeare's capacity for reanimating the historical past in the theatrical present. I want to add here that this clock also shows us Shakespeare locating a universalizing temporality in the imperial project that Julius Caesar institutes and that will be fulfilled when Octavian/Augustus proclaims in *Antony and Cleopatra* that "the time of universal peace is near."

That the clock in *Julius Caesar* speaks to the establishment of an imperial temporality is confirmed when we juxtapose it with one found in a much less well-known tragedy, Nicolas Chretien des Croix's 1608 *Les Portugaiz Infortunez*. In a key scene of this French play, a Portuguese woman attempts to rescue a group of travelers shipwrecked off the coast of southern Africa by giving a watch to a local woman. At first, this scene seems to set the European travelers up as modern, surpassing not only the supposedly archaic time of Africa, but also the time of Europe's own past. Against this model of European progress, however, the singular violence inherent to the genre of tragedy explodes with its own reminders of a non-European present time, suggesting the fragility and instability of the supposedly modern temporality instituted by "early modern" European empires.

Dianne Mitchell

### **Potential Forms**

Where does a Renaissance form begin and end? I want to take up this question by thinking about the affordances of the early modern lyric manuscript, and more particularly, Lady Anne Southwell's manuscript (Folger Shakespeare Library MS V.b.198), which witnesses a unique collection of original poems. Marked by strike-throughs and alternate readings in the margins and interlineal spaces of the page, Southwell's verse puts pressure on the logic of before and after, form in progress and form as fixed into shape. Taking up Southwell's own articulated idea of form as subjunctive - as something that *could* or *would be* rather than something that is - I will read one of her most vexing poems as a site of potential: form promising something it never fully materializes. What is at stake in reading for potential forms, and how might it change our sense of the early modern lyric archive? And what would it mean to respond to Southwell's invitations with our own acts of poetic making?

Michael West

### **Necromantic and Anachronic Renaissances**

I take the Renaissance Project as in part an invitation to encounter works of art that were first written down in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries as living works. My paper takes up the question of how we should understand a work of art to be “alive” by looking at how the European Renaissance understood the life of works that dated from so-called classical antiquity.

Thomas Greene has noted the pervasiveness of a cluster of “necromantic metaphors of disinterment, rebirth, and resuscitation” (32) across the European Renaissance. According to this “necromantic” approach, old works need to be first recognized as dead – as in some sense on a far side of a barrier – in order for us to revive them. In this understanding, artworks are not Gadamer’s “unfinished events” but corpses in need of exhumation.

We might take another approach by taking a cue from Alexander Nagel and Christopher Wood’s book *Anachronic Renaissance*. An “anachronic” work, they write, is not frozen in time, restricted to a punctual moment of origin in the past. Instead, an anachronic work “moves easily in time,” thereby inviting us “to say what the artwork *does*, qua art” (14).

My paper will test the value of “necromantic” and “anachronic” approaches by showing the different approaches at work in two works of contemporary literature, titles tbd.