Renaissance Academic Drama and the Popular Stage

A virtual conference hosted by the University of St Andrews

11-12 June 2020

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Thursday 11 June

10:30 Opening remarks
Panel 1 – Rome on Academic and Popular Stages
Cristiano Ragni, (Università degli Studi di Torino), “‘Forsan quietos’: Religious Scepticism in William Gager’s and Christopher Marlowe’s Dido”

11:30 Break

12:00 Panel 2 – Greek Tragedy in the English Renaissance
Cressida Ryan (University of Oxford), “Christus Patiens as translation and performance”
Angelica Vedelago (Università degli Studi di Padova), “‘Pop’ Academia: The Cross-contamination Between Popular and Academic Drama in Thomas Watson’s Sophoclis Antigone”

13:00 Lunch

14:00 PERFORMANCE IN PRACTICE:
Perry Mills (The Edward’s Boys, Director), “Education, Youth and Nostalgia: Edward’s Boys Playing ‘Academically’”, with video excerpts from Dido Queen of Carthage (Marlowe), Wit and Science (Redford), Grobian’s Nuptials (May), Summer’s Last Will and Testament (Nashe), and When Paul’s Boys Met Edward’s Boys (Carwood/Mills)

15:00 Break

15:30 Panel 3 – Performing the Academic, Performing the Popular
Daniel Blank (Harvard University), “Acting Like Professionals: Academic Drama in Parts”
Isabel Dollar (University of St Andrews), “Ovid for Sale – Changeable and Exchangeable Bodies in Bellamy’s Iphis & Lyly’s Gallathea”
Elizabeth Sandis (Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, UoL), “Violas before and after Shakespeare: Cross-dressing drama in Italy and England”
17:00  Break

17:30  KEYNOTE LECTURE:  
Professor Laurie Maguire (University of Oxford), “Classical and Commercial Drama in Print in Sixteenth-Century England”

18:45  End of the first day

Friday 12 June

10:30  Panel 4 – The School of Drama: Didactic Values of Academic and Popular Plays
Orlagh Davies (University of St Andrews), “‘This comes of putting Girls to a Boarding-School’: female boarding schools on the seventeenth-century stage”
Neil Rhodes (University of St Andrews), “Two Versions of Prodigality in Sixteenth-Century Academic Drama: Acolastus, The Pilgrimage to Parnassus, and Love’s Labour’s Lost”
Lorna Wallace (University of Stirling), “The Educative Value of Dramatic Spectacle in Joseph Simons’ Theoctistus (1624)”

12:00  Break

12:30  PERFORMANCE IN PRACTICE:  
Professor Elisabeth Dutton (University of Fribourg), “Reflecting Narcissus: on filming an early modern student panto”. Screening of Narcissus (EDOX), followed by discussion with director Prof. Elisabeth Dutton.

13:30  Lunch

14:30  Panel 5 – Intersections of Popular and Academic Drama
Moira Donald (University of Exeter), “The chronology of cross-fertilisation. Coincidence or causality?”
Maddalena Repetto (Università degli Studi di Genova), “Inspiration and Imitation in Academic and Popular Drama: A Comparison between Nero and The Tragedy of Nero”
Harriet Archer (University of St Andrews), “Gorboduc on Fire: Pyropoetics and the Popular”

16:00  Break

16:30  KEYNOTE LECTURE:  
Professor Sarah Knight (University of Leicester), “Turning your library to a wardrobe”

17:45  Closing Remarks

18:00  End
LIST OF ABSTRACTS

Harriet Archer
University of St Andrews
“Gorboduc on Fire: Pyropoetics and the Popular”

It has long been recognised that Norton and Sackville’s Inns of Court play Gorboduc (1562) stages a struggle between modes of political authority, dramatising the limitations of absolute sovereignty and seemingly advocating for parliamentary rule. Here I will ask, how does the trope of fire, and the behaviours it both stands for and elicits, inform this debate? Part of an imaginative historiographical tradition which has come to be critically associated with the heavy elements, water and earth, through its entanglements with Elizabethan and Jacobean chorographies, Gorboduc is nevertheless shot through with fire and fire language. From repeated allusions to the myth of Phaeton, the hot-headed son of Apollo whose joyride in his father’s sun chariot caused widespread environmental devastation, to an array of incendiary props, fire pervades the play’s imaginary, and its theorisation of civil discord, in ways which have so far gone unremarked. This paper suggests that attention to this feature on both page and stage, informed by the critical methods of ecomaterialism, allows affinities to emerge between the elite Inns drama and more public-facing forms of writing. In particular, I will discuss the play in relation to the genre of the fire pamphlet, and the ways in which such ephemeral publications negotiate the shared responsibilities of elites and commons in response to catastrophe.

Daniel Blank
Harvard University
“Acting Like Professionals: Academic Drama inParts”

In a 1592 letter to the Oxford academic and theologian John Rainolds, the academic playwright William Gager defended student theatrical performance by emphasizing its frugality and lack of skill. In comparison to professional actors, he claimed: “we differ from them alltogether in the manner bothe of settinge owte Playes, and of actinge them…thay acted theire Playes in an other sorte then we doe, or can, or well knowe howe.” In laboring to keep his theatrical endeavors distinct from those of the commercial stage, Gager paints a picture of a slapdash performance tradition, in which little care is devoted to the rehearsal process or the final production. The manuscript record, however, suggests otherwise, and this paper calls Gager’s characterization of university drama, as well as his distinction between academic and commercial theatrical performance, into question through an analysis of four university parts that survive in the Harvard library. These documents have been used to highlight differences between academic and commercial practices, but I argue instead that certain features of these manuscripts, as well as their very existence, point to an unrecognized affinity between academic and commercial ventures. These surviving parts provide insight into academic drama’s professionalism, rather than its lack thereof.
Orlagh Davies  
University of St Andrews  
“‘This comes of putting Girls to a Boarding-School’: female boarding schools on the seventeenth-century stage”

Academic drama, when performed within the confines of Oxbridge, is a male-dominated theatrical realm. What happens then if we look at female pedagogical spaces and how they were approached on the early modern popular stage? Avoiding such canonical Shakespearean drama as The Taming of the Shrew and Love’s Labour’s Lost, this paper will discuss the depiction of female boarding schools on the stage across the seventeenth century in the anonymous The Wit of a Woman (1604), William Cavendish and Jame Shirley’s The Variety (1649), Thomas D’Urfey’s Love for Money, or, the Boarding School (1696), and the 1617 masque Cupid’s Banishment. It will examine how these dramatic representations compare to contemporary prose discourses on the ideal set-up for female boarding schools and the teachers within them. Depressing yet inevitable, these plays depict useless female teachers and students; however, the performance of Cupid’s Banishment before Queen Anne at Greenwich by a group of school-girls from Ladies Hall shows a real-life female pedagogical triumph. This paper proposes to be an intriguing counterpoint to other papers at this conference, exploring the depictions of explicitly pedagogical institutions as performed on the popular stage.

Isabel Dollar  
University of St Andrews  
“Ovid for Sale – Changeable and Exchangeable Bodies in Bellamy’s Iphis & Lyly’s Gallathea”

Originating in Ovid’s Metamorphoses, the story of Iphis and Ianthe offers a transformation across the sexes – from woman to man through unwavering love. This story is adapted continuously through the Renaissance, but notably, it is adapted for the stage by two playwrights in two different playing conditions: John Lyly adapts this story, among others, for the popular stage his 1588 comedy Gallathea; and Henry Bellamy follows in 1621 with his academic drama Iphis. In both adaptations, these playwrights stress the changeability of bodies – physical forms are altered by the transformative power of love. As R.S. White observes in “Metamorphosis by Love” the body undergoing physical transformation defined the very experience of love, not only within Gallathea but in the drama to follow. I argue that what makes Lyly’s adaption of Iphis and Ianthe unique is not its depiction of changeable bodies, but exchangeable bodies – as Lyly depicts the bodies of women and boys as sexualized, commodified, and traded. Performed at time where the children’s playing companies had license to “take up,” or essentially kidnap, talented boy performers for their troupes, the exchangeable bodies within Gallathea mirror the performers’ experience as the property of the playhouse.
Moira Donald
University of Exeter
“The chronology of cross-fertilisation. Coincidence or causality?”

While the extent to which the universities were involved in staging non-classical contemporary drama has been noted by scholars,1 with the notable exception of Legge’s Richardus Tertius, the influence of Latin plays on Court and public drama has attracted little contemporary attention. Yet, as noted over a century ago, such influence would be unsurprising, given that ‘the public theatre’s playwrights and their aristocratic patrons were mostly university-educated men, whose interest in the stage was awakened and shaped by …the Latin plays that were put on regularly …at Oxford or Cambridge’.2 Plays staged in Latin/Greek in the Universities and Inns of Court, and those performed in English at Court, in private houses and in the public theatres occupied different linguistic territory and physical spaces, yet they frequently shared themes and sources, as well as writers, patrons, actors and audience members.3 This paper attempts to quantify the extent of thematic commonality between academic and popular plays (including the myriad ‘lost’ and anonymous plays) and to question whether such commonality was the consequence of chance, or conscious imitation.

Jillian Luke
University of Edinburgh
“Friends, Romans, Crocodiles: Roman masculinity on the English stage”

What did it mean to be a manly Roman man? And how were Roman men represented by early modern English dramatists? This paper will address these questions through close readings in a variety of Latin sources and three seventeenth century English plays about Cleopatra: Shakespeare’s Anthony and Cleopatra; Dryden’s All for Love; and Beaumont and Massinger’s The False One. In the first part of this paper I will make the case that pudor -- a sense of honour, and / or a sense of shame -- is the central domestic and martial virtue for Roman men. In the second part, I will explore how early modern dramatists centralise pudor in their representations of Julius Caesar and Mark Anthony. Throughout the paper, I will argue that to be a manly Roman man is to be a blusher, arguing that it is only through understanding the seemingly contradictory meanings of the blush in its classical and early modern contexts that we can understand how early modern English audiences understood Roman values, society, and masculinity.

Touching on topics as diverse as race, empire, power, and gender, this paper will revivify the blushes of Julius Caesar and Anthony, and offer a fresh insight into the representation of Roman masculinity on the early modern stage.

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3 Working in tandem on separate projects on English Renaissance translators and the early modern theatre led me to investigate the question of cross-fertilisation.
Cristiano Ragni  
Università degli Studi di Torino  
“‘Forsan quietos’: Religious Scepticism in William Gager’s and Christopher Marlowe’s Dido”

Dido’s journey from ancient Rome to Elizabethan England was long and multifaceted. In his Aeneid, Virgil drew upon the historical Dido to shape his own fictional queen, who tragically fell in love with Aeneas, Rome’s pious hero. The contradictions resulting from Virgil’s epic were first challenged by Ovid’s “counter-epic”, the Heroides, where a heart-broken Dido resentfully curses an “impious” Aeneas for abandoning her. The adherence to either of these two versions would characterise all medieval and early modern refashinings of this tale. This resulted in a huge and varied amount of material for all the English poets and playwrights who looked back at classical Rome and its myths and legends for inspiration during the Renaissance.

In this paper, two early modern versions of Dido’s story will be discussed: William Gager’s Dido, an academic play written in Latin in 1583, and Christopher Marlowe’s more famous Dido, Queene of Carthage (1586-1587). Despite their undeniable adherence to the Virgilian epic, Gager’s and Marlowe’s plays will be shown to share a common demystifying spirit, which unmistakably reminds of Ovid’s Heroides. Particularly, I will underscore how both plays reveal a general scepticism towards the actual influence of the supernatural world on human destinies and, in the light of this, I will propose possible connections between the two.

Maddalena Repetto  
Università degli Studi di Genova  
“Inspiration and Imitation in Academic and Popular Drama: A Comparison between Nero and The Tragedy of Nero”

The academic and popular drama of the early modern period are often regarded as two wholly separate theatrical experiences separated by an ideological gap that could be only partially bridged by the University Wits and the birth of Elizabethan theatre. This paper seeks to contribute to disproving this misconception by comparing two early modern plays that deal with the same historical matter but were composed in different languages and for different audiences.

The first play, Nero, penned by Matthew Gwinne in 1603, is a monumental retelling of the life and reign of the Roman Emperor Nero. Written in Latin, the play was supposed to be performed at St John’s College, Oxford, but was ultimately rejected and relegated to print. The second play, The Tragedy of Nero, published in 1624 but probably composed around 1619, is an anonymous vernacular drama that limits its scope to the final years of Nero’s life and was probably moderately successful among popular audiences.

By comparing these two plays in order to highlight the covert cooperation between two ostensibly separate genres, I argue that, despite the radically different circumstances of their composition, the academic Nero is indebted to the commercial theatre for several reasons, while at the same time The Tragedy of Nero borrows several elements from its predecessor.
Neil Rhodes  
*University of St Andrews*  
“Two Versions of Prodigality in Sixteenth-Century Academic Drama: *Acolastus*, *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus*, and *Love’s Labour’s Lost*”

As a warning against misspent youth the prodigal son story was a staple of sixteenth-century moral literature. Arguably the most popular academic play of the period, Willem de Volder’s *Acolastus* is a prodigal son drama. But academic plays designed to assist Latin language learning fostered their own prodigality in the form of rhetorical *copia*, something that is evident in the profusion of synonyms in the English translation of *Acolastus*. Later plays respond to this double sense of prodigality in different ways. The St Johns’ play *The Pilgrimage to Parnassus* presents us with a prodigal father, whose copious praise of literary study only directs his young charges towards penury, while on the popular stage Shakespeare turned the genre inside out in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*. Here a group of young men prefer academic study to sex, but the riot of rhetorical prodigality that results from this apparently sober choice shows us that their real duty lies in romantic love.

Cressida Ryan  
*University of Oxford*  
“*Christus Patiens* as translation and performance”

This paper seeks to examine Grotius’ Latin translation of the Χριστος Πασχων in its Early Modern context as an act of the Latin reception of Greek, as well as the Christian reception of Greek tragedy, as a play for both page and stage. Translating the Greek original into Latin, Grotius faced the same challenges that translators of Greek tragedies did. These include how to model a Latin thought world that both made sense in a Humanist context, but also reflected their understanding of the Greek cultural psyche. With *Christus Patiens* we see a further layer of Christian history. This paper examines the translation choices which underpin the play in terms of its representation of the Passion (with reference to translations of the Gospels) and in relation to translations of the Greek tragedies from which it borrows. How different is the Latin of *Christus Patiens* from the Latin of the *Bacchae*, for example, and what about the plays makes it so? The context of the *Christus Patiens* as a mystery play, for example, also performed and thought about in the context of other religious tragedy such as *Samson Agonistes*, is relevant to our understanding of its language.

Elizabeth Sandis  
*Institute of English Studies, School of Advanced Study, UoL*  
“*Violas before and after Shakespeare: Cross-dressing drama in Italy and England*”

In this paper I identify a series of comedies performed at Cambridge in which university students try their hand at adapting Italian models into Latin. These plays have much in common, not least overlapping plotlines in which a female character appropriates male costume to act the part of a young man or boy, before being discovered and having ‘her’ identity revealed. In each case, the dramatist has drawn on the homosocial atmosphere of college life and the tradition of the all-male cast for comic effect. The phenomenon of double cross-dressing (men dressed as women dressed as men) has been made especially famous by
Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night*, but its popularity at the English universities pre-dates its appearance on the London stage. Demonstrating the aims of academic drama in the early modern period, I show how the entertainment value of these university comedies relies heavily on the manipulation of Classical models, converting learning into laughs and testing the boundaries of propriety at the Oxford and Cambridge colleges.

Angelica Vedelago
Università degli Studi di Padova
“‘Pop’ Academia: The Cross-contamination Between Popular and Academic Drama in Thomas Watson’s *Sophoclis Antigone*”

Thomas Watson’s *Sophoclis Antigone* (1581) has been defined as ‘the most intellectually challenging item in the entire repertoire of academic drama’. This definition appears particularly apt if one considers its structure: the centrepiece of the work, i.e., the Latin translation of the Greek play, is surrounded by additional material authored by Watson such as a prologue by Nature and a series of allegorical figures, all elements that are usually to be found in the tradition of the so called ‘popular’ drama as opposed to ‘humanist’ drama. By focussing on Watson’s additions to his translation, I will argue that *Sophoclis Antigone* challenges conventional dichotomies between popular and humanist theatre and rather exemplifies the cross-contamination between these two subgenres. Lying between the waning tradition of morality plays and the incipient experience of the popular theatre, Watson’s *Antigone* can be considered a transition play, thereby questioning the idea that academic drama was a sort of self-contained unit immune from external influences.

Lorna Wallace
University of Stirling
“The Educative Value of Dramatic Spectacle in Joseph Simons’ *Theoctistus* (1624)”

This paper will examine Joseph Simons’ *Theoctistus* (1624), written and performed at the Jesuit English College in St. Omer, France. While Jesuit Colleges were geographically removed from England, they generally functioned like the Universities of Oxford and Cambridge and the Inns of Court. All of these institutions prioritised the humanistic learning of ancient languages and the study of rhetoric through Greek and Roman historians, poets, and politicians. Like at the academic institutions in England, Jesuit Colleges carried this training through to drama. Plays at the University of Oxford, for instance William Gager’s *Dido* (1583) and Matthew Gwinne’s *Nero* (1603), combined erudition with entertainment in order to ensure the didacticism was absorbed. Jesuit theatre also implemented this, using spectacle to enhance the educative value of plays. While Simons’ *Theoctistus* was geographically distant from English academic theatre and the popular stage, it features influence from both. This paper will argue that *Theoctistus* is imbued with didacticism about maintaining virtuous duty at a political court, much like the didacticism of English University drama. However, Simons goes further than his academic counterparts and professional English dramatists in his presentation of dramatic spectacle to convey his moral message.

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