

Bergen Shakespeare Network Conference
21-23 October 2009
Salle des Colloques, CNRS, 1919 route de Mende, 34000 Montpellier

‘Framing and Reframing Shakespeare: History, Theory, Performance’

Participants

Charles Armstrong (University of Bergen, Norway)
Kent Cartwright University of Maryland, USA)
Fernando Cioni Università degli studi, Firenze, Italy)
Jean-Christophe Mayer (University of Montpellier, France)
Svenn-Arve Myklebost (University of Bergen, Norway)
Goran Stanivukovic (Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Canada)
Susanne Wofford (New York University, USA)

Programme

Wednesday 21 October

9.30 Registration and opening welcomes

Jean-Pierre Chanderler, Co-Director of the Institut de Recherche sur la Renaissance, l’Age Classique et les Lumières (UMR 5186 du CNRS)

10.15 Concepts of framing

Stuart Sillars (University of Bergen, Norway)

11.00 Susanne Wofford (New York University, USA)

Hymen and the Gods on Stage in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* and Italian Pastoral

1.00 Lunch

3.00 Svenn-Arve Myklebost (University of Bergen, Norway)

‘By whatever name...’

4.00 Charles Armstrong (University of Bergen, Norway)

A Master’s Monument: Shakespeare’s Sonnets in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats

Thursday 22 October

10.00 Kent Cartwright(University of Maryland, USA)

Substitutes and Revenants in Shakespeare’s Comedies

11.00 Break

11.30 Fernando Cioni (Università degli studi, Firenze, Italy)
Reframing Shakespeare in Nineteenth-century Productions: critical and performative heritage

1.00 Lunch

3.00 Jean-Christophe Mayer (University of Montpellier, France)
Shakespeare's Commonplacing Readers

Evening (time to be announced) Conference Dinner in town, La Brasserie des Arts

Friday 23 October

10.00 Goran Stanivukovic (Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada)
Framing Futures in Shakespeare

11.30 Concluding discussion

1.00 Lunch

'Framing and Reframing Shakespeare: History, Theory, Performance'

In *Framing the Sign*, Jonathan Culler privileges the term *frame* over *context* (ix). Culler states that framing a work of literature implies literary analysis whereby the agency of the critic determines the meaning of that work, whereas context is something that is already given. While frame invites the interpretations of complexities separate from the surrounding space in which the work of literature exists, context directs us "to slip back into the model it proposes"; it thus simplifies analysis because it presumes that some of the meaning in the work of art is already known.

What does it mean, then, for Shakespeare critics to approach their subject not by contextualizing it, not by looking to recognize and document in Shakespeare something that shades into his literary world, but to redirect their analysis towards *framing Shakespeare*? That is, to analyze Shakespeare through critical habits, discursive trends, institutional mechanisms, values of aesthetic judgments, philosophical practices, performative potential.

In particular, this conference will explore what might be termed the founding parents of Shakespeare criticism – those eminent Victorians who established practices of scholarship, editing and critical reading who, though long overlooked, may nonetheless be seen as essential forces in defining and directing the work of subsequent students and writers.

Abstracts

A Master's Monument: Shakespeare's Sonnets in the Poetry of W. B. Yeats

Charles I. Armstrong (University of Bergen)

In her recent study *Our Secret Discipline: Yeats and Lyric Form* (2007), Helen Vendler has stressed the importance of taking the formal structures of W. B. Yeats' poetry seriously. If her analyses occasionally seem overwrought in all their technical detail, she nevertheless forcefully argues that 'technique was never, for Yeats, without conceptual meaning' (153). But the actual conceptual meanings she brings forth are often less than convincing – particularly so in the case of Yeats' appropriation of the Shakespearean sonnet. Building on her hefty tome on *The Art of Shakespeare's Sonnets* (1997), Vendler concisely pinpoints both accords and discords in the Irishman's handling of the form, arguing that it was precisely 'because of its centrality to English literature' that 'the sonnet compelled from Yeats both his literary allegiance and his nationalist obedience' (147). This paper will try to provide more nuance to the simplified, nation-oriented reading Vendler gives of the Yeats-Shakespeare relation, linking Yeats' experiments back not only to the formal precedent of significant nineteenth century precursors (such as Wordsworth and Hopkins) but also to his early engagement with a Shakespearean ideology of Englishness in his own *On Baile's Strand* (1904).

Substitutes and Revenants in Shakespeare's Comedies

Kent Cartwright (University of Maryland)

This paper 'reframes' Shakespeare by arguing that, if Shakespeare's tragedies and histories have been especially associated with aspects of early modernity, then the comedies can be aligned with more atavistic, even medieval qualities. The argument will proceed in two respects. First, it will suggest the importance of substitution in Shakespeare comedies, the way that objects, animals, and other characters can stand in for a particular character – with reference to *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Measure for Measure*. Substitution suggests values rather different from autonomous subjectivity, values that are increasingly being discussed in terms of the interpersonal and the intersubjective. Such notions of the self's relationship to others and to community recall pre-modern worldviews. Second, the paper will discuss the figure of the revenant (someone who returns from the dead) as a special instance of substitution. Revenants

evoke pre-Reformation, Catholic, and medieval values at odds with Protestantism's contempt for ghosts and derogation of Purgatory. But Shakespeare uses the metaphor of return from the dead pointedly and recurrently in his comedies, often with the effect of a character acquiring a special vividness and charisma from having 'returned.' Revenants will be discussed in *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Much Ado about Nothing*. The overall thrust of this interest in atavistic elements is to suggest the layered or sedimented nature of literary form and to find ways of bridging discussions of cultural history and of genre.

Reframing Shakespeare in Nineteenth-century Productions: a critical and performative heritage

Fernando Cioni (University of Florence)

Shakespeare's reception since the Folio follows a twofold perspective: on the one hand the rise of the modern editors and the modern editing, on the other hand the use and re-use that the plays underwent in the playhouses, mainly with the rising of the theatre managers. If the editors, since Rowe, had the merit of producing a Shakespeare on the page as much accurate, and "coherent", as possible, the actors and the theatre managers reinvented Shakespeare, putting his plays in a different frame, that of the stage. During the late Eighteenth century, throughout the Nineteenth century, i.e. from Romantic to Victorian theatre, there was a proliferation of non-scholarly editions – or better of editions that have never been considered for a Variorum edition – that range from performance editions to souvenir editions, which meant to represent on the page the Shakespeare on the stage. The great Nineteenth century actors, such as John Philip Kemble, William Charles Macready, Edmund Kean, Charles Kean, and Henry Irving made up their own Shakespeare, framing, and reframing his plays according to theatre practice.

The paper will explore these theatre editions, focusing on the use and re-use of Shakespeare, on the practice of adapting the texts to that particular historical and cultural context. The paper will also explore how this particular way of framing and re-framing Shakespeare has been maintained in theatre history or how it has been developed, or simply excised. Examples include *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

Shakespeare's Commonplacing Readers

Jean-Christophe Mayer (CNRS and University of Montpellier, France)

If Shakespeare has become a classic, it is partly due to the fact that his works have long been considered the meeting place of classical and of English (and to some extent British) culture. Scholars trained to recognize snippets of ancient wisdom in classical works could easily apply the commonplacing method to Shakespeare. Even as late as the twentieth-century, such a distinguished Shakespearean critic as Emrys Jones pointed out that 'It is often as if, at some deep level of his mind, Shakespeare thought and felt in quotations'. The idea that it is possible to recognize in Shakespeare fragments of a common code which (if properly deciphered) might enable individuals to make sense of their existence has a history which stretches back to the early seventeenth century. John Dryden reported that in the 1630s he had heard John Hales, an Oxford professor of Greek, declare that 'there was no subject of which any Poet ever writ, but he would produce it much better done in *Shakespeare*'. Nahum Tate also drew on this tale when writing to Edward Taylor in the preface to his tragedy *The Loyal General*: 'I cannot forget the strong desire I have heard you express to see the Common Places of our *Shakespeare*, compar'd with the most famous of the Ancients'. As Shakespeare fell into the hands of more and more editors and as his works entered the canon of English literature, there was also an irresistible need to demonstrate his superiority by framing or indeed itemizing his resources: printed commonplace books, indexes, highlighted purple passages, books of quotations, a whole set of reframing and reshaping apparatuses put forward by publishers, editors and academics created the image of a man who was at once a natural genius and a source of intellectually superior knowledge. As academics, we have all played our part in this process and there is something inevitable about it. Yet all this does not mean that we should not try to reconstruct the actual practices of early modern readers in order to see how Shakespeare was 'studied for action', to what uses he was put, and what linguistic, cultural, intellectual and even psychological processes were involved when readers extracted passages. In this essay, I wish to concentrate on manuscript miscellanies and commonplace books in order to examine the private practices of individuals, more than the techniques of established scholars, editors or academics. My intention is to try to discover how and why these individuals reframed Shakespeare's works and reshaped his language. The variety of practices described will, it is hoped, help us partly redefine our sometimes austere or overly intellectualized image of early modern commonplacing.

‘By whatever name...’

Svenn-Arve Myklebost (University of Bergen)

I aim to explore the significance of naming in Shakespeare's plays. Is it Imogen or Innogen, Falstaff or Oldcastle? By looking into how editors of Shakespeare have approached these and other naming problems I begin to investigate what has influenced their approaches and choices, what the implications of their choices might be and what we may learn from their ways of thinking about textual editing, be it defective or successful. Ultimately, I hope to be able to suggest something about such editing practices in general and, more specifically, the actual significance of naming: is Henry IV featuring Sir John Oldcastle a wholly different play from Henry IV featuring Sir John Falstaff?

Framing Futures in Shakespeare

Goran Stanivukovic (Saint Mary's University, Halifax, Canada)

In the early modern period the idea of future was troubling because futurity framed by apocalyptic and eschatological discourses and associated it with the last Judgment. Most often, it thus appears in sermons and writing about the Scriptures. The future invoked torment to the early modern, not an unprecedented opportunity for progress punctured with existential uncertainty, which is how it tends to be presented in the modern world. Because ‘the future’ is such a contested yet persistent topic in a number of discourses at the present moment, I want to look back in time and explore how Shakespeare imagined and presented it.

The word ‘future’ appears thirteen times in Shakespeare’s works; ‘futurity’ and ‘futurely’ appear once each, in *Othello* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, respectively. This is a fairly low frequency usage. In the early modern period, the word future tends to appear more often as an adjective qualifying a concrete state involving humans (e.g. future lovers) than a noun with a specific temporal marking. Paired with, or appearing in the semantic milieu determined by the words like accidents, lack of safety, change, melancholy, strife, and death, in Shakespeare, ‘future’ is most prevalent in the English chronicles, Roman history plays, and tragedies. In comedies, romances, and problem plays, ‘future’ is linked with the prospect of, and anxiety about, emotional fulfillment. Curiously, one play in which the word appears more than in any other play is *Timon of Athens*, which is about a misanthrope, a character whose denial of the present may be a compromise with the future. This low frequency in the use of the word future may mislead us to conclude that Shakespeare is not interested in the future as a theme. I will propose that terms which connote futurity and discourses in which futurity appears differ from terms in which we expect to find futurity in the modern period. In Shakespeare, futurity is especially fictionalized in the plays associated with voyaging (including tempests), discovery, and removal to other worlds. In a world in which history and geography elided, travel and geographical writing, and literature share the intersecting language of the promise and risk overseas discoveries, trade and traffic bring in venturing

beyond the familiar in search for economic profit and political gain. Proto-colonial language of overseas voyaging in *The Comedy of Errors*, *Pericles*, and *The Tempest* share with prose romances the idea of the sea voyage which counters the theological argument for colonization—that Christianity should be spread in the newly discovered lands (and the pagans Christianized) before the end of the world arrives. Paradoxically, thus, fear in the West of the last judgment triggered thinking about the future as salvation outside the West's old geographical borders.

Hymen and the Gods on Stage in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* and Italian Pastoral

Susanne Wofford (New York University)

This paper will lay out an agenda of thoughts related to the earlier criticism--the framing Shakespeare from the late 19th century point of view, by trying to see how those critics solved the problem I am interested in, which is what/who is Hymen in the last scene of *AYLI*. I try to connect this to the role of the gods in Italian pastoral plays, including commedia scenarios but also high drama. I hope to be able to do the research that will tell me more than just my consultation of the older Ardens has done – to show how these figures were viewed then and now.

What I would like to do to add to this paper is to outline a set of research questions that the topic of the conference raises in my mind and to try to explain why I think they are important for this group to address. Chief among them is the question of how foreign spaces – especially Illyria but also other exotic locales – were viewed in the late 19th century on the one hand, and in pre cold war 20th century Europe on the other. I am quite convinced that at least in the US all of our understanding of any setting in eastern Europe was profoundly controlled by the cold war, and by the curtain of ignorance that came down during it.

I am as interested in figures like Mario Praz and other writers in Europe in the earlier part of the 20th century as I am in the late 19th century, and I hope to be able to use some of their works in expanding my essay towards a topic that will fit the conference better. I am planning on looking at how these earlier critics, including G. Wilson Knight, looked at (or did not look at) Italian pastoral as a possible way to understanding *AYLI*. I don't know how far back I would have to go to find a critic who does – and that is where Mario Praz comes in – I want to see what role he, and maybe Katherine Lea, played in this whole question of understanding the foreign.