YOUNG SCHOLARS’ WORKSHOP ABSTRACTS

- Michela Compagnoni (University of Bergamo), *Posthumous Memory and Myth: The Jacobean Legacy of Queen Elizabeth in Shakespeare’s Late Plays*

- Ilaria Natali (University of Florence), *“Remov’d from human eyes”: Poetry and Madness 1676-1774*

- Cristina Paravano (University of Milan), *The theatre of Richard Brome: an example of multilingualism in early modern drama*

- Silvia Spera (Università degli Studi di Salerno), *Shakespeare and the supernatural. Adaptations of Shakespearean supernatural dimensions*

- Allison Lindsay Steenson (University of Padua), *William Fowler’s neo-Latin verse in the Hawthornden Manuscripts: a case-study on the relations between vernacular and Latin poetry in Renaissance Scotland*

- Emanuel Stelzer (University of Bergamo), *Functions and Effects of the Portrait in Early Modern English Drama*
ABSTRACT

By the end of the first decade of James I’s reign, discontent, both among common people and in Parliament, had won over initial expectations. Signs of dissent against the King’s rule also became visible in refashioned approaches to the memory of Elizabeth Tudor. Instead of restoring the Queen’s entrenched mythology, some of the new memorial practices actually promoted the ambiguity of her figure as the gist of her glorious reign. Traces of such ambiguity can be retrieved in Shakespeare’s romances. As noted (Palfrey 1997), Shakespeare’s late plays are imbued with Elizabeth’s aura, but what I propose is that their engagement with the Queen’s memory is more subversive and more productive than commonly acknowledged.

I have partly developed this argument in my MA thesis, where I suggest that Shakespeare’s late plays intercept and redeploy political dissent through a redefinition of gender paradigms which feeds on the paradoxes of Elizabeth’s mythological self-construct (Montrose 2006). In order to retrieve the shadows of the Virgin Queen, my inquiry has relied on the close reading of selected scenes in Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, The Tempest, and Henry VIII. More specifically, I have focused on the double enunciation (Locatelli 1999) of female roles, a rhetorical strategy that defies and, at the same time conforms to contemporary patriarchal dynamics.

My project now is to expand my investigation of Elizabeth’s posthumous mythology and of its uses in the light of through the lenses of Early Modern politics of memory and forgetting. As the mnemonic paradigm inherited from classical tradition (Yates 1996) was being undermined, the Renaissance in fact witnessed to a momentous epistemic change: a new model of forgetting was being formulated, no longer (or not only) perceived as the mere negative of memory (Sullivan 2005), but as “a formative force in the production of history and culture” (Ivic and Williams 2004).

In the first section of my research I intend to address available historical documents such as the Queen’s biographies, annals and records written under James’s rule with a view to retrieve the oscillations of Elizabeth’s memorial legacy between remembering and oblivion. To what extent did the erasure and / or forgetting of Elizabeth’s major faults contribute to the construction of her mythological imagery as the pivot of the new national identity? What kind of femininity becomes entrenched in the representation of authority and sovereignty after the Virgin Queen’s death? How did the partial rescue of the old queen’s ambiguities from strategic oblivion voice political dissent, and forge a new posthumous Elizabethan mythology? These are the main questions I propose to address at the outset.

I will then proceed to consider Shakespeare’s engagement with these topics in his late plays: I will concentrate on how the combination of chastity and authority, of subversiveness and conformity in such characters as Hermione, Imogen or Miranda is related to, owes to, but also renegotiates this new political treatment of historical memory.

The research project I have briefly outlined is ideally meant for a PhD program in Shakespeare and Early Modern Studies where I would have a chance to refine and specify research questions and aims in view of publication.

REFERENCES

Ilaria Natali  
Contract teacher at the University of Florence, Italy; ilaria.natali@unifi.it  

“Remov’d from human eyes”: Poetry and Madness 1676-1774  

RESEARCH PROJECT  

I have carried out my research during a five-year fellowship (Assegno di Ricerca) at the Department of Lingue, Letterature e Studi Interculturali, University of Florence, Italy, under the guidance of professors Donatella Pallotti and Rita Svandrlik. The outcome of this research project will be submitted as a book in April 2015.  

ABSTRACT  

Poetry seems to be the ideal locus for a study of the relationships between literature and the history of madness: within Occidental thought, the connection between poetry and insanity dates back at least to Plato’s Phaedrus and Ion. My research proposes not only to partially revisit this traditional cultural concept, but also to focus on the different ways in which poetic texts create and represent the idea of unreason. To this purpose, I analyse works by James Carkesse, Anne Finch, William Collins, Christopher Smart and William Cowper, who were officially considered ‘mad’, confined in hospitals and madhouses, or otherwise estranged from society. A common thread runs through these five poets’ works: they all respond to contemporary definitions of madness and to the procedures of normalization proposed by the medical world.  

By limiting my study to the years 1676-1774, which mark two significant changes in the managing of mental disease, I consider roughly the period that Michel Foucault defines as the Classical Age in his influential History of Madness. However, rather than endorsing Foucault’s contested idea of a European “Great Confinement”, I explore its possibilities as a means to identify changes in the feeling towards mental trouble in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Britain. On a methodological level, my research is influenced by Foucault’s work, but it is even more deeply indebted to studies by Allan Ingram, Roy Porter and Alan Richardson, who have worked across disciplines, combining historical stance with literary analysis. Through an interdisciplinary approach, my research aims to demonstrate that seventeenth- and eighteenth-century ‘insane’ authors created a sub-genre of poetry: ‘mad’ poetry adheres to a set of key tropes and questions, turns the performance of insanity into a site of identity formation, and takes on a more nuanced meaning when read against the backdrop of contemporary scientific concerns.  

REFERENCES  

Ingram, Allan, with Michelle Faubert, Cultural Constructions of Madness, New York, Palgrave 2003.  
ABSTRACT

My project purposes to discuss the issue of multilingualism in the period ranging between 1625 and 1642 and concentrates on Richard Brome (1590-1652), a Caroline playwright known as one of Ben Jonson’s literary sons. Brome stood out of the group around Jonson for his originality and the topicality of his works, attributable, among other factors, to his extensive use of multilingualism.

My research will take an interdisciplinary approach involving disciplines such as literary studies, theatre and performance, socio-linguistics and early modern history in the hope of shedding new light on my field of study. I will be using a New Historicism approach, the most suitable to my idea of research and criticism since it emphasizes the impact of politics, economics, religion, and social and class dynamics on aliterary text. I will also take on board gender and feminist theories, seeing that language is inevitably gendered. Theories from translation studies will likewise be useful, since there are often different kinds of translation going on within these multilingual texts.

The first part of my work will address the methodological and terminological premises such as the use of terms such as ‘multilingualism’ ‘foreign’, ‘stranger’, ‘alien’. My study takes into account three types of language found in Brome’s plays, namely modern languages other than English, classical languages and dialects, and explores the relationship between the recourse to one or more languages in a play and the contemporary early modern context.

In the second part, I investigate works including multilingualism and divide them into three main categories: plays featuring a single language, a dialect and Latin, and a foreign multilingualism, and the complexity and topicality of this device, which enables the playwright to comment on the English domestic and foreign politics throughout the period.

REFERENCES

Shakespeare and the supernatural.
Adaptations of Shakespearean supernatural dimensions

Shakespeare and the Supernatural will be the field of my investigation. In particular, I will consider the role and transformation of the spiritual dimension of some plays in Seventeenth and Eighteenth century 'rewritings', mainly through the lenses of adaptation and reception studies. The return of the Stuart dynasty in 1660 was a marked reaction against Puritans, who had violently brought to an end the unique experience of the Elizabethan stage. Coming back from his French exile, Charles II was the promoter of the innovations of the new, unmistakably aristocratic theatre of the Restoration: its use of spectacular painted movable scenes and of women as actresses. It was to this new stage that the Shakespearean plays, which had been silent for almost twenty years, were to be re-adapted. That process consisted mainly of the so-called practice of 'Making Shakespeare fit'.

How did the supernatural Shakespearean dimension change in the process? It moved into two complementary, though apparently opposite, directions. On the one hand, apparitions and supernatural events were an opportunity to show off the new technologies, as Davenant demonstrated. For instance, in his adaptation of Macbeth, the supernatural dimension is rendered through acrobatic devices: thanks to stage machinery, witches fly over the stage, they enter and exeunt hanging from ropes. That would illustrate an instance pointing towards the translation of the supernatural into the so called 'fantastic' literature. On the other hand, in a cultural context where the 'enlightening' reason was the only leading principle of order in an otherwise chaotic world, formal equilibrium and harmony as well as a desire for balance, symmetry and refinement were the aesthetic values adopted by dramatists and, apparently, in striking contrast with Shakespeare’s supernatural imaginary. This trend would lead to philological and philosophical accuracy rather than a simple 'regularization' of Shakespeare’s plays.

My hypothesis is that in the process of making the Bard fit, his plays involved in irrational states of mind or supernatural dimensions were the ones subjected to the most serious modifications. Consequently, this investigation will try, first, to identify and interpret the often unexplored field of the approach of Seventeenth century adapters – including Davenant, Dryden, Colman, Garrick – in the staging of Shakespearean supernatural dimension, particularly in texts as Midsummer Night’s Dream, Hamlet, Macbeth, The Tempest, and, then, also trace their influence on the cultural process of Shakespearean adaptation.

REFERENCES

William Fowler’s neo-Latin verse in the Hawthornden Manuscripts: a case-study on the relations between vernacular and Latin poetry in Renaissance Scotland

ABSTRACT

The material aim of this project is to produce a viable scholarly edition of the previously unedited corpus of Latin verse by William Fowler, Foreign Secretary of Queen Anne from around 1590 until 1612. Fowler is the author of a Scots translation of Petrarch's Triumphs, as well as of part of Machiavelli's work and of a Petrarchan sonnet sequence, the Tarantula of Love. Fowler's vernacular verse has already elicited a good amount of critical attention, as have some of his prose works, in the light of his dealings in poetry and politics, and of his intellectual contacts in Scotland, England and on the Continent. The present research is firstly intended as the prosecution of such critical work, completing Fowler's published canon with the inclusion of his Latin production in verse. The edition will be based on the main manuscript witness for Fowler's Latin poetry, Edinburgh National Library of Scotland, Hawthornden 2063-2067, though other examples of contemporary Latin poetry will also be taken into consideration. Ongoing research into the role played by neo-Latin literature in the definition of a modern literary identity is a recent reminder of the significance of the neo-Latin literary world between the XVI and XVII centuries. Therefore, a secondary aim of this research is to obtain information on the reading and writing circles associated with Fowler's production, to clarify their composition and their role in Scotland and England, and the relations they entertain with both the Insular and the Continental neo-Latin cultural milieu. This second aim relates closely to the work that is being carried on by prof. Reid of Glasgow University and his group, with the project Bridging the Continental Divide, dealing with an anthology of Latin poetry published in the Netherlands in 1637, Delitiae Poetarum Scotorum.

The project is currently in the initial stage; as such, my intention here is to present the results of preliminary surveys, including a detailed description of the relevant sections in Hawthornden, and an inventory of the Latin texts.

REFERENCES

Emanuel Stelzer  
PhD in Studi Umanistici Interculturali, University of Bergamo  
Supervisors: Prof. Angela Locatelli, Prof. Ingo Berensmeyer

Functions and Effects of the Portrait  
in Early Modern English Drama

ABSTRACT

My project aims to investigate the complex web of interconnections that grows out of the presentation of portraits in drama. The time period under consideration ranges from the Elizabethan age up to the closing of the theatres. I intend to carry out a study of the diverse ways in which the structure of the dramatic text and the characters’ subjectivities are shaped and changed through the process of observation and interpretation of pictures in dramatic action and dialogues.

The first part will be devoted to a discussion of the methodological premises and instruments to be applied. I will illustrate certain fundamental notions pertaining to the semiotics of theatre and drama, intermediality studies and visual culture studies.

The second part shall examine specific elements from the visual culture(s) circulating in early modern England. English portraiture featured specific stylemes which are dissimilar from the ones in use on the continent. In particular, the poetics of limning will be taken into account. These practices find a precise correlative in the drama of a society facing anxiety toward the image as such, generating the opposite attitudes of iconophobia and iconophilia. In fact old beliefs concerning picture magic, the well-known Baconian attack against “idols”, and the new discoveries in the field of optics, are at work in this context and promote a great epistemological shift from a system based on “resemblance” to one hinged on “representation”. In this chapter I will also concentrate on the use of props of that theatre and its peculiar actor-spectator transaction.

In the third part of the thesis, the plays that best illustrate the potentialities of portraits on stage will be closely analysed, through the methodological lenses outlined in the first part and the results ascertained in the second. Among these texts, I will discuss Hamlet (the closet scene), John Webster’s The White Devil (the first dumb show, II.ii), Philip Massinger’s The Picture, and William Sampson’s The Vow-Breaker.

REFERENCES