



Centro di Ricerca Skenè
Ricerche interdisciplinari sul teatro



**CLASSICAL RECEPTIONS
IN EARLY MODERN ENGLISH DRAMA
2017 PRIN (VERONA, VALLÉE D'AOSTE, GENOA, PISA)
2ND INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM**

**10-11 JANUARY 2023
Verona University**

10 January:

Chair: Emanuel Stelzer

Sources: Visible and Invisible

10.30-11.00 (9.30-10.00 UK): Colin Burrow

11.00-11.30 (10.00-10.30 UK): Silvia Bigliuzzi – Carla Suthren

Break: 11.30-11.40 (10.30-10.40 UK)

Sources: Hyper-Visible

11.40-12.10 (10.40-11.10 UK): Jane Raisch

12.10-12.40 (11.10-11.40 UK): Alessandro Grilli

Discussion: 12.40-13.10 (11.40-12.10 UK)

Chair: Cristiano Ragni

Translations/Adaptations

15.30-16.00 (14.30-15.00 UK): Giovanna Di Martino

16.00-16.30 (15.00-15.30 UK): Francesco Morosi

Break: 16.30-16.40 (15.30-15.40 UK)

Similarities

16.40-17.10 (15.40-16.10 UK): Jane Ganberg

17.10-17.40 (16.10-16.40 UK): Anna Hartmann

Discussion: 17.40-18.10 (16.40-17.10 UK)

11 January:

Chair: Carlo Bajetta

Canon

10.30-11.00 (9.30-10.00 UK): Domenico Lovascio

11.00-11.30 (10.00-10.30 UK): Sarah Knight

Break: 11.30-11.40 (10.30-10.40 UK)

Institutions

11.40-12.10 (10.40-11.10 UK): Tania Demetriou

12.10-12.40 (11.10-11.40 UK): Fiona Macintosh

Discussion & Final Remarks: 12.40-13.30 (11.40-12.30 UK)

Abstracts

Silvia Bigliuzzi – Carla Suthern (University of Verona)

Taking Seneca for Granted in Early Modern Drama

This paper takes as its provocation Emrys Jones' astute observation that what appears 'Senecan' to us may not have seemed so to early modern audiences, who 'may well have taken for granted the qualities we call "Senecan", but have been all the more alert to those other qualities which were unfamiliar to them', including 'the "Greek" ones' (*Origins of Shakespeare*, 106). A case in point is Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh's *Jocasta*, performed at Gray's Inn for the Christmas revels of 1566-7, which advertises itself as 'A Tragedie written in Greke by *Euripides*, translated and digested into Acte [sic] by George Gascoygne, and Francis Kinwelmershe'. The translating and digesting, however, had already been done by Lodovico Dolce, whose *Giocasta* (1549), an Italian adaptation of Euripides' *Phoenician Women*, forms the direct source for the English play. To judge by Anglophone criticism, what Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh found and responded to in Dolce was a 'Senecan adaptation' of Euripides (Miola, 2002); this seems like a reasonable claim to make, but what does it actually mean? More precisely, Stephen Orgel has recently claimed that *Giocasta* is 'heavily reliant on Seneca's *Phoenissae*' (2021), which again seems likely – except that Seneca's *Phoenissae* bears very little relation to Euripides', and the scene which Dolce borrows most closely from Seneca is actually from his *Oedipus*. Dolce was certainly steeped in Seneca, whose complete works he also

translated – but it is for precisely this reason that, heeding Jones, we should be alert to ‘those other qualities’ which he appears to be deliberately activating. Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh, I suggest, were in fact attuned to the ‘other qualities’ which they perceived in Dolce, and which they associated (rightly or wrongly) with Euripides. One of the methodological issues at stake here is that Latin leaves finger-prints on English verse in a way that Greek does not, even where we know that English writers were reading Greek texts. Re-thinking what we understand as noticeably ‘Senecan’ from an early modern perspective may allow space for the unfamiliar to make itself heard.

Colin Burrow (Oxford)

Invisible Books: The Things We Don’t Call ‘Sources’

Books onstage in Shakespeare tend to be provocatively unidentifiable, or serve as props for dialogue between characters. The naming of sources onstage in early modern drama tends to happen when someone who is either a pedant or a plagiarist is either boasting about their rudimentary learning or having it exposed. Plays with clear classical ‘sources’ typically do not explicitly identify them, and rely instead on readers and audiences to recognise parallels and divergences. What does this tell us about early modern reading and writing practices, and how should it inform critical practice? Recent work on relationships between early modern drama and the classics typically explores how Greek and Latin writing provides intellectual frameworks as well as invisible structures and forms that may underlie early modern drama. This invisibility is in keeping with early modern reticence about ‘sources’, but (as this paper will argue) work still needs to be done to develop a vocabulary and a set of criteria for persuasively making such identifications.

Tania Demetriou (Cambridge)

Classics without patronage

This paper considers the work of George Chapman as an author whose engagement with the classics, particularly the Greek poetry of Homer, was profoundly conditioned by the institution of the theatre. After briefly demonstrating the enormous, if unacknowledged debt of Chapman’s interpretive practice to modes of tonal attunement and satirical delineation developed in the course of his career as a playwright, I will reflect on early modern England’s commercial theatre as an institution that had the capacity to foster an approach to classical antiquity that stood at variance from scholarly orthodoxy, from a writer who was debarred from the scholarly establishment by his social situation. Like other writers who earned their living by writing for the theatre, Chapman has left an imprint in the archival record primarily through becoming embroiled in disputes around debts. I suggest that his financial entanglements and the writer’s life that they allow us to glimpse provide a significant perspective on his creative trajectory and the classical scholarship that was its product. Chapman’s circumstances made him materially dependent on the commercial theatre and therefore – in his view – frustratingly, perennially unable to concentrate on the uniquely inspired classical exegesis he was destined for. But though he viewed the theatre as a burden or hindrance, it was this new cultural arena, this new possibility of making a living out of one’s pen, that made it possible for him to have a classical career at all. But the theatre did not only enable creative careers such as Chapman’s; it also made possible an intellectual independence when approaching the classics whose distinctive potential is perhaps best in evidence in the example of Chapman. I will end by trying to put this early modern ‘case study’ into conversation with recent critical work on classics and class, which has mainly focussed on later periods.

Giovanna Di Martino (UCL)

Early Modern Translation and English Drama

The present paper discusses the issue of classical reception in early English drama from the perspective of translation theory and practice. Indeed, translation is not just one of the multiple ways in which early modern English drama interacted with, studied, appropriated, and recreated ancient

Greek (and Roman) drama; as a practice that, before it was ever channeled into strict and binary oppositions between ‘foreignisation’ and ‘domestication’, integrated and reworked sources *across* time whilst situating them *within* a specific time and place, translation disrupted textual, temporal and geographical linearities and combined ancient and early modern sources alike. It is for this reason that the analysis of an early modern translation (*largo sensu*) of one or multiple ancient as well as modern sources necessitates as well as includes a wider discourse on the relationship between ancient theory and performance and early modern theatre theories and practices. Furthermore, as target texts for the stage (if only ideally), translations of dramatic texts possess an inner dramaturgy: namely, the creative (re)arrangement of the dramatic meanings and structures that may be found in the sources onto which the translation is grafted. This paper will thus discuss the multiple theoretical possibilities that putting translation theories and practices at the centre of discourses around classical reception in early modern English drama might open up and substantiate the discussion with some examples taken from Lady Jane Lumley’s translation of *Iphigenia at Aulis* (ca. 1557).

Alessandro Grilli (University of Pisa)

The Flaunting of Influence: Glamorous Models and the Liberty of Creation

Not unlike the rest of his *œuvre*, Ben Jonson’s comedies display countless references to literary predecessors. However, the aims and methods of his intertextual dialogue are very complex, encompassing meticulous rewriting as well as a wider pursuit of legitimacy in the eyes of his more educated audience. This last impulse is particularly clear in Jonson’s appropriation of Aristophanes, which appears to be limited to the evocation of a prestigious figure rather than based on an in-depth dialogue with the texts. This example should not lead to conclude that Greek models do not contribute in any way to the shaping of the EM comic code; on the contrary, it should help realize how their contribution unfolds in a rather indirect form, not entirely free from occasional misreadings and misinterpretations. I will try and explain some of these misinterpretations as the effect of the triangular structure entailed in the appropriation strategies: the oldest and most prestigious models, such as the Greek texts newly ‘discovered’ and made accessible to the educated readership throughout Europe, are thought of and revered as pillars of literary excellence, even though – more often than not – their assimilation is substantially mediated by more familiar Latin models: this is precisely the case with Aristophanes, whom Jonson absorbs first and foremost through the mediation of Horace’s *Satires*. The Greek classics do indeed exert an influence of the utmost importance, but, as I will argue, in much more complex terms than we are accustomed to recognize in the practices of direct intertextual dialogue. However, even if Jonson’s reception of Aristophanes seems to rely quite rarely on a deep knowledge of the Greek texts, it is precisely thanks to the flaunted credentials provided by this indirect and superficial appropriation that the EM playwright can attain his creative freedom and innovate so radically the code of Renaissance comedy. It is not so much the influences actually operating, as those declared and exhibited to allow the modern author to achieve truly original results – just as the ill-conceived idea of reaching the Indies had allowed Columbus, a few decades before, to discover a completely new world.

Jane Ganberg (Cambridge)

‘Of gentle and ignoble, base and kings’: the Transformations of the Homeric Simile on the Early Modern English Stage

The simile is a fundamental element of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. Offsetting the scenes of war and destruction by those of peace, the simile, praised by such early modern students of Homer as Jean de Sponde and George Chapman, opens a window into a world beyond the battlefield: it depicts the day-to-day activities of housewives and reapers contrasting them with those of the warriors. But can it be considered a mode of thought that goes beyond the epic narrative? Early modern drama on the Trojan War – George Peele’s *The Arraignment of Paris* (1584), Thomas Heywood’s *The Iron Age* (1632), James Shirley’s *The Contention of Ajax and Ulysses* (1659), Elkanah Settle’s *The Siege of Troy*

(1707) – clearly embraces these juxtapositions: in these plays, the common, non-heroic Greeks and Trojans are implicitly or explicitly compared with their canonical ‘betters’. These comparisons highlight alternative paradigms or patterns of behaviour, helping the playwrights scrutinise and occasionally critique the commended epic models as well as the widespread Renaissance practice of relying on such classical *exempla* for moral guidance. What the paper wants to probe is whether it is productive to take these recurrent parallels as a specific response to the Homeric simile rather than as variations of the ‘servants’ subplot; whether thinking with and through comparisons is something inherent to the Trojan myth and, thus, appearing independently in its various iterations; and, finally, whether this might provide a case-study of how classical forms and tropes are unconsciously received alongside plots and characters.

Anna Hartmann (Cambridge)

Finding Shakespeare, or, The Third Set of Twins in The Comedy of Errors

I will propose that *The Comedy of Errors*, and in particular the way Shakespeare doubles Plautus’s doubles, dramatizes the danger formulated in early modern imitation theory, of becoming a mere simulacrum of the imitated author, or, to put it closer to the language of the play itself, of losing oneself in the pursuit of another. Just as his protagonists are confounded by their doubles until they eventually find each other and, in doing so, find themselves, so does Shakespeare enter the mirror cabinet of imitation and emerge as an imitative author.

Sarah Knight (University of Leicester)

Ghost Kings

I am interested in how three dramatists working in English in the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries engaged with plot devices and character types first encountered onstage in Aeschylus. The plays and critical writing of Fulke Greville (1554-1628), William Alexander (1577-1640) and John Dryden (1631-1700) variously illuminate how these authors represented elements of ancient tragedy in both theory and practice. I will discuss Dryden’s critical prefaces of 1679-80, Alexander’s *Monarchicke Tragedies* (1607) and Greville’s *Alaham* and *Mustapha*, and a central intertext will be Aeschylus’ *Persians*. I will consider how these authors’ engagement with motifs and characters originating in Aeschylus was informed by a range of pedagogical and readerly factors, especially textual transmission and earlier sixteenth-century publication history (e.g. which editions and Latin translations of Aeschylus were available when); what access the dramatists had to commentaries on his plays both as students and as later readers; and a keen awareness of ancient and continental theatre as much as vernacular English developments. Finally, I will investigate how the figure of the ‘Ghost King’ in Aeschylus, Seneca and these later dramatists might help us think through some of the different ways in which classical plays could be absorbed, questioned and represented on the early modern English stage.

Domenico Lovascio (University of Genoa)

Fletcher’s Classical (Re)sources

The main focus of my strand of the PRIN research has been on John Fletcher’s relationship with the classics both as concerns his Roman plays specifically and more generally as regards his engagement with classical material in his very large canon of around fifty plays. In this paper, I will first outline what I have identified as Fletcher’s *modus operandi* when it comes to his engagement with the classics, and then I will try to tease out some larger potential implications of the tendencies that I have seen emerge from my examination of Fletcher’s oeuvre. Fletcher clearly preferred non-grammar-school, Late Antiquity writings (and even contemporary vernacular translations or rewritings) to the texts that represented the golden age of classical literature and history and, when he mixed those texts together, he regularly bestowed more importance upon vernacular rather than classical sources. Fletcher’s approach seems to voice a certain perspective on the classics, namely a sense of detachment, suspicion, and scepticism towards everything that had to do with classical

antiquity and especially the trans-temporal value of classical models. These findings will be then considered in the light of the most recent theoretical treatment of source studies in an early modern context, namely John Drakakis's *Shakespeare's Resources*. While the concept of "resources" proves to be helpful to reflect on Fletcher's use of the classics, Drakakis's insistence on recuperating the importance of the oral circulation of culture, of the power of memory, and of the workings of the unconscious (while very effective in the case of Shakespeare) seems to be only partly useful in the light of Fletcher's higher authorial self-awareness. Hence, the paper finally suggests that perhaps a one-size-fits-all theoretical approach may not be particularly productive in dealing with discussions of early modern English playwrights' engagement with classical resources.

Fiona Macintosh (Oxford)

Medea and the theatrical sublime, 1750-1800

In this paper, Macintosh explores Medea's connections with both the baroque and the eighteenth-century sublime, and her concomitant failure to conform to generic and institutional norms in this period. Noverre's *ballet d'action, Médée et Jason* was pivotal not simply because it was staged throughout Europe in the last part of the century, but also because it provided a radically different model for tragic drama. It was this new kind of tragedy, informed no less by Euripides than it was by ideas of the theatrical sublime, that enabled Medea's return to serious spoken drama in the playhouses of Europe and the Americas in the following century.

Francesco Morosi (University of Pisa)

Uncontrolled Anachronisms. Form and Ideology in the Reception of Ancient Comic Texts

Whenever a text is 'received' by a new author in a different era a process of change is triggered. To fit into its new context, a text may need to undergo sometimes radical changes both in form and in content. This is even more the case in comedy, a genre that relies constitutionally on a high degree of formal self-consciousness and extra-textual relevance to current events. For a modern author interested in reworking an ancient comedy, one obvious strategy to deal with such features is to modify and adapt: meta-literary as well as socio-political references can be updated to the new context, thus producing what we may call controlled anachronisms. Within this framework, this paper aims at observing a less visible, however equally relevant, literary phenomenon—*uncontrolled* anachronisms in the reception of ancient comic texts, especially in the realm of ideology. Sometimes, the process of ideological adaptation and update of an ancient comedy can prove accidental. In other words, the author may well be as accurate as possible in reproducing a text, or a scene, but the original ideological function of that text could be significantly distorted, or even overturned. This is the case, for instance, of the representation of cultural, literary, and performative proficiency in ancient and early modern comedy: both genres feature prominently characters who are culturally inept; however, such exact dramaturgical and formal correspondence produces opposite ideological dynamics—in ancient comedy, cultural incompetence is depicted as a positive political aptitude, whereas in modern comedy it is a clearly negative sign that leads to socio-cultural marginalisation. Although the comic form does not differ, its ideological results are poles apart. This paper will discuss some cases of such uncontrolled anachronisms, and will try to explain how, and why, this phenomenon can happen.

Jane Raisch (University of York)

Gower and Greek Romance in Pericles

There may be no other play (in part) by Shakespeare as self-consciously interested in its own source material as *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*. Featuring the fourteenth-century poet, John Gower (whose version of the ancient romance, 'Apollonius, Prince of Tyre,' is a primary source for the play's story), as a character/chorus in the text, the play stages the story of its titular protagonist by also staging that story's narrative origins. By overtly framing the action of *Pericles* as a retelling at least twice over (Gower-as-chorus opens the play by acknowledging *his* adaptation of an even older tradition), the play locates its own conditions of possibility in the transhistorical and cross-cultural reception of

ancient narrative. In this way, my paper will approach *Pericles* as not simply an individual example of the dramatic reception of ancient narrative but also as self-consciously responding to, and even theorizing, that reception. In part, I propose that *Pericles* exploits the self-consciousness already characteristic of ancient romance to examine not just the nature of storytelling but also the critical and historical nature of classical reception. Gower – who ostensibly makes the romance ‘stageable’ by narrating its leaps of time and space – draws attention to the same leaps of time and space that necessarily informed the early modern reception of ancient literature. Through this connection, *Pericles* invites its audiences and readers to view the work of reception as governed by the same acts of imaginative and speculative world-making as romance itself.