

Shakespeare Association of America, 2024
Shakespeare and Italy - Influence, Reception, and Adaptation
Chair - John H. Cameron (Saint Mary's University)

Presenter: Elisabetta Tarantino (University of Oxford)

Title: *Much Virtue in ottamie: A Microscopic Clue to Shakespeare's Engagement with Giordano Bruno's Vocabulary*

Abstract:

While preparing for publication an English translation of two nineteenth-century essays on Shakespeare and European authors by Wilhelm König, I came across the following sentence, part of the author's discussion of possible traces of Bruno's atomism in Shakespeare:

the word 'atomies'/'atomi' occurs several times in Shakespeare with the meaning familiar to us: i.e., respectively, in *As You Like It* 3.2.211 and 3.5.13; and *Romeo and Juliet* 1.4.58.

Our edition of König unifies all Shakespeare quotations on the 1997 Norton Shakespeare, and the spellings quoted ("atomies"/"atomi") are as per that edition. In the First Folio they appear as follows: *As You Like It* - 'Atomies' (Comedies, p. 196), 'atomyes' (p. 199); *Romeo and Juliet* (as part of Mercutio's famous 'Queen Mab' speech) - 'Atomies' (Tragedies, p. 57).

What is particularly interesting, however, is how the word in question is printed in the first two quartos of *Romeo and Juliet*, i.e. the so-called 'bad quarto' of 1597 (Q1) and the second quarto (Q2), published in 1599.² (In the case of *As You Like It*, there are no editions earlier than the First Folio.) The actual reading in *Romeo and Juliet* Q2 is 'ottamie'; on the other hand, in Q1 we find the form 'Atomi'. This is extremely interesting because this is the actual Italian form for 'atoms', complete with the upper case initial that was commonly found for nouns in renaissance prose tracts. Taken together with the Q1 spelling, Q2's 'ottamie', far from obscuring the origin of the word, actually confirms two crucial points.

Title: *Anthropocene Othello 1933-2030*

Presenter: Shaul Bassi (Ca' Foscari University of Venice)

Abstract:

What can Shakespeare's Venetian plays tell us about Venice in the 21st century? What would Shakespeare's Venetian plays be like without Venice, if the city succumbs to sea-level rise? This paper looks at three productions of *Othello* staged in Venice between 1933 and 2030, a period that coincides with the Great Acceleration phase of the Anthropocene. This framework places a theatrical show not only in its immediate political milieu but also in the broader context of our uncertain planetary condition, suggesting the peculiar choice to examine two productions from the past and one that has not happened yet. In 1933 *Othello* was staged inside the Doge's Palace, as Venice was becoming the theatre of the celebration of Fascism's colonial campaigns in Africa and the eventual proclamation of the Italian Empire. In 1974 an experimental adaptation of *Othello* was brought to the factories of Marghera, Venice's industrial area, responsible for the contamination of the lagoon and its land subsidence, two major anthropogenic factors contributing to the city's environmental predicament. In an experiment in speculative performance criticism, I envision a new production to take place in 2030, based on the real experience of staging *The Merchant of Venice* in the Ghetto in 2016 and informed by many contemporary African reimaginings of *Othello* and African Venice. This production would fully embrace the plight of Venice as a paradoxical site where sea level rise, overtourism, ecological migration all coalesce to show how Shakespeare can be, in turn, a powerful diagnostic instrument, an agent of disavowal, and a precious traveling companion in our perilous journey into the future.

Presenter: Jessica Tooker (Indiana University Bloomington)

Title: Italian Shrew

Abstract:

The Taming of the Shrew is a romantic comedy featuring both Italians and Italy. Thus, my essay analyzes what could be considered principally "Italian" about the play and how its memorable representation of Italy and its famously passionate, hot-tempered people instantiates, for the playwright, an ease of writing powerfully about Italy – subsequently illustrated in dramatic performance – that may be called, "Shakespearean *Sprezzatura*." Or the art of making that which would be challenging, appear effortless, first on the page – and then on the stage. While Shakespeare deftly scripts *sprezzatura* playtext, Petruccio masterfully deploys the concept onstage in his revolutionary taming of the "shrew," within the confines of Padua (her hometown). Of course, how Petruccio

goes about perspicaciously wooing his “wildcat” is determined by the play’s multiple Italianate facets, as they are compellingly shown via theatrical mechanisms such as character, plot, verbal style, atmospheric settings and backdrops. For Petruccio’s prodigious “wooing dance,” and the ultimately shocking success which he encounters, is made possible by his observant utilization of what are understood (within Padua) as recognizably Italian preferences, instincts, and actions – thoughtfully presented with personal sprezzatura for maximum effect upon Katherina. Petruccio’s ultimate vanquishment of curstness, forward behaviors, and basically acting like a “shrew,” demonstrate how being Italian (in Italy) really shapes what transpires happily ever after. The purpose of this essay is to determine how Italy lends the play its specific brand of charm – especially involving its charismatic protagonists – who proudly showcase why *Shrew* stands as a remarkable part of Shakespeare’s Italy.

Presenter: John Mucciolo (independent scholar)

Title: Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline*: Gentle-class Rivalry, Ethnic Antagonism, and the Hellenic Concept of Degree

Abstract:

The gentle culture was an early-modern, pan-European phenomenon. Its peculiar blend of Hellenic and chivalric ethics with Christian overtones, comprises Europe’s ethical heritage. National inflections – ethnic variations – were explained by the Hellenic notion of Degree: species sharing the same genus are distinguished by their different, natural inclinations. According to this account of nature, national propensities are indigenous to their climate and are bred into the blood, earning each a reputation that distinguishes it from the other. In *Cymbeline*, the ancient Britain Posthumous and the Italian Iachimo are gentlemen encumbered by like codes and national difference. From this perspective, Philario’s sixteenth-century Roman residence is a gathering of men of different ethnicities imbued with the values of the gentle class. Their honor, the hallmark of the gentle class, transcends their ethnicity. But their emulous display of honor is problematic. At all costs, these men, to maintain their standing in their social world, must defend their reputation for honorable conduct against derogation. In *Cymbeline*, this paper will argue, Shakespeare dramatizes the ethical problems posed by the honor code of the gentle class, problems further complicated by ethnic antagonism. As gentlemen rivals vying for honor, the Britain Posthumous must defend his reputation against the Roman Iachimo’s Italianate attack.

Presenter: Liam Thomas Daley (University of Maryland)

Title: “Report of Fashions in Proud Italy”: Queer Time Travel in *Richard II*

Abstract:

Two notable features of Shakespeare’s *Richard II* – its wistful medievalism and its characters’ dismay at Richard’s perceived effeminacy – collide in a passing, anachronistic reference to Italy early in the play. When Richard’s uncle York laments that the young king cares for nothing but “Report of fashions in proud Italy / Whose manners still our tardy-apish nation / Limp after in base imitation” (2.1.21-23), the play momentarily slips into a strange break in its temporal order. Whereas the historical Richard’s court of the 1390s was noted for its fashionable interest in France, the English craze for Italian culture would not begin in earnest for another century at least – too late for the real Richard II, but early enough to be “still” in progress when Shakespeare’s *Richard II* was first performed in the 1590s. This chronological whiplash of two-hundred years “queers” the moment in several senses. Not only would Richard’s over-interest in fashion have seemed unmanly to Elizabethan audiences, but scholars have shown how English conceptions of Italy in particular held associations of homoerotic behavior. But the moment is also “queer” according to medievalist Caroline Dinshaw’s conception of “queer time” – a sense of chronology that disrupts or confounds the orderly, linear sequence of past, present, and future. This brief moment in the play offers a key to understanding issues theoretical, formal, and social – from the difficulties of representing past chronologies on stage, to early modern England’s sense of national identity, both in relation to contemporary foreign culture and to its own historical past.

Presenter: Lauren Weindling (University of Toronto)

Title: Ennobling Love: Torquato Tasso’s *Aminta* and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*

Abstract:

A source text for Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labours Lost*, Tasso’s *Aminta* begins with a prologue from Cupid. In it, he complains that his mother, Venus, would have him spend all of his time “in royal courts, among the crowns and scepters, / and there she would that I spend all my strength” (Prologue 18-19). Only the “lesser aides,” he says, are typically permitted amongst the rustics of the pastoral country, but he will, in a show of his power, “flee to the woods and homes of common folk” (31-2). The play’s opening here suggests that romantic love is an ennobling force, one that is typically reserved for elite spaces but which could, in theory, ennoble all who are struck by Cupid’s arrow. This paper will explore the relationship between love, class, and power

in Shakespeare's play and its Italian forebear. It argues that *Love's Labours Lost* highlights the extent to which love, and especially rhetoric in service of love, is bound up with power. Love, knowledge or poetry, power, and wealth ultimately appear to be fungible goods; moreover, these goods may be negotiated and exchanged in the service of replicating the status quo. These are, as Tasso puts it in the conclusion of the *Aminta*, "not serious torment / but games of gentle scorn / and sweet refusals, and / affrays and quarrels, which cease / and yield to hearts rejoined in truce and peace" (5.1.154-8). Full-throated romantic love, if it exists, seems to exist beyond the confines of the play's comedy.