



HUMANITIES RESEARCH CENTRE Conference

SHAKESPEARE AND POLITICAL THOUGHT

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Abstracts and Biographies of
speakers
in
Conference running order

UNFOLDING THE PROPERTIES OF GOVERNMENT: *MEASURE FOR MEASURE* AND THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

Conal Condren

University of New South Wales

Although *Measure for Measure* is an obviously political play, a context of doctrinal commitment is inadequate for its understanding. Argument on both sides of an issue (argumentum in utramque partem) is held to be central to understanding its play with doctrinal content and explores this with reference to casuistry and the uncertain fit between the principal characters and the positions in which they are put.

Biography:

Conal Condren is Emeritus Scientia Professor of Politics and International Relations at UNSW. He is a fellow of The Australian Academy of the Humanities and of the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia. His most recent book is *Argument and Authority in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 2006. His current research, beyond the themes of the seminar, is on the persona of the philosopher in early modern Europe.

COUNSEL, SUCCESSION, AND THE POLITICS OF SHAKESPEARE'S SONNETS

Cathy Shrank

University of Sheffield

The words 'political'/'politics' and 'Shakespeare' are often yoked together. Discussions about Shakespeare's politics, however, focus primarily on the same sets of texts: on his Roman plays, his English histories, and – to a lesser degree – The Rape of Lucrece. Relatively little attention, in contrast, has been paid to the politics of Shakespeare's sonnets. This is in part due to a critical tendency to overlook the potentially political nature of sonnet collections, an omission which can be traced to the frequent misrepresentation Petrarch's *Canzoniere*, the model and point of departure for many English sonnets and much of the critical writing upon them. This paper will include an evaluation of the genre of sonnets in general, before exploring some of the ways in which Shakespeare's sonnets can be read politically, focussing particularly on ideas of succession, counsel and the depiction of the sonneteer's relationship with 'severer studies'.

Biography:

Cathy Shrank is Lecturer in English at the University of Sheffield. She is the author of *Writing the Nation in Reformation England* (2004) and editor of Massinger's *The City Madam* (2005). She is currently working on a study of Tudor dialogue and an edition of Shakespeare's poems (with Raphael Lyne).

SPEAKING HIS GOOD: MANNERLY SPEECH IN *HENRY VIII* OR *ALL IS TRUE*

Jennifer Richards

University of Newcastle, UK

'Mannerly' or temperate speech is a neglected concern of Shakespeare's late plays, but also, more broadly, of early modern culture which understood the 'political' to include, not just 'power', but the values and relations that constitute the polis. This paper aims to explore how the representation – or more accurately, misrepresentation – of mannerliness features in one play, William Shakespeare's and John Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, or *All is True* (c. 1613). In relation to this, I am keen to establish how Shakespeare and Fletcher engaged with the far-reaching post-Reformation debate about the meaning of Cicero's conception of moral propriety (*honestas*). 'Honest' is evidently a key word in *Henry VIII*, so too are 'mannerliness' and 'true'. However, scholarly discussion has tended to focus on the last of these terms, recovering for this play its participation in an ongoing debate about historical objectivity, a debate seen as developing critical judgement: the weighing of different viewpoints. My emphasis is different. I am interested in this play's reflection, on the one hand, upon what it means to be honest, temperate, modest and decorous, especially when this does not entail speaking or acting 'truly', and, on the other hand, upon the limits of moralized protestant history: more specifically, upon the way in which the collaborative *de casibus* history, the *Mirror for Magistrates* - the other forgotten historical source for *Henry VIII* - underpins the misappropriation of a commonwealth idiom for private interest. In what sense does this represent Shakespeare and Fletcher's engagement with the processes and language of classical renaissance and religious reformation?

Biography:

Jennifer Richards is a reader in English at the University of Newcastle. Author of *Rhetoric and Courtliness in Early Modern Literature* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), editor of *Early Modern Civil Discourses* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), and co-editor, with James Knowles, of *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings* (Edinburgh University Press, 1999). *Rhetoric, Women and Politics in Early Modern England* (co-ed with Alison Thorne) and *Rhetoric: the New Critical Idiom* are forthcoming with Routledge (later this year or early next).

THE EDUCATION OF HAMLET AND PRINCE HAL

Aysha Polnitz

Trinity College, Cambridge

The education of princes was a central concern in the political writings and pedagogical practice of sixteenth-century England and Scotland. Erasmus' *Institutio principis Christiani*, Thomas Elyot's *Boke named the gouvernour*, George Buchanan's *De iure regni apud Scotos* and James VI and I's *Basilicon doron* all emphasized that carefully cultivating future rulers was critical to good government. Learning was also an important part of the self-presentation of Elizabeth and James VI and I. This paper will discuss Shakespeare's examination of two very different student princes living in corrupt courts: Hamlet, educated in the university, possessing an extensive knowledge of rhetoric in addition to a 'Courtiers, Soldiers, Scholars: Eye, tongue, sword' and in the habit of evaluating actions in terms of their honesty as well as their utility; and Prince Hal, left to grow up as 'the strawberry grows underneath the nettle' but who proposes to 'imitate the sun... when he please again to be himself'. Ultimately, this paper proposes that Shakespeare—alongside James VI and I himself—was skeptical as to whether an Erasmian liberal education was the best way to teach princes to manage political, military and dynastic crises.

Biography:

Aysha Polnitz is a Research Fellow of Trinity College, Cambridge. Her work concentrates on the development of princely education in sixteenth-century Britain.

THE COLONISATION OF EARLY BRITAIN ON THE JACOBEAN STAGE

Gordon McMullan
King's College, London

Summary: Starting from recent critical discussions of *Cymbeline* as a play of reverse colonisation, that is, of Britain's colonisation by the Romans, I examine two Jacobean plays with early British settings as examples of the coherent way in which the early modern stage read British origins as colonial history and rehearsed contemporary colonial tensions by way of the dramatisation of foundation myths.

Biography:

Gordon McMullan is Reader in English at King's College London and a Visiting Fellow at the HRC. He is the editor of the Arden *Henry VIII* and a general editor of Arden Early Modern Drama. His collection, *Reading the Medieval in Early Modern England*, co-edited with David Matthews, and his monograph, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing*, will both be published by Cambridge University Press.

PUTTING THE CITY INTO SHAKESPEARE'S CITY COMEDY

Phil Withington
University of Leeds

The paper examines Shakespeare's only city comedy – *The Merry Wives of Windsor* – in the context of the major cultural and political reforms that English cities and boroughs like Windsor were experiencing in the second half of the sixteenth century. Many of these reforms were intended to inculcate 'civility' among England's 'middling sort' through the regulation of conversation and sociability within both the male-dominated civic realm – e.g. the council chamber – and the wider, female-dominated neighbourhood and household. Using civic and depositional records the paper shows that the treatment of Falstaff by the wives of Windsor was consistent with the intent of these reforms as actually implemented in cities and boroughs during the later sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It also demonstrates the skill of the women in using the codes of civility for their own purposes, in the process triumphing over Falstaff's embodiment of dissolute gentility with some of the core values of civic humanism: discretion, honesty, and self-knowledge. In so doing, the paper suggests the close connections made by contemporaries between civic (masculine) and communal (feminine) behaviour; the cultural and political importance of urban citizenship within England's provincial urban environments; and the interpretative benefits to be had from juxtaposing the source materials of literary and social history. Moreover, in recovering the conversational basis of citizenship in the later sixteenth century the paper offers an important corrective to those narratives of political and cultural change that associate the emergence of popular public discourse with 'modernisation' and 'structural transformation'. On the contrary, it was in the revitalised culture of corporate and civic life that many 'ordinary people' learnt the power of discourse and talk.

Biography:

Phil Withington is lecturer in history at the University of Leeds, where he teaches courses on early modern society, politics and culture and cultural theory since the nineteenth century. He is currently researching the subject of intoxication in early modern Britain.

TURNING A DEAF EAR: SHAKESPEARE ON FREEDOM OF SPEECH AND THE PROBLEM OF COUNSEL

David Colclough

Queen Mary, University of London

Abstract: This paper considers Shakespeare's treatment of a key aspect of early modern political thought: the importance (and dangers) of counsel to good government, and the related problem of freedom of speech. Focussing on Julius Caesar and Richard II, the paper will explore the ways in which Shakespeare plays out some of the most pressing anxieties about political advice in the sixteenth century: where should it come from? How should it be listened to? How does the person being advised distinguish between disinterested counsel and self-interested manipulation? In Julius Caesar we see several instances of good counsel being ignored (Caesar turns his deaf ear to Artemidorus' warning; Brutus decides to spare Antony) and bad (or at least questionable) counsel being attended to (Caesar goes to the Senate; Brutus is spurred on by Cassius' propaganda). Yet it is unclear whether there are stable criteria for what makes good or bad counsel in the world of the play, which is concerned with a series of *misconstructions*¹--ending with Brutus' fatal misinterpretation of a triumphant return as a shameful capture. I will compare this with the description in Richard II of a pragmatic, quasi-machiavellian approach to politics that depends upon claiming, frequently through extreme self-interest, the right to speak frankly to the king.

Biography:

David Colclough is a Lecturer in the School of English and Drama at Queen Mary. He works on the literature and culture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. His research focuses on the history of English political thought, rhetoric and the religious writing of the period. He is the author of the New DNB article on John Donne, and has recently completed a book entitled *Freedom of Speech in Early Stuart England*. With Lisa Jardine, he is editing the volume of the Oxford Francis Bacon edition devoted to *Sylva Sylvarum* and *New Atlantis*. Future projects include an international conference on the history of freedom of speech, and a book-length study of the diplomat and poet Sir Henry Wotton, to be followed by an edition of Wotton's works and correspondence.

KINGS AND TRIBUNES: THE POLITICS OF IDEOLOGY IN SHAKESPEARE'S ROMAN PLAYS

Eric Nelson

Cambridge University

General Idea: I'll be arguing, more or less, that Shakespeare is very suspicious of ideological claims about politics (republicanism in particular, but also various monarchisms), and believes that they tend to be deployed instrumentally and opportunistically. I claim that he dramatizes this conviction in numerous passages in the Roman plays (and also in related works, like *The Rape of Lucrece*), and underlines his point by drawing a fairly precise parallel between kings and tribunes (in effect suggesting that men in power all behave the same way, whether in republics or monarchies).

Biography:

Eric Nelson is Assistant Professor of Government at Harvard University, and a junior fellow in the Harvard Society of Fellows. He is the author of *The Greek Tradition in Republican Thought* (Cambridge, 2004).

POLITICS OF IDEOLOGY IN RHETORIC AND CITIZENSHIP IN *CORIOLANUS*

Markku Peltonen
University of Helsinki

The aim of the paper is to examine the role of political rhetoric in *Coriolanus*. Its point of departure is the centrality of the question of citizenship in *Coriolanus* on the one hand and the importance of political rhetoric in contemporary theories of citizenship on the other. The paper begins by arguing that whilst it was widely agreed in the early modern period that rhetoric was central to citizenship, there was much less unanimity about its social depth and thus about its precise nature. These competing views of rhetoric are then used as an intellectual context for an analysis of citizenship and political eloquence in *Coriolanus*.

Biography:

Markku Peltonen is Professor of Intellectual History at the University of Helsinki. His publications include *Classical humanism and republicanism in English political thought 1570-1640* (1995) and *The duel in early modern England: civility, politeness and honour* (2003). He is presently working on rhetoric, politics and ideology in England, 1558-1640.

JULIUS CAESAR AND THE JUSTIFYING OF TYRANNICIDE

Quentin Skinner

Christ's College, Cambridge

The direction of my argument:

If Caesar was a tyrant, there are two arguments that some c16 political writers would have taken to be justifications for killing him. Brutus reflects on both of them, but is forced to acknowledge that neither can be applied. Even if Caesar was not a tyrant, however, there remains the rhetorical possibility of trying to 'shape' and 'colour' the act of killing him in such a way as to excuse it. The paper first examines Brutus's attempt to offer such an excuse, and then considers how it is handled in the latter part of the play.

Biography:

Quentin Skinner is Regius Professor of Modern History, and Fellow of Christ's College, University of Cambridge. He is interested in the intellectual history of early-modern Europe, specialising in the culture of the Renaissance and 17th Century political philosophy. Professor Skinner is also interested in such philosophical issues as historical explanation, the nature of interpretation more generally, and contemporary political theory, particularly the concept of political liberty and the character of the state. His books include two volumes on *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*; *Machiavelli*; *Reason and Rhetoric in the Philosophy of Hobbes*; *Liberty Before Liberalism*; and three volumes on *Visions of Politics*.

THE ACTIVE AND CONTEMPLATIVE LIVES

Cathy Curtis

University of New South Wales

My paper is concerned with one of important debates of classical and Renaissance political thought – the relative merits of the active and contemplative lives – and Shakespeare’s dramatic engagement with it. I shall first briefly outline the contours of that debate, and then examine a number of interrelated ideas which emerge from it, such as early modern English conceptions of citizenship and office, true nobility, the uses and abuses of rhetoric and counsel. What I suggest is that in a number of Shakespeare’s plays, across their generic range and through their chronological extent, many points of contact can be found. That contact invigorates the traditional debate, insisting upon its ambiguities and complexities in contemporary political life, giving it new emphases and formulations, and satirizing its earnestness.

Biography:

Cathy Curtis is a Lecturer in Politics and International Relations at UNSW who works in the history of early modern political thought and literature. Her recent articles focus on Tudor humanism and pedagogy, the diplomat Richard Pace, and the persona of the early modern philosopher and the methodology of Quentin Skinner. She is currently working on the political and social thought of Juan Luis Vives and a study of Thomas More as satirist and philosopher.

VARIETIES OF FEAR: COWARDICE, MELANCHOLY AND SUPERSTITION

Susan James

Birkbeck College, University of London

Early modern writers take up classical discussions of the various ways in which fear can be politically damaging. The threat posed by cowardice is widely discussed, by Shakespeare among others. In this paper I shall explore the phenomenon of superstition. I shall suggest that delineations of this kind of fear form part of the context needed to understand both Macbeth and Julius Caesar.

Biography:

Professor Susan James's overlapping areas of philosophical research are the history of seventeenth and eighteenth century philosophy, political and social philosophy, and feminist philosophy. Much of her recent work on all three subjects has focused on the emotions. One of her books, *Passion and Action*, explores the place of emotion in the philosophy of the early-modern period, and she is completing a book about the political theory of Spinoza in which the connections between passion and politics are a central concern. She has also begun to investigate these same connections in a number of papers about current approaches to political philosophy.

Susan James is the author of:

The Content of Social Explanation (Cambridge University Press, 1984)

Beyond Equality and Difference, co-edited with Gisela Bock (Routledge, 1992)

Passion and Action: The Emotions in Early Modern Philosophy (Oxford University Press, 1997)

Visible Women: Essays in Legal Theory and Political Philosophy, co-edited with Stephanie Palmer (Hart, 2002)

The Political Writings of Margaret Cavendish (Cambridge University Press, 2003).

SHAKESPEARIAN CORRUPTION

Andrew Fitzmaurice
University of Sydney

Hamlet is a study of the corruption of the court. Modern critics have discovered in Hamlet the 'interiority' of the modern self. I will argue that he is, on the contrary, a figure of withdrawal from the corruption of the political world.

Biography:

Andrew Fitzmaurice is a Senior Lecturer in History at the University of Sydney. He is the author of *Humanism and America* (Cambridge 2003), and is completing a study of terra nullius.

SHAKESPEARE'S PROPERTIES

David Armitage
Harvard University

Shakespeare appears mostly in the public record as a holder of properties, in shares, tithes, houses and land. As an actor and playwright, he manipulated those dramatic appurtenances called stage properties. Within his plays, he portrayed the workings of a variety of property regimes, ancient and modern, English and European, and made property relations central to many of his plots and structures of metaphor. This paper uses the multivalency of "property" in all these forms to suggest ways of linking Shakespeare's biography, his dramaturgy and the presentation of political argument in his works, in order to define his characteristics — his properties — as a political thinker.

Biography:

David Armitage is Professor of History at Harvard University. He is the author of *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (2000) and *The Declaration of Independence: A Global History* (2006); among his interdisciplinary publications are *Milton and Republicanism* (co-ed, 1995) and *British Political Thought in History, Literature and Theory, 1500-1800* (ed., 2006).