



Queen's University
Belfast



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Symposium One – Programme

Filming and Performing Renaissance History Players and Personalities

25-27 April 2008

Symposium One Programme

Filming and Performing Renaissance History: Players and Personalities

Friday, 25 April

Dinner: 8.00 (Deanes at Queen's, 1 College Gardens)

Saturday, 26 April

Welcome: 9.00 (Graduate Research Centre, 18 College Green)

Paper Session One: 9.30-11.00

Chair: Mark Thornton Burnett, Queen's University, Belfast

The Falstaff Syndrome: Pathos, Prosthetics and Performance Robert Shaughnessy, University of Kent at Canterbury

In this paper, I examine the contemporary articulation of one of Renaissance theatrical (and subsequent English) culture's most enduring icons: Falstaff. Paying particular attention to the significance of representations of the Falstaffian obese or grotesque body in performance, the paper considers the recent historic interplay between the manifest artifice of theatrical prosthesis, the cultivation of character-centred psychological realism, and the production of seriousness, as well as those instances where the established norms of theatre practice have been called into question (for example, in Michael Gambon's portrayal for the National Theatre in 2005). It is my contention that the Falstaff belly is considerably more than an already heavily overdetermined signifier of a particular male body type, and, drawing upon feminist and psychoanalytic work on the maternal body, and with reference to stagings of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as well as of the *Henry IV* plays, the paper concludes by examining the latent appeal of what is identified as a kind of cross-dressing, as well as situating this practice alongside adjacent performance idioms (pantomime, musical theatre), and within the broader cultural context of the current popular-cultural vogue for transvestite representations of the female body *in extremis*.



Interpretation and Belief: Constructing the Renaissance

Ros Barber, University of Sussex

Representations of the Renaissance, whether fictional or purporting to be factual, derive from the human imagination. The Renaissance is a construction still in progress: like the public theatres of the period, which required regular structural repair and in one case had to be dismantled and moved across the river to a new site, key components of the Renaissance are not necessarily as sturdy as they seem.

All types of evidence require interpretation, meaning there can be no one single version of history. Many historians now recognise that history is fictive in nature, since the creation of any narrative (including biography and historiography) requires the writer (or historian) to engage their imagination. Biographies of key Renaissance figures, including William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe, can be shown to be essentially fictive constructions. In addition, it is possible to construct more than one plausible narrative from the historical evidence.

Taking cues from Marlovian theory, this paper demonstrates how close examination and re-interpretation of a wide range of texts written between 1593 and 1613 can be used to support the hypothesis that Christopher Marlowe wrote the works of Shakespeare. The nature of human perception is such that we tend to interpret evidence according to our beliefs, but rarely question the beliefs that guide our interpretations. By investigating the possibilities of alternative histories, we gain new perspectives on the Renaissance and a deeper understanding of ourselves as constructors of our own realities.

Mark Rylance, *Henry V* and 'Original Practices' at Shakespeare's Globe

Christie Carson, Royal Holloway, University of London

Shakespeare's Globe opened in 1997 with a production of *Henry V* as part of a season called The Festival of Firsts. With this production, director Richard Olivier and lead actor and Artistic Director of the Globe Mark Rylance, took a bold step towards developing theatre practices that were appropriate to the architecture of the new theatre. The practical research project, that Rylance would later entitle 'original practices', began with this production which employed original clothing, early modern music and an all male cast. The critical reception of this production of the play ignited a serious debate about the role of the new Globe both as a contemporary theatre and as a site for making new discoveries about the Renaissance period. In this paper, I will chart the creative approach undertaken in this production and its critical reception in order to illustrate how the Globe Theatre has instigated a serious and sophisticated debate about representing the Renaissance, involving a range of experts with widely diverging backgrounds. The aim, then, of this paper will be to evaluate not the artistic quality of this production of *Henry V* but rather its effectiveness in posing new and complex questions about our understanding of the past and how it can usefully be represented today.

Coffee/Tea Break

Paper Session Two: 11.30-1.00

Chair: Ruth Abraham, Queen's University, Belfast

The Filmic Elizabeth: A Renaissance Queen?

Susan Doran, Christ Church, Oxford

Elizabeth I has been a character in over twenty films. This paper explores how and to what extent she is presented (or could be read) as a Renaissance queen. It argues that the majority of film-makers seem to have little interest in the English Renaissance but prefer to play with narratives and issues surrounding Elizabeth's gender and/or treat her as a heroic guardian of England's independence and liberty.

CGI Elizabeth, or a Spanish Tragedy: Historical Thrills and Heroes and Villains in Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: The Golden Age*

Stephen O'Neill, National University of Ireland, Maynooth

Shekhar Kapur's *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* (2007) filters the political and religious complexities of the Elizabethan period through a narrative of female empowerment that is largely reliant on Cate Blanchet's star-turn as the Virgin Queen. The film's evident concern to celebrate Queen-power renders history as a series of lavishly costumed binary oppositions (Elizabeth/Mary; English Queen/ Spanish king; Protestant/ Catholic) that provoke a series of questions about perceptions of the Elizabethan past and the uses to which it can be put. For instance, how does the film's generic status as biography and war-movie delimit its sense and application of Elizabethan history? This paper explores some of the implications of the film's structuring devices by focusing in particular on its representation of the Spanish and Catholics. The depiction of a scheming Philip II and of Jesuits that lurk in the dark corners of an otherwise serene England denote the threats to Elizabeth's judicious rule but also, as several reviewers have noted, suggest a loose parallel with the discourse of religious fundamentalism in the early twenty-first century. This paper argues that the film's casual presentism gives rise to a series of static stereotypes that distort the Elizabethan past and also the historical and cultural moment that it speaks too and indeed from. More generally, the paper indicates how the fragmented sense of history in *Elizabeth: the Golden Age* raises questions about received understandings of the past and the postmodern abandonment of historical narrative.



Renaissance Mania and the Film Industry: A Historical Perspective

Ton Hoenselaars, Utrecht University

This paper represents a Shakespearean scholar's look at the representation of the Renaissance in a cinematic context. I looks at the way in which the interwar image of the Renaissance affected the movie industry during the 1930s and 1940s. Rather than concentrate on the rather obvious range of Renaissance movies made during the period, I shall be studying the various ways in which the image of the early modern period was constructed by academic as well as film critics. Furthermore, I will be illustrating how, on occasion, such views came to be used as a yardstick for wartime propaganda movies, like a prescriptive early modern poetics for the twentieth-century cinema.

Lunch: 1.00-2.30

Performance Session: 2.30-4.30

(Rehearsal Room, Queen's Film Theatre, 20 University Square)

Chair: Adele Lee, Queen's University, Belfast

Through a Glass Darkly: Galileo, Guy Fawkes and Grinding the Lens of Theatre

Bridget Foreman, Playwright

Taking the long view on characters and events of the Renaissance, theatre can turn the telescope – and even the microscope – of the past upon the present, sometimes with startling effect. Illustrated with extracts read by actors, this session will be dedicated to exploring how the events of centuries back can challenge audiences today with a fresh understanding. There will be particular reference to contemporary plays *Science Friction* and *Remember Remember*, which toured recently with Riding Lights Theatre Company and were supported by the Wellcome Trust and Arts Council England. The session is presented by Bridget Foreman (playwright and author of *Science Friction* and *Remember Remember*), with Aoibheann Kelly and Mark Payton (actors).

Drinks Reception: 6.00-7.00

(Graduate Research Centre, 18 College Green)

Dinner: 7.00 (Beatrice Kennedy's Restaurant, 44 University Road)

Sunday 27 April

Paper Session Three: 9.30-11.00

(Graduate Research Centre, 18 College Green)

Chair: Majella Devlin, Queen's University, Belfast

**'We are trying to entertain people,
not impress them with our scholarship':
Enacting and Re-enacting the 'Renaissance'
in popular culture**

Jerome de Groot, University of Manchester

This paper analyses a variety of 'bodily' historical experiences and delineates the complexity of engagement they demand. I consider the implications of re-enactment, performance and games on questions of historical experience and authenticity. What do types of performance mean for the understanding the Renaissance in popular culture? How does 'history-as-experience' impact upon questions of historical authenticity? Does the ability to inhabit a selection of personas enfranchise the participant? Is this first-person history? Re-enactment and Living History and such historical media as reality television history and computer game first-person history offer a range of experience within history and a complexity of consumption. They enfranchise the audience, whilst also subjecting them to a viewed history, history as a performance and story (and a story with particular narrative rules overseeing events). Both Re-enactment and Living History as practices raise questions of education, ownership and authenticity whilst also being in many ways undertheorised by historians. They are activities, like first-person and role-playing games, which suggest an historical freedom in the 'bodily' or embodied experience. These activities – mainly new or newly popular – provoke troubling questions about 'how' history is as well as 'what' history is. The various types of re-enactment I analyse demonstrate the complexities of historical empathy. The prevalence of re-enactment throughout popular culture, in multiple varieties, suggests the importance of (bodily) experience to an understanding of history. Re-enacting reinscribes the self in relation to both the 'past' and to a set of tropes associated with a previous event or artefact.



**God Save the Queen: Sex Pistols,
Shakespeare, and Critical Negation**

Greg Colón Semenza, University of Connecticut

The Filth and the Fury, Julien Temple's 1999 documentary on the British punk rock band, The Sex Pistols, appropriates Renaissance history in surprising ways: an opening title sequence refers to the Wars of the Roses; multiple montage segments centre on clips from Olivier's Shakespeare films; interviews with band members focus on the negative role of Shakespeare in British education, especially the teaching of English history. Most surprisingly, though, the film pays tribute to the fact that lead singer

John Lydon (aka Johnny Rotten) based his hunched-over, writhing stage persona on Shakespeare's character of Richard III. Lydon identifies with Richard on several levels: as deformed ('I always did view myself as one damn ugly fucker'); as disabled (Lydon spent his seventh year of life in a coma induced by meningitis, which resulted in a spine curvature and vision problems); as alienated (Lydon grew up in an Irish, working-class family).

To a band that eventually achieved infamy mainly through its assault on the British monarchy ('God save the Queen / She ain't no human being') and the ideology of British nationalism and history ('Oh, God save history'), Richard III's anarchic violence serves as a foundation for the strategies of negation that defined the punk movement in its heyday. In this essay, I will consider how Richard III informs, and is informed by, the achievement of the Sex Pistols and punk itself and how Lydon's decidedly radical appropriation of Renaissance (popular) history was central in punk's 1970s' assault on British monarchy.

Renaissance Soundings: British Radio and the Aural Performance of History

Susanne Greenhalgh, University of Roehampton

This paper will consider the interpretive and theoretical issues raised by the ways in which early modern figures 'emerge into representational visibility' within the soundscapes created by radio. Although the main focus will be on Shakespeare (a dominating presence in British radio from its beginnings), some comparison will be made with other early modern historical personalities who have emerged as a significant or distinctive voice through aural performance.

Coffee/Tea Break

Workshop: 11.30-1.00

Chair: Emma Rhatigan, Queen's University, Belfast

The 'Great Man' Conceptualisation of History

Ruth Abraham (Queen's University, Belfast),

Majella Devlin (Queen's University, Belfast) and

Adele Lee (Queen's University, Belfast)

This workshop will investigate expressions of imperial fantasies of the self within stage and filmic performance, posing the following questions for group discussion: to what end do expressions of the self manifest in early modern drama serve to comment upon the conceptual notions of self in which the production is created? Why are certain characters constantly 'refigured' whilst others are relegated to the sidelines?

Lunch: 1.00-2.30 (Café Renoir, 95 Botanic Avenue)

Paper Session Four: 2.30-4.30

Chair: Mary-Ellen Lynn, Queen's University, Belfast

Interrogating Conversion in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*

Adrian Streete, Queen's University, Belfast

One of the fundamental tenets of early modern apocalypticism is that, before the day of judgement, all non-Christians will undergo conversion, voluntarily or forced, to the 'true' faith. But while sixteenth- and seventeenth-century writers did discuss this process in relation to Muslims or atheists, the group that were most commonly singled out and whose conversion was the most important marker of apocalypticism were the Jews. This is because of the so-called 'blood curse', mentioned in Matthew 27: 24-25 after Pilate washes his hands of Jesus, where the people reply, 'His blood be on us, and on our children.' By seemingly claiming 'responsibility' for Jesus' death, this section has been used to justify the oppression, conversion or murder of Jews from the first millennium A.D. to the present day. Therefore, in this paper, I want to look at the deeply anti-Semitic focus of much early modern apocalyptic thought both as a way of discussing the conversion of Shylock in William Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*, but also as a way of examining contemporary debates about anti-Semitism in modern film.

In particular, I intend to look two films that appeared in 2004, Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* and Michael Radford's *The Merchant of Venice*. I examine the politics of each film in relation to how each deals with the presence of the 'blood curse' in its 'source texts' (the Gospels and *The Merchant of Venice*). While Gibson's film is now notorious for having the 'blood curse' spoken but not translated in the film's subtitles, Radford's deals with the virulent anti-Semitism of its Shakespearean source text by attempting to sanitise its less palatable manifestations. Linking both films is a problematic teleology of apocalypticism that begins with Christ's death at the hands of the Jews and ends with the forced conversion of the Jew Shylock. In this way, both films act as commentaries on each other, evincing the spoken and unspoken legacy of anti-Semitic violence that underpins Western apocalyptic thought and which is problematically translated into capital by the filmic industry of late modernity.



Breaking Shakespeare's Image in late Spanish Drama and Film

Jesús Tronch Pérez, University of Valencia

This paper discusses how the historical Renaissance playwright Shakespeare has been appropriated in four late Spanish dramatic pieces and in the film by Inés París, *Miguel y William* (2007). The four plays are Manuel Molins' *Shakespeare (La mujer silenciada)* (1996), J. C. Somoza's *Miguel Will* (1997), Chema Cardeña's *La estancia* (1997) and Jaime Salom's *El otro William* (1998). The paper explores the way these Spanish authors seek to legitimize their use of a famous historical figure while they construct an iconoclastic image of Shakespeare that addresses specific social and artistic issues in contemporary Spanish culture.

Holbein's Henry VIII and the Construction of Modern Masculinity

Tatiana C. String, University of Bristol

Hans Holbein's Whitehall portrait of Henry VIII (1537) may be characterized as the definitive image of the king. Through this image, Henry has become the most instantly recognizable of all English kings and, arguably, the synecdoche of British monarchy more generally. The portrait of Henry VIII, shown with his father, mother, and third wife, Jane Seymour, was destroyed in the Whitehall Palace fire of 1698, but is known today through Holbein's cartoon for the left half of the mural, a seventeenth-century copy of the whole composition, and numerous sixteenth-century copies of the portrait of Henry, extracted from the whole composition, which provide further evidence for the status and authority of the original. While studies of Holbein's career in England have been much in evidence in the past decade, one notable omission from the scholarship has been the absence of a study of notions of masculinity as communicated through this iconic image – even though, as this paper will demonstrate, this is a particularly fruitful approach to the analysis of the image. Investigations of the group portrait have tended to stress the basic dynastic iconography of generations of Tudor monarchs. This paper will go substantially beyond an iconographic reading of the dynastic theme of this portrait, to suggest that by interrogating the parts of the body in Holbein's portrait of Henry VIII it is possible to examine aspects of early modern 'masculinity', and how this, in turn, has become a referent for later representations of powerful men.

