

Abstracts

In Defiance of Death: Shakespeare and Tomb Sculpture

CATHERINE BELSEY

Two distinct versions of the *vanitas* appear on late medieval and early modern double-decker tombs. On the one hand, medieval asceticism shows death triumphant and sculpted cadaver humiliated by its own mortality. On the other, Reformation humanism celebrates death as the gateway to eternity, allowing the skeletal dead to defy their own finitude. Shakespeare draws imagery and dramatic action from both traditions.

Keywords: Effigy, Skeleton, *Transi* tombs, *Hamlet*, Cleopatra

'False Latin', Double Dutch: Foreign and Domestic in Love's Labour's Lost and The Shoemaker's Holiday

RUI CARVALHO HOMEM

This paper offers a discussion of linguistic diversity as a source of laughter in two early modern English comedies, respectively by William Shakespeare and Thomas Dekker. It focuses especially on the close relationship between the risible potential of some verbal practices and the playwrights' dramatisation of tensions between a sense of the foreign and an assertive vernacular Englishness – at a moment in European cultural and political history that proved crucial for the emergence of commonplace perceptions of national identities. My reading of such tensions will benefit from insights provided by imagology, translation and comparative studies.

Keywords: *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Shoemaker's Holiday*, Laughter, Vernacular Englishness, National identities

Shakespeare contra Erasmus

CLAUDIA CORTI

This essay reads Erasmus, with the mediation of nineteenth-century theorists,

as one of Shakespeare's dominant influences: this is equally true for his dramatic, theatrical, and lyric production. Drawing upon *The Praise of Folly*, *Enchiridion*, and *Adagia*, as well as "vanitas" portraiture and emblematic literature, this essay aims to provide a textual analysis of cross-references between Erasmus' and Shakespeare's shared conceptions of the Renaissance idea of vanity, in their treatment of such themes as illusion, fancy and imagination, phantasm, as well as politics.

Keywords: Erasmus, Shakespeare, Vanity, Folly, Phantasm

Samuel Johnson, William Shakespeare, and the Vanity of Human Wishes

ROBERT DEMARIA, JR.

He may be best known for his *Dictionary of the English Language* (1755), but Samuel Johnson also performed in almost every other literary genre common in the eighteenth century. In all his many varied works of poetry, biography, fiction, and journalism, certain common themes persist. The most conspicuous of these is the vanity of human wishes, or, as the sermonizer in Ecclesiastes 1.14 says, "all is vanity". It is not surprising, therefore, that this theme appears prominently in Johnson's edition of the plays of Shakespeare (1765). He worked on this edition on and off throughout the middle part of his career when he was elaborating Ecclesiastes 1.14 in every other genre, and he does so again as an editor. He felt that Shakespeare's greatest fault was a failure to be explicit about his moral lessons. His role as commentator, he evidently felt, was to articulate the morals he believed should be drawn from Shakespeare, and the moral he finds more often than any other is the vanity of human wishes. That is, above all, what Johnson's Shakespeare teaches us.

Keywords: Samuel Johnson, *Dictionary of the English Language*, Shakespeare, Ecclesiastes, Vanity

"There is nothing sure in mortality – but mortality": Notes on Middleton's Way with Death

DANIELA GUARDAMAGNA

The title quotation is attributed by Thomas Middleton to one of the shallower characters in his *Revenger's Tragedy* (1606). This paper deals with the unconventional strategy of attributing such a fundamental sentence to an antagonist and analyses its fruitful outcome. It also tackles the theme of mortality in revenge tragedies, particularly in *Hamlet* and in Middleton's

play.

Keywords: Middleton, Shakespeare, Revenge tragedy, Mortality, the Vanity of human wishes

"This is nothing, fool": Shakespeare's Vanities

MICHAEL NEILL

Remembering the Latin root of *vanity* in *vanus* meaning 'empty' or 'void', this essay explores the use of *vanitas* and *memento mori* motifs in early modern drama, and to the ways in which they are used to play upon primal fears of nullification. Paying particular attention to the relationship between vanity and folly, the essay concludes with an account of *King Lear's* Fool as a *vanitas* figure – a prophet of the terrifying nullity into which the tragedy descends.

Keywords: Vanity, Emptiness, Nullification, Folly, *King Lear*

Vanitas Iconography as a Dramatic Device in Hamlet and Macbeth

ALESSIA PALMIERI

By tracing an iconographical itinerary throughout some of the typical symbols that animate the *memento mori* artistic *topos*, this essay seeks to demonstrate how Shakespeare's use of verbal images of death in *Hamlet* and *Macbeth* is not only indebted to a centuries-long literary as well as pictorial tradition, but also functions as a primary dramatic device in the framework of both plays. From Laertes' parting words to Ophelia, to Macduff's portrayal of Banquo in the guise of a walking spirit, Shakespeare weaves a web of cross-references running through each of the two tragedies, foreshadowing the characters' fate. Investigating the plot in retrospect, small hints at the protagonists' demise resurface. Thus, Shakespearean *dramatis personæ* can be said to perish of a slow and gradual death, one that is gradually prepared until it is made actual.

Keywords: Vanitas, Death iconography, Dramatic technique, Preparation

All Petrarch's Fault: The Idea of a Renaissance

ALESSANDRA PETRINA

This article discusses the meaning of the term *Renaissance* and its application to the cultural and literary sphere, discussing its early definitions on the part of scholars such as Jules Michelet, Jacob Burckhardt, and Johan Huizinga, as well as its etymology, in the context of the investigation of other keywords such as *Humanism* and *Middle Ages*. It then focuses on the latter term, *Middle Ages*, by considering its first creation, and its use on the part of a proto-humanist such as Petrarch. In the discussion of the reception of these terms on the part of scholarship, it also proposes a new meaning for these terms.

Keywords: Renaissance, Early Modern, Middle Ages, Humanism, Petrarch

An Image of Vanitas: Geometrical Optics and Shakespearean Points of View

B. J. SOKOL

A woodcut illustration to *Der Ritter vom Turn*, Marquard vom Stein's 1493 German translation of Chevalier Geoffroy de La Tour Landry's *Livre pour l'enseignement de ses filles* (c. 1372), shows a girl vainly viewing herself in a mirror unaware of an obscene demon standing behind her. The implied viewer of this scene sees the girl and demon and the demon reflected in her mirror. Thus the spectator is made aware of the unawareness of the girl. The geometrical optics and perceptual mechanisms lying behind this scene are explored and placed in historical contexts. It is also noted how mirror imaging served varied purposes when noted or depicted by Renaissance authors. It is demonstrated finally that Shakespeare created dramatic configurations that show how perceptions may be entirely altered as a result of changes of vantage point or points of view.

Keywords: Mirrors, Vanity, Mistaken perception, *Timon of Athens*, *Troilus and Cressida*