

Seminar

Shakespeare and Religious Dislocations: Texts, Iconography, Performance

Maria Luisa De Rinaldis¹, Paul J.C.M. Franssen²

¹University of Salento, Italy; ²Utrecht University, The Netherlands

marialuisa.derinaldis@unisalento.it; p.j.c.m.franssen@uu.nl

This seminar addresses Shakespearean passages that are charged with theological meaning(s) to provide insight into his dramatic practice in a period of religious change and theological anxieties. In line with a renewed interest in the relationship between literature and religion, but beyond divisive readings of Shakespeare as secular or religious, Catholic or Anglican, this seminar explores his supposed ideological 'evasiveness' or "confessional invisibility" (Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion*, 2010; Sean Benson, *Heterodox Shakespeare*, 2017), by tracing layers of religious allusion in otherwise secular plots - as when the conspirators wash their hands in Caesar's blood after the assassination, described by Brutus as a religious sacrifice.

Focusing on religious dislocations, including the survival of Roman Catholic feeling underneath Protestant repression, enhances our understanding of Shakespeare's intersystemic imaginative response to contemporary ideological and religious changes. If the recognition scene in *Twelfth Night* seems to dramatize the notion of 'presence', related to the controversial real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, "Mercy", in Portia's speech, calls up Protestant conceptions of Grace, while Portia herself appeals to nostalgia for Marian intercession (R. Espinosa, *Masculinity and Marian Efficacy in Shakespeare's England*, 2016).

Iconography, too, can help analysing how 'miracles,' such as Hermione's return to life, tie in with ancient, even pre-Christian ideas of resurrection. Extending the subject into Performance Studies, the seminar invites research into religious layers discovered in - or added to - Shakespeare's texts by (film) directors, such as Julie Taymore's self-conscious use of Roman-Catholic imagery of the Virgin and Saints in her 1999 *Titus*.

Regarded in the context of a post-Reformation world torn between old and new religious experiences, presumed centres and margins, Shakespeare's religious dislocations between (and within) "pasts and presents" (H. Cooper, R. Morse, P. Holland, *Medieval Shakespeare Pasts and Presents*, 2013) may appear less evasive.

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