

# Shakespeare's Unsung Heroes and Heroines

24. April 2015, 15:00-16:30

Seminarzentrum der Freien Universität Berlin.

- 15:00** Felix Sprang and Christina Wald: Introduction
- 15:05** Sam Gilchrist Hall (London): Feeble Heroism: *1&2 Henry IV* and Intellectual Liberty (Respondent: Martin Moraw)
- 15:10** Gemma Miller (London): 'There's not a boy left alive': The heroic eloquence of Shakespeare's silenced children. An analysis of *Henry V* and *Macbeth* (Respondent: Sam Hall)
- 15:15** Responses
- 15:20** Discussion
- 15:35** Martin Moraw (Munich): Fortinbras's Revenge: from *Trauerspiel* to Romance in *Hamlet* (Respondent: Karoline Baumann)
- 15:40** David Amelang (Berlin): Rediscovering Ophelia: Conception and Perception of Ophelia in Relation to Her Revenge Tragedy Predecessors (Respondent: Marlena Tronicke)
- 15:45** Marlena Tronicke (Münster): Screaming Silence – Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus* (Respondent: David Amelang)
- 15:50** Karoline Baumann (Berlin): (Un)heroic madness: The Jailer's Daughter as playwright and audience figure in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (Respondent: Gemma Miller)
- 15:55** Responses
- 16:10** Discussion
- 16:30** End of Seminar

## Abstracts

### **Feeble Heroism: 1&2 *Henry IV* and Intellectual Liberty**

**Sam Gilchrist Hall (University of London)**

‘Resolve to be slaves no longer and you are at once freed’: so wrote Étienne de La Boétie in his *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude* (pub. 1579), for whom the success of tyranny depends upon what William Blake would come to call the ‘mind-forg’d manacles’ of its victims. This paper analyses the heroic refusals of two characters from very different times and places to behave as they should.

The philosophical readiness for death of Francis Feeble, an unsung hero, who is a marginal and plebeian character in Shakespeare’s *2 Henry IV*, offers an alternative to the two prevailing ways of behaving: the cynical instrumentalism of the nobles, on the one hand, and the outright cowardice of Falstaff and Co., on the other. And a similar acceptance of death from someone without a Socratic education can be found in a surprising place: Werner Herzog’s 1977 documentary, *La Soufrière – Warten auf eine unausweichliche Katastrophe*, which follows a hermit who has refused to leave the volcanic Caribbean island of Guadeloupe, instead ecstatically accepting his ostensibly inescapable death.

Not only do the actions of these characters encapsulate the revolutionary kernel of art, which lies in obstinate resistance to the way things are, but their refusals to serve also offer twenty-first century humanists a model of political praxis: the corrupt managerial hierarchies and insidious systems of intellectual surveillance, which have flourished in the academe in recent years, function only with the willing acquiescence of those they enthrall. Because many twenty-first century humanists choose to serve the powers that be rather than think for themselves, they are in no small part responsible for the insidious marketization of the academe. There is a pressing need to re-discover the heroic kernel of humanistic study, encapsulated by Erasmus’s defiant credo: *concedo nulli*. Justification for continued study of the arts and humanities, I contend, is to be found in the fact that they teach people to take courage in their convictions, inculcating a life that is no longer blighted by voluntary servitude.

### **‘There’s not a boy left alive’: The heroic eloquence of Shakespeare’s silenced children An analysis of *Henry V* and *Macbeth***

**Gemma Miller (King’s College London)**

Shakespeare’s children are the most disregarded and underanalyzed of the unsung heroes. Yet their marginalization is critical rather than dramatic. Child-characters feature more numerous and prominently in the Shakespearean canon than in that of any other early modern playwright. Extensive work has been carried out over the past 30 years to recuperate voices subordinated by class, gender and race. However, the excellent work of scholars such as Carol Chillington Rutter, Kate Chedgzoy, and Katie Knowles notwithstanding, the significance of the children, both on the page and on the stage, remains an area to be examined and foregrounded more rigorously. They speak with a wisdom that belies their tender years, warning Shakespeare’s adults – and his audience – of the specious nature of political rhetoric, as in *Richard III*. Their deaths often function as a dramatic peripeteia,

manipulating audience empathy and hastening a tragic demise, as in *King John*. They reflect and magnify the major dramatic themes, whether that be the cyclical nature of history, as in *Coriolanus*'s miniature warrior Young Martius, or sensitive political issues of succession and legitimacy, such as Fleance in *Macbeth*. They provide ironic commentary on the actions of their elders, as in the Boy in *Henry V*, and foreground their failings, like Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale*. Their lines may be minimal, but their presence speaks volumes, and nowhere is this more evident than on the stage. Although it is perhaps forgivable to gloss over the child-characters when reading Shakespeare's plays (and many have), the phenomenological effects of their embodied presence in performance precludes such interpretive oversights. Through a consideration of the role of the child in *Macbeth* and *Henry V*, this paper will draw on performance examples and close textual analysis to call for a greater recognition of the children as Shakespeare's unsung heroes.

### **Fortinbras's Revenge: from *Trauerspiel* to Romance in *Hamlet***

**Martin Moraw (Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität, Munich)**

This essay argues that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* shifts over the course of its action from the generic logic of *Trauerspiel* as theorized by Walter Benjamin to that of romance. The occasion for this shift is the plot line that frames the play's main action, Fortinbras's revenge on Denmark. The logic of revenge, I argue, resists closure. Yet closure, both in the formal sense of conclusion and in the political sense of a return to stability, is at the same time what Fortinbras's accidental conquest of Denmark is called upon to provide in *Hamlet*. I first show that the paradoxical result of this contradiction on the level of form is that Hamlet's revenge on Claudius, while taking center stage, is simultaneously subordinated to Fortinbras's revenge on Denmark, even as the latter remains behind the scenes for most of the play. I then argue that this initial distinction, between Hamlet's capacity to impel the main action on the one hand and Fortinbras's timely appearance to round it off on the other, should in turn be conceived in terms of a second, deeper variance between their two stories. The two princes, that is, inhabit two distinct generic modes: whereas Hamlet's revenge unfolds in the mode of a Danish *Trauerspiel*, that of Fortinbras is a Norwegian romance. Finally, I argue that this internal generic discontinuity allows us to grasp the play as what Fredric Jameson calls a "socially symbolic act," as an "ideological — but formal and immanent — response to a historical dilemma." In *Hamlet*, the remotivation of the older romance structure within the new formal environment of revenge tragedy functions to contain an ideological problem that emerges in the latter genre. The Fortinbras plot symbolically resolves the conceptual scandal that is the dialectical unity of the figures of the outlaw and the sovereign, by transforming the Norwegian prince, as though by fortunate accident, from one into the other.

### **Rediscovering Ophelia: Conception and Perception of Ophelia in Relation to Her Revenge Tragedy Predecessors**

**David Amelang (Freie Universität Berlin)**

This paper explores how the character of Ophelia in *Hamlet* stylistically and conceptually challenges the traditional figure of the young heroine in Elizabethan revenge plays. Throughout his career, especially in the stage leading up to the writing of *Hamlet* in 1599-1600, the heroines of Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies, so different and so distinctive in character, play agential roles in the development of the plot, even when they do not

necessarily find themselves at the centre of the story. The same can be said of the heroines in revenge tragedies of the time, such as Bel-Imperia in Thomas Kyd's blockbuster *The Spanish Tragedy*. *Hamlet's* Ophelia, however, is a variation that becomes even more noticeable when compared to her direct generic and chronological predecessors. Where, then, did Shakespeare look to instead of at his immediate theatrical precedents? The analysis of behavioural guides for gentle ladies of the period suggests that the source of inspiration for *Hamlet's* heroine was probably, in fact, Elizabethan England's Every(gentle)woman. The argument I present in this paper is supported by the close reading of Ophelia's interaction with other characters throughout the first three acts of the play, during which she behaves exactly as the manuals suggest a lady should. The importance of this turn to nature – to the reality of 16th century England – instead of falling in line of the playwriting tradition is heightened by the fact that all female characters were played by young men during Shakespeare's time. To the eye of the Elizabethan beholder, a more 'realistic' female character on the stage would remove by degrees the distance between the character on the page and the one on the stage.

### **Screaming Silence – Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus***

**Marlena Tronicke (Universität Münster)**

Lavinia is one of the most readily marginalised of all Shakespearean characters, often discounted as mere collateral damage in a play that keeps piling up body after body. Through rape and mutilation, she literally loses her voice and is stripped of all forms of agency, which is epitomized in her physical inability to commit suicide. For centuries, *Titus Andronicus* has been passionately hated for its lack of tragic vision, which is substituted by an oscillation between stylization and grotesque violence. Unlike earlier stagings, more recent productions – especially Lucy Bailey's gory spectacle at Shakespeare's Globe in 2006/2014 – have quite rightly tended to highlight the latter. As the focal point of the audiences' attention and sympathy, Lavinia is the character that most urgently calls for poetic justice, but this is deliberately denied her. The play culminates in sensationalism and blood feast, whilst Lavinia herself finds a bathetic and distinctly unsatisfying ending, first unceremoniously killed by her father and then buried next to him in the family monument. However, Lavinia's silence has to be understood as a form of empowerment; it makes her the play's tragic heroine. Such extreme victimization challenges, if not altogether unsettles preconceived notions of the term 'heroine,' but to dismiss Lavinia as minor or indeed passive would be a misreading of not only her character but also the entire play. The haunting presence of her dismembered body on stage becomes a site of performative gender in Butler's terms, and since we cannot avert our eyes we are forced into the position of the voyeur. *Titus Andronicus* presents a disturbing, nightmarish vision of patriarchal authority, and it is through watching its unsung heroine suffer that we have to perceive this.

### **(Un)heroic Madness: The Jailer's Daughter as playwright and audience figure in *The Two Noble Kinsmen***

**Karoline Baumann (Freie Universität Berlin)**

*The Two Noble Kinsmen*, being a 'bastard' play that was written in collaboration with Fletcher, has itself been an unsung hero of the Shakespeare canon for a long time. It is based on "noble Chaucer" but as an important addition includes the subplot of the Jailer's Daughter who goes mad out of impossible love for one of the kinsmen. Her character forms a nexus for

various metatheatrical and political discourses. This paper will examine how madness, previously a privilege of the aristocracy, enables nuanced subjectivity for a bourgeois character. Unlike her predecessor Ophelia and unlike the noble kinsmen, the Jailer's Daughter is effectively "cured" from her madness by friends who steer her out of it (symbolically on a fictitious ship) once her hallucinations have been acted out collectively. They also save her when she is at the point of drowning – but not just her, the playwrights themselves need to be saved, swimming as they are "breathless[ly] in this deep water". The Jailer's Daughter becomes an on-stage surrogate for the artists and, at the same time, an audience figure whose desire for Palamon reflects the audience's desire for the aristocratic characters. She is also the authority on whose persuasion the success of the collective performance depends. The last unsung Shakespearean hero this paper will look at is, therefore, the audience, summoned by the prologue to "hold out/ Your helping hands" and "something do to save us." The Jailer's Daughter's (temporary) madness thus becomes a metaphor for the collective fiction of the theatrical illusion itself, the collaborative effort of which it is an effect, and the social position that it provides for its participants.