**Greek Texts and the Early Modern Stage**

One-Day Colloquium, 14th July 2014

The Treehouse – Humanities Research Centre, University of York

8.30-9.00 Registration & Coffee

9.00-9.15 Introduction and opening remarks

(Tanya Pollard and Tania Demetriou)

9.15-10.00 Yves Peyré, *Montpellier III – IRCL*

‘Homeric Voices in *Antony and Cleopatra*’

[30mins followed by questions]

10.00-11.00 Claire Kenward, *APGRD* (Oxford)

‘Striving to illustrate things not knowne to all’: Reading Homer on the Early-Modern Stage’

Charlotte Coffin, *Paris-Est*

‘Heywood’s *Ages* and Chapman’s Homer: From Contrast to Comparison’

[2x 20mins followed by questions]

11.00-11.20 COFFEE BREAK

11.20-1.00 Charlotte Markey, *Exeter University*

‘Aristophanes, Lucian and Ben Jonson’s Anti-Acquisitive Attitude’

Marion Hollings, *University of Tennessee*

‘Performing Ghosts of Greek History: Genealogies of Shakespeare’s Scythian’

[2x 20 mins & 10 mins questions]

Micha Lazarus, *Cambridge University*

‘Aristotle’s *Poetics* and Reformation Greek’

Patrick Gray, *Durham University*

‘The Moral Mirror: Shakespeare and Aristotle’s Theory of Friendship’

[2x 20 mins & 10 mins questions]

1.00-2.00 LUNCH

2.00-3.00 Sarah Van der Laan, *Indiana University*

‘Circean Transformation and the Poetics of Milton’s Masque’

Hannah Crawforth, *KCL*

‘Milton and Euripides: The Politics of Genre’

[2x 20mins & discussion]

3.00-4.30 Leah Whittington, *Harvard University*

‘Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, Plutarch, and Greek Tragedy’

Sarah Dewar-Watson, *Sheffield University*

‘*Hamlet* and the Ghost of Sophocles’

Andrew Zurcher, *Cambridge University*

‘Shakespeare, Sophocles, and the Unbearable Father’

[3x 20 mins & questions]

4.30-5.00 TEA BREAK

5.00-5.45 Gordon Braden, *University of Virginia*

‘Classical Greek Drama and the English Renaissance Stage’

5.45-6.00 BREAK (wine and juice to take to the discussion)

6.00-7.00 Roundtable

led by Charles Martindale, Richard Rowland, and Fiona Macintosh

7.45 for 8.00 Dinner at *Ambiente*

Abstracts

Yves Peyré   
Homeric Voices in *Antony and Cleopatra*

Rereading *Antony and Cleopatra* in the light of Homer’s epics, of Vergil’s and Ovid’s reworkings of Homeric material, and of some translations of the *Iliad and the Odyssey* into Latin between late 15th century and mid-sixteenth century may lead one to envision Antony’s oscillations in Shakespeare’s tragedy as constructing a composite character sharing features that derive from interpretations both of Hector and of Paris. This investigation is conducted within the broader framework of the cultural reception and reinterpretation of Homer in early modern literature, at a time when fluctuating relations between heroism and sentiment seem to be reassessed.

Claire Kenward

‘Striving to illustrate things not knowne to all’: Reading Homer on the Early-Modern Stage.1

In 1619, during a performance of Thomas Goffe’s *Couragious Turke* at Christ-Church Oxford, a copy of Homer’s *Iliad* took centre-stage. In a strikingly convoluted metatheatrical moment a student-actor, playing a Turkish-Player playing Alexander the Great, reads aloud from a Greek edition *Iliad* whilst Achilles’ and Hector’s ghosts battle across the stage. The moment effectively summarises the manner in which Greek texts have typically been considered in discussions of early-modern England: locked in Greek, closeted within academia, and mediated by Latin texts allowing only ghostly glimpses of the original (here, Plutarch’s account of Alexander reading Aristotle’s “casket-copy” of the *Iliad*).

However, between *c*.1610 and *c*.1612, Homer and his *Iliad* had also taken centre-stage in London’s major playhouses. Thomas Heywood’s cycle of *Age* plays (*Golden*, *Silver*, *Brazen* and *Iron Age 1* and *2*), were most probably performed at the Red Bull, Globe and Blackfriars. The *Iron Age*s ostensibly stage the *Iliad*, whilst the former plays are presided over by Homer himself as Chorus. Thus at the same time that Chapman’s completed English *Iliad* was urging readers to ‘love [Homer] thus reviv’d / As borne in England’, Heywood’s own English-Homer was informing London’s ‘unlettered’ audience that he had come ‘to unlocke the Casket long time shut, / Of which none but the learned keepe the key’.

Taking such instances of metatheatrical intertextuality as its starting-point, this paper explores theatrical transmissions of “Homer” (as a character, textual-source, and critical authority), whilst investigating the two-way relationship between early-modern playwrights and Greek texts – principally Homer’s *Iliad* and Aristotle’s *Poetics*. Considering these playwrights as grown-up schoolboys, the paper will examine rhetorical reading-strategies inculcated by England’s Humanist grammar-schools, as well as the strict bifurcation of genre within academia’s “Aristotelian” criticism, as cultural factors at work in their negotiations with ‘old Worme-eaten Booke[s]’. Chief amongst such competing factors will be the impact of the playwrights’ ‘unlearned’ playhouse audience, whose own understanding of Homeric material set the newly circulating Greek texts in dialogue with the “older” traditions of the English *Troy Books*.

Charlotte Markey

Aristophanes, Lucian and Ben Jonson's 'Anti Acquisitive Attitude'

Ever since the publication of L C Knight’s *Drama and Society in the Age of Jonson* (1937), scholars have been divided in their interpretation of Jonsons’ use of the comic form as a means of critquing the increasingly fragmented, individualistic society of proto-capitalist London. Katharine Eisaman Maus believes that Jonson’s satirical treatment of avarice and self-interest comes from his engagement with Horace, Juvenal and the various Stoic sources with which he was familiar.

In this paper I argue that Jonson’s use of comedy as means through which to reform the abuses asssociated the acqusitive mindset was rooted in his knowledge of Lucian and Aristophanes and stock characters of Plautus, which were essentially Greek in origin. Lucian’s Menippean satires were inherently theatrical and combined with the biting critique of individualism and the self-seeking pursuit of indiviual wealth which pervandces the Aristophanic corpus, Jonson had an arsenal of Greek sources which he could unleash upon his London audience.

In this paper, I examine Jonson’s *Volpone* (1606) as the most glittering example of Jonson’s Greek rather than Roman frame of mind. I demonstrate how Jonson absorbed the Greek attitude to wealth and its use through the study of Classical sources read through a humanist lens. I show how Jonson’s engagement with Erasmus’ *Praise of Folly* (1516)and More’s *Utopia* (1516)would have provided him with a Platonic and Lucianic attitude to the effect of gold upon the psyche.

Marion Hollings

Performing Ghosts of Greek History: Genealogies of Shakespeare’s Scythian

A Scythian specter haunts Shakespeare’s plays: *Titus Andronicus*, *Henry VI, Part I*, *King Lear*—all participate in the culture’s perpetuation of a Scythian ghost. Shakespeare might have derived his idea of the Scythian from sources including such Greek classical accounts as those of Herodotus in his *Histories*, appearing in several fifteenth- and sixteenth-century compilations, editions and translations into modern languages, as well as more popular forms of transmission such as contemporary theatre (notably Marlowe’s *Tamburlaine*) and travel literature making use of Herodotian formulae. But Scythians emerge in Shakespeare’s drama as figures more complex than the metonym for barbarity that early modern discourses on the Scythian might seem to suggest. Re-examining the Scythian’s primary characteristics in *The Histories* within the context of early modern accounts of “Scythian barbarisme” (Spenser’s *Vewe*) invites a reconsideration of the significance of the Scythian in the writing of early modern chronicles, histories, and genealogies, to which Shakepeare’s plays contribute and from which they emerge.

Herodotus admires in Scythian restlessness an attendant facility in perpetuating bloodlines by mixing with “all nations” (*Vewe*). In Shakespearean drama, this quality of mixing is perhaps most clearly revealed in the character of Tamora, behind which the specter of Herodotus’s Tomyris can be seen, propelled by early modern cultural expectations regarding the Scythian. The play of *Titus Andronicus* ends with the promised survival of Tamora’s and Aaron’s child. The inherent drama of the Scythian’s self-perpetuating strategies, through movement and mixing, helps establish the Scythian as a subtext, or as part of a palimpsest, of English views of the Irish. Early modern discourses on the Scythian, prevalent in the chronicles, especially as regards the supposed descent of the Irish from Scythians, the reputed invasion of Ireland by Scythians following the collapse of the Roman empire, and the remnant of Celtic cultural influences recorded in Scythia, contribute to emerging ethnographic and ethnological categories, and vestiges of the Scythian continue to cling to the Amazons’ displacement from Scythia to the “New World” in travel literatures of the period.

Through constituting the Scythian as most barbaric of barbarians, most “outside” law and culture, the archetypal “other” of history, superlative in all thing abominable, in a logic resembling that of Derrida’s in *The Beast and the Sovereign*, all nations are “mingled into one” (as Spenser puts it)—all national and cultural distinctions are effectively erased. Thus the Scythian formula aids the period’s imperial and colonial projects, but not only by helping to confine the barbarian or “savage” needing civilization—though that is superficially the case. On the one hand, Spenser, and Elizabethan policies more widely, advances this reason as justification for outlawing Irish culture. But on the other hand, according to Spenser again, the restless Scythian, mingling with all others, provides the “oneness” that allows “Christendom” to supplant “all nations” (a Pauline commonplace). Thus the spectre of Scythian lawlessness, which haunts Shakespeare’s plays as well as Spenser’s *Vewe of Ireland* and Marlow’s Tamburlaine, among the more enduring formulations, becomes a necessary antecedent of Christ’s, existing in history polychronically, in Gil Harris’s conception of palimpsestic artifacts. This essay revisits the function of Herodotus’s Scythian in Shakespeare’s plays and in early modern historiography more generally. Foregrounding the Scythian in conversations about Greek classical receptions in the English Renaissance deepens our understanding of the Scythian’s significance in early modern political theology and to the project of remapping broader issues that engage the status of ‘nation’ and cultural and religious identity in the period.

Micha Lazarus

Aristotle’s Poetics and Reformation Greek

My paper draws together an under-appreciated set of references to Aristotle’s *Poetics*made in the 1540s by John Cheke, Roger Ascham, and Martin Bucer, several decades before the *Poetics* is usually thought to have become influential in England. Making sense of these references touches on several fields of interest in sixteenth-century Greek, including the reform of Greek pronunciation at Cambridge, Luther’s take on Aristotelian education, the teaching of Greek language by early sixteenth-century Byzantine émigrés in Venice, Erasmus’s stay in Aldus’s printing house in 1508, and the oft-neglected generic affiliations of the *Poetics*to grammar and rhetoric. This paper revises the conventional narrative of Aristotle’s English reception both chronologically and generically, replacing it among a set of major Reformation figures thinking seriously about educational, linguistic, ecclesiastical, and even dramatic reform.

Patrick Gray

The moral mirror: Shakespeare and Aristotle’s theory of friendship

In a conversation at the beginning of Shakespeare’s *Julius Caesar*, Cassius explains to Brutus that he needs another person, a friend, as a “mirror” or “glass,” in order to understand his own true worth. The same kind of imagery appears in the work of contemporary poets such as John Donne, as well as other plays by Shakespeare such as *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*; in particular, the haunting conceit of the eye itself as the mirror of the eye of another: “eye to eye opposed.” Over the years, critics have suggested a wide range of possible sources for this *topos*, including Plato’s *First Alcibiades* and Cicero’s *Tusculan Disputations.* The most likely source, however, is Aristotle’s moral philosophy, in particular a short treatise of doubtful authenticity known as the *Magna Moralia,* in which Aristotle, or perhaps pseudo-Aristotle, introduces the metaphor of the friend as a mirror. The preeminent commentator on Aristotle in England in the sixteenth century was John Case, a physician affiliated with the University of Oxford, and he seems to have seized upon this conceit as a master-metaphor. In 1584, Case wrote a commentary on Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* titled *Speculum moralium quaestionum* (“The mirror of moral questions”), and in 1596 a commentary on Aristotle’s *Magna Moralia* titled *Reflexus speculi moralis* (“Reflection of the moral mirror”). Case draws special attention to Aristotle’s comparison between a friend and a mirror, and it is Case, it seems, who first introduces the eye-as-mirror conceit as an elaboration of this simpler metaphor.

Circean Transformation and the Poetics of Milton’s Masque

Sarah Van der Laan

Tempted by Milton’s decision to make Circe the mother of Comus, critics have often read *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle* through traditional allegories of Odysseus’ encounter with Circe as a triumph of human reason over baser appetites. Though popular in the Renaissance, this allegorical tradition was not the only treatment of Circe available to Milton. Another tradition, derived from Augustine and widely diffused through the paratexts of Renaissance editions of both the *Odyssey* and the *Metamorphoses*, uses Circe to explore the possibility and the permanence of human transformations and the experience of transformation itself. These discussions range from the metaphysical to the practical, from reflections on the ability of any mortal (or demonic) creature to effect transformations to curiosity about the mechanics of changing men into pigs. Extended from theological to literary discourse, this reading of Circe interrogates the nature of poetic transformation and the potential for human creativity. It is this discourse that Milton embeds in his masque—a genre that places metamorphosis and unveiling at the heart of its poetics—to examine the nature of Renaissance intertextuality and interrogate his own use of Renaissance practices of *imitatio* and *aemulatio* in light of his desires for original poetic achievement.

Hannah Crawforth

Milton and Euripides: The Politics of Genre

Considerations of the debt Milton’s political writings owe to Euripides, dubbed his ‘favourite dramatist’, have thus far prioritised the epigraph to *Areopagitica* taken from *The Suppliants*. But scholars have begun to uncover a more profound influence of the Greek playwright upon Milton, detecting allusions to Euripides in poetic works ranging from ‘The Nativity Ode’, the Sonnets, *Samson Agonistes* and his epic, *Paradise Lost*; the range of texts evoked is also wider than previously thought, encompassing *Medea*, *Alcestis*, *The Trojan Women*, and *Iphigenia in Taurus*, amongst other plays. My paper takes in questions of both politics and genre, as I seek to reconsider what Milton thought he was doing when invoking Euripides’ plays in his political writings. What political motivations underpin such allusions? And what does it mean for Milton to cross genre divides, importing fragments of dramatic verse into his prose tracts?

Leah Whittington

Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*, Plutarch and Greek Tragedy

It is now a matter of scholarly consensus that Shakespeare’s renewed engagement with North’s Plutarch in late 1590’s had a transformative impact on his conception of drama. Cynthia Marshall is one of several recent readers to observe that the return to Plutarch marks “the establishment of our culture’s prevailing model of character as one that is at once intensely performative and putatively interiorized;” with *Julius Caesar*, Marshall argues, Shakespeare moves from the “richly inventive but largely plot-driven plays of the 1590’s” to the “deeply characterological dramas that follow.” Part of the allure of Plutarch lay in the very organization of his text as pairs of *Lives*: tightly structured, highly literary comparisons of the virtues and vices of great men. But in addition to providing a wealth of classical material already shaped into character-based narratives, Plutarch’s *Lives* were deeply imbued with the representational strategies of ancient drama. Recent critics have demonstrated that Plutarch constructs many of his *Lives* on the patterns of Athenian tragedy, using a tragic lens to mould the material of his stories of great men. This paper makes a case for Shakespeare’s contact with ancient Greek drama through the mediation of Plutarch’s *Lives*. I argue that in *Coriolanus* Shakespeare takes the structuring principles of ancient drama – sensing through Plutarch some of the patterning devices of Greek tragedy – and develops them into his own story of a man undone by the same qualities that define his greatness. While evidence for Shakespeare’s direct contact with Greek drama continues to be elusive, Plutarch functions as a literary mediator who enables Shakespeare to fashion his Coriolanus along the lines of Sophocles’ Ajax: an unyielding war-hero who can only break, not bend.

Sarah Dewar-Watson

Hamlet and the Ghost of Sophocles

There is growing recognition of Hamlet’s particular engagement with Greek tragic sources (e.g. Schleiner, 1990). Most recently, Tanya Pollard has highlighted the significance of Watson’s Antigone (1581) for our reading of the play. This paper argues for further intertextual relationships between Hamlet and Sophocles’ Antigone.

In Hamlet I.v, the Ghost protests that he died without due preparation for death: that he died ‘Unhousel’d, disappointed, unanel’d’ (I.v.77). This line recalls Teiresias’ description of the corpse of Polyneices corpse as ‘ἄμοιρον, ἀκτέριστον, ἀνόσιον’ (Antigone 1071). In both cases, there is a distinctive use of tricolon, the privative prefix and an emphasis on the absence of ritual elements which should properly accompany death.

Significantly, the obvious source for Shakespeare’s reading of the Antigone – Watson’s translation – does not render this phrase very closely. I suggest that the apparent verbal echo in Hamlet takes us to a parallel text anthology, Tragœdiae selectæ Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripidis (1567). The Greek text of the Antigone contains a facing translation by George Rataller. This volume contains three Greek tragedies (Erasmus’ Hecuba and Iphigeneia and Buchanan’s Alcestis) which Shakespeare is believed to have known. My claim that Shakespeare knew this Greek-Latin edition of the Antigone does not displace Watson’s translation from view: Watson may well have prompted Shakespeare to read other versions of the text.

The implications of the textual link I am positing are, broadly, threefold. (1) I suggest that we need to look in a more extended way at this volume of seven plays and its possible influence on Shakespeare. (2) Looking beyond the verbal reminiscence which I am positing, I argue that Hamlet’s debt to the Antigone is pervasive. Sophocles’ play, I suggest, provides a key stimulus for Hamlet’s exploration of moral questions concerning what the living owe the dead. (3) Finally, I reflect on Oedipal readings of Hamlet by Ernest Jones et. al. We may think that Oedipal theory is something which has been retrospectively been mapped onto the play by Freud and others following him. But it may be that the Oedipal paradigm is indeed embedded in the play through its use of Greek sources.

Andrew Zurcher

Shakespeare, Sophocles, and the Unbearable Father

Both Shakespeare's King Lear and Sophocles' Trachiniae present the tragedy of a father placing an unbearable burden onto his child – the burden of his body. Both plays, too, open questions about the intentionality of a range of actions, culminating in this, inscrutable, act of self-donation. In this paper I will show some of the structural and verbal parallels that suggest Shakespeare’s close attention to the bilingual Stephanus (or Estienne) edition of this play in Sophocles’ Tragoediae septem, which will lead me to propose that King Lear in some sense bears the corpus of Sophocles.

Gordon Braden

Classical Greek Drama and the English Renaissance Stage

The desire to see Classical Greek thatre as somehow a shaping presence in the development of the English Renaissance stage has been a persistent one, even in the face of good scholarship and common sense that forcefully argue otherwise. The potential wistfulness of the desire, a natural result of the high regard in which both Greek drama and English Renaissance drama, above all Shakespeare, continue to be held, is obvious enough, and discussion of the topic in the last few decades has not been extensive. There has, however, been a sustained line of serious proposals—from Emrys Jones, C. D. B. Pelling, Tanya Pollard, Louise Schleiner, Michael Silk, and others—for specific, sometimes very specific lines of theatrical influence between ancient Athens and early modern London, proposals involving fresh research into details, new assessment of old evidence, and innovative understandings of just how this kind of influence can manifest itself. The purpose of this paper is to canvass these proposals, assess them critically, consider their methods in relation to one another, and discuss what it is that they do (and do not) show within our larger understanding of the role of classical literature in the achievements of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatre.