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Introduction: Gascoigne from the Margins — Mediations, Translations, Appropriations

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Résumé de l'article

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Issues in Review

Silvia Bigliazzi (contributing editor), Silvia Silvestri, Cristiano Ragni, Emanuel Stelzer, Carla Suthren

Introduction: Gascoigne from the Margins — Mediations, Translations, Appropriations

Silvia Bigliazzi

This introduction presents the essays in the Early Theatre *Issues in Review 'Gascoigne from the Margins — Mediations, Translations, Appropriations', placing them in the context of current criticism on Gascoigne and bringing them into a conversation on his dramatic works looked at from the 'margins'.*

In 1990, Jonathan Crewe voiced a general critical difficulty in placing George Gascoigne in the Elizabethan literary context, calling him 'an appreciable poet of the English sixteenth century, with whom … no one has known quite what to do … Where he fits … remains a problem'.[1] Rather than trying to fix Gascoigne into any single category, this Issue in Review section discusses Gascoigne's dramatic works from a variety of perspectives, with sustained attention to his role as an intercultural mediator. Time and again, we find that Gascoigne's works constitute loci in which the local and the international, the personal and the public, intersect. His *Jocasta* (1566), collaboratively written with Francis Kinwelmersh, uses a contemporary Italian work as a lens through which to bring the prestige of classical Greek tragedy onto an English non-commercial stage. His *Supposes* (1566) shows an eccentric approach to translation, developing an original take on Ariosto's prose and verse versions of his *Suppositi*. In the *Masque of Mountacutes* (1572), Gascoigne's appropriation of the Romeo and Juliet story, which he could find in Arthur Brooke's 1562 poem from which Shakespeare was also to draw inspiration, he foregrounds issues of race and nationhood, putting the Italian

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novella in dialogue with contemporary Mediterranean political contexts. His probably unperformed didactic drama *The Glass of Government* (1575) stages English humanist educational theory against the backdrop of contemporary Antwerp, informed by Gascoigne's own experience as a soldier in the Low Countries during the 1570s. If we work to excavate the submerged story of the prodigal daughter in this otherwise male-dominated work, issues of gender become again significant, as they are in the earlier work *Jocasta*. Approaching Gascoigne's dramatic works through their printed marginalia offers a further level of multivocality, allowing us to explore the ways in which marginalia interact with the play-texts and engage the reader dialogically.

The essays in this issue of *Early Theatre* originate in a roundtable held at the *Theater Without Borders* 19th annual conference, 'Early Modern Theater in Our Time: Translational Urgencies' (Verona, 13–16 June 2023). They expand an idea of marginality, which does not mean secondary or peripheral but rather implies an ever-mutable perspectival flexibility that George Gascoigne proves beautifully to have. A soldier, a poet, a lover, and a mercenary in a broad sense, Gascoigne initiated the cult of Elizabeth, launching the 'innovation of deifying' her in entertainments and later in poetry.[2] He embodies, in many respects, the versatile proclivity of the Renaissance humanist who engages in different areas of life, combining court, military, and literary interests and, in this latter field, spanning a number of genres as well as speaking in different voices. Gascoigne was a mediator of classical and continental traditions. Crewe rightly remarks that 'Gascoigne parades himself in an unusually large number of guises for a sixteenth-century author': fictional as well as social, 'translator, apologist, satirist, reporter, playwright, prose-fiction author, moral essayist, editor, self-anthologizer, and instructor in versification'.[3] Translation is crucial to his activity, not only in the narrow interlingual sense but also in the broader sense of translating his own voice into different personae as well as transferring into his writings the cultural capital he drew on in his contribution to the shaping of English humanism.

This section on 'Gascoigne from the Margins' explores some of these roles in four plays across the genres of classical tragedy, comedy, 'moral closet drama', as well as the masque. Most studies of Gascoigne have been devoted to his life, and critics have examined his literary and dramatic works individually,[4] yet we have lacked a comprehensive view embracing multifarious approaches to lingual translation as well as to genres and forms for both the stage and the page. The five essays collected here engage in this conversation across various fields, moving from considerations about how an apparently marginal detail in Gascoigne's reworking of the first Greek tragedy in English helped construct ideas of classical

antiquity; to an analysis of the *Supposes*'s paratexts and their dialogue, from the margins of the text, with Gascoigne's strategies for domesticating Ariosto's play; to reflections on the relation between page and stage that can be deduced from the annotations in the page margins of *Supposes*; to his mediating role in elaborating a masque to accommodate religious and political ideas about the Turks around a marginal story connected with that of Romeo and Juliet; finally, to gender implications of the story of a prodigal daughter embedded in the larger plot of the prodigal son in the *Glass of Government*, where Gascoigne operates a deliberate project of self-fashioning as the reformed prodigal son himself.

The section opens with Silvia Bigliazzi's discussion of how Gascoigne, in collaboration with Francis Kinwelmersh, contributed ideas about what it meant to be classical in the early modern period.[5] During this era, as Stephen Orgel has contended, a relevant question was what it would 'mean for the principles of humanism to inform literature in the vernacular — how could English literature become 'classical', not only classical in imitating the ancients, but classical in the sense subsequently applied to music, classical as opposed to popular, classical as formal, serious, and therefore good'.[6] The larger question concerns the shaping of a humanist position about the past and its relevance in the construction of an early modern 'classical' identity, in Orgel's sense. The Greek and the Roman traditions were alternative competing pasts, with different degrees of authoritativeness and collaborative reservoirs of ancient knowledge.[7] Critics have often discussed how *Jocasta*, the first Greek tragedy written in English, eclectically combines ancient and early modern traditions, drawing from Lodovico Dolce's 1549 *Giocasta*, a contemporary rewrite of Euripides' *Phoenissae*, and possibly aware of at least a Latin version — Dorotheus Camillus's 1541 edition.[8] But very few have raised questions about how such a clearly neoclassical play could be advertised and received as an English translation of a Greek play; nor do critics consider the role of the paratext, which, albeit textually peripheral, guides the play's reception. Bigliazzi's essay, '"A Tragedie Written in Greke": How *Jocasta* was Made "Classical"', deals precisely with this issue, moving from the implications of the play's subtitle, to a discussion of Gascoigne's rendition of Dolce's syncretic approach in his re-articulation of Antigone's lyrical monody before the *exodos* into a dialogue with the female chorus, to ideas of how the play reinterprets a Greek funeral lament for the Gray's Inn audience. Bigliazzi contends that Dolce's treatment of the Euripidean material, which he adjusted to modern dramaturgical as well as cultural and political circumstances while sprinkling the play with clues indicating belongingness to classical antiquity, is one of the reasons why Gascoigne and Kinwelmersh chose this play. The model of the female chorus engaging with

Antigone in a funeral lament in the final act was recognizable as both Euripidean and, more broadly, Greek, even though Euripides did not use it in *The Phoenician Women*. Through Dolce's manipulation of this model and its addition to the final act as a common signature of ancient drama, the two English writers found the required inset piece to indicate a classical veneer for their claimed translation of Euripides. And yet, the unexpected failure of the female ritual of lament in this play also signals that ancient ideas of a female chorus could hardly be integrated into the new Renaissance frame.

In the second essay, '"To Coosen the Expectation": George Gascoigne's Moral "Poses" in *Supposes*', Silvia Silvestri also concentrates on paratextual material — Gascoigne's prefatory letters commenting on the edition of his *Posies* — to explore the reasons behind his approach to the translation of Ariosto's *Suppositi* and the way he fashioned its reception.[9] Critics have foregrounded Elizabethan censorship when interpreting Gascoigne's fictional code of morality adopted in the *Posies*,[10] but Silvestri's essay shifts attention to the way in which Gascoigne pushes Elizabethan moral boundaries in this play by questioning rather than reforming morals. The article examines the stylistic characteristics of a sexualized discourse in the transition from Ariosto's Italian prose and verse adaptations of the drama to Gascoigne's own English version. It also considers Gascoigne's rhetorical dissimulation as presented in the paratexts of the *Posies*. Silvestri finally contends that its adoption of a deceitful pose plays around with the expectations of the readers of a reformed text which, in fact, is even richer in sexual innuendos than the Italian original, while making a case for a moralizing stance.

Supposes is also Cristiano Ragni's focus in the next essay, 'Between the Stage and the Page: Printed Marginalia in Gascoigne's *Supposes*'.[11] Ragni addresses Gascoigne's play from the angle of a group of printed marginalia in the two printed editions (1573 and 1575). The essay places this discussion squarely in the context of contemporary studies of marginalia and the recent attention paid to printed notes and stage directions. The four marginalia in the 1573 edition the article engages with belong to the latter category and are interesting precisely because they underline that the text was not reserved for readers but was to be played out by actors on a living stage, something which had in fact been done at Gray's Inn that same year when *Jocasta* was presented. Ragni ventures to suggest that the use of English and Latin for different types of stage directions, the former being more narrative, the latter more 'technical' in recording/prescribing entrances and exits, underscores a subtle conversation between different printing conventions of academic drama and the kind of drama connected with commercial theatre. The marginalia in vernacular seem to record a voice closer to Gascoigne's own,

addressing those who at the Inns would produce and perform his play. The essay further discusses the added marginalia in the 1575 edition, all in vernacular, where the tone changes and the notes become mainly textual explanations engaging with the interpretative expectations of the text.

With Emanuel Stelzer's 'The Anglo-Catholic Perspective of George Gascoigne's 1572 *Masque of Montacutes*', we move to a different genre and a different concern: a masque dissembling religious and political preoccupations under cover of an entertainment devised for the double wedding of Anthony Browne with Mary Dormer, and Elizabeth Browne with Robert Dormer, son and daughter of the first viscount Montacute/Montague and lord lieutenant of Sussex, respectively.[12] Gascoigne ingeniously connects that surname with the story of Romeo and Juliet as he and his contemporaries had read it in Arthur Brooke's *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562) and in William Painter's translation of Pierre Boaistuau's novella (1567), and places the masque in the Mediterranean context of the Battle of Lepanto (1571). This strategic choice aimed at gaining the support of the Montacute family, and Gascoigne's treatment of the story is an example of his subtle ability to adjust to circumstances as a shrewd courtier. Although at the time dissimulation was considered harmful in public discourse, as Cicero famously warned in *De officiis* ('ex omni vita simulatio dissimulatioque tollenda est'), the Renaissance recognized its benefits.[13] Many believed that both simulation and dissimulation were necessary for the art of politics, as Machiavelli argued in chapter XVIII of *Il Principe*: 'quello che ha Saputo meglio usare la volpe, è meglio capitato. Ma è necessario questa natural saperla bene colorire, ed essere gran simulatore e dissimulatore' ('Those best at playing the fox have done better than the others. But you have to know how to disguise your slyness, how to pretend one thing and cover up another').[14] The courtier was equally cognizant of the 'virtues' of deceit to expedite the acquisition of power, as well as the harmless application of dissimulation in amicable interactions, such as in jesting, 'where a man speaketh one thinge and privilie meaneth another'.[15] Arguing against recent critical positions that uphold that here Gascoigne engaged with 'the internal Other', Turkish or Venetian, to challenge English identity, Stelzer argues that the entertainment does not so much subvert English identity as evoke a multilingual and multicultural context that he could exploit for personal preferment — after all, as has sometimes been pointed out, Gascoigne was a courtier and a skilled 'mercenary'.[16] The essay seeks to explore the Anglo-Catholic perspective of Gascoigne's masque and underlines the international dimension presented in the masque's text. Gascoigne's use of multiple European languages, the presence of a subtext about the crusades, and his reliance on the enslaved Christian

boy trope of Italian drama, all contribute to the construction of an Englishness that is called upon to lessen the internal, confessional divide between Catholics and Protestants and unite against the Ottoman common enemy. More precisely, the polyglot phrases strewn throughout Gascoigne's masque suggest an imagined world in which dialogue between European nations is possible under the auspices of a shared religion and cause.

This section closes with Carla Suthren's essay on the *Glass of Government* closet drama, which emerges here as a mirror play of *Jocasta* for its subtle interest in a female figure, in the classical tradition, and in a Christian humanist perspective on the legacies of the past.[17] 'Through the Looking Glass: Reflections of the Prodigal Daughter' does not deal with Greek antiquity but with *The Glass of Government*'s Christian rereading of Terence, whose moral teaching may be evinced if interpreted correctly. In this sense, the Christian subtext is displayed as the necessary filter to approach the past and the criterion for classical reception in a humanist vein. The moral teaching is conveyed through the trope of the play as a looking glass mirroring both goodness and evil in the spirit of Christian repentance and forgiveness. If the main addressee is a male audience who is presented with a moral example drawn from the prodigal son model, the essay also unveils a mirror story unfolding in the margins and concerning the female counterfigure of a prodigal daughter. Suthren shows this daughter's marginal position and fate of marginalization in terms of both dramatic presence on stage and position within the story, which sees the 'Harlot', as Lamia is called in the list of characters, punished and exiled from the city of Antwerp, where she had moved from the margins. Like Antigone in *Jocasta*, Lamia is also banished, but she is in no way an ambivalent figure, as Antigone was sometimes received in the early modern period: she demonstrates that 'there is no place for a woman at the centre: she must stay in the margins'.[18]

Thinking about Gascoigne's different plays via the conversation enacted in this Issues in Review gives us access to his prismatic personality from different angles. Common threads emerge, one of which is a particular attention to female presences. We see this attentiveness in his choice of *Giocasta/Jocasta,* with its reinvention of ancient tragic femaleness and the Jocasta/Antigone dyad in relation to the chorus nexus, suggesting the emancipation of a young woman within a stereotyped Christian setting voiced by the court ladies; we also see this theme in Gascoigne's riddling approach to frank female sexuality in *Supposes*, and in the subversive figure of the prodigal daughter, claiming a different space from 'the margins', in *The Glass of Government*. These are all figures that underline Gascoigne's fascination with women and their position in contemporary society,

both politically and at the level of the family and society, while at the same time underlining the difficulty of talking about such issues openly. But there are also narrative strategies recurrent in all his dramas that play with subversion of rules and roles, and engage in game-playing with the reader. Gascoigne's life is exemplary of a certain type of humanist, a courtier, a soldier, and a writer with many voices. Looking at his dramatic works shows how he not only paved the way for subsequent Elizabethan writers, as 'a craftsman of the English language',[19] but also embodied the multifaceted figure of the Renaissance experimenter, playing around with masks, voices, languages, and styles. Theatrical self-fashioning in drama was the epitome of his art, craft, and life.

Notes

1 Jonathan Crewe, *Trials of Authorship: Anterior Forms and Poetic Reconstruction from Wyatt to Shakespeare* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, 1990), 118, https://doi.org/10.2307/jj.16552211.

2 Ilana Nash, '"A Subject Without Subjection": Robert Dudley, Earl of Leicester, and *The Princely Pleasures at Kenelworth Castle*', *Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies* 25 (1994), 81–102, 90–1; see also Stephen Hamrick, '"Set in portraiture": George Gascoigne, Queen Elizabeth, and Adapting the Royal Image', *Early Modern Literary Studies* 11.1 (May 2005), par. 1–30. On the relation between Gascoigne and the queen through his presentation of the *Hemetes* manuscript and an ingenious use of paratexts, see Gabriel Heaton, *Writing and Reading Royal Entertainments: From George Gascoigne to Ben Jonson* (Oxford, 2010), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199213115.001.0001.

3 Crewe, *Trials of Authorship*, 122.

4 See especially C.T. Prouty, *George Gascoigne: Elizabethan Courtier, Soldier, and Poet* (New York, 1942), https://doi.org/10.7312/prou91274; Gillian Austen, *George Gascoigne* (Cambridge, 2008), https://doi.org/10.1515/9781846156434; R.W. Maslen, *Elizabethan Fictions: Espionage, Counterespionage, and the Duplicity of Fiction in Early Elizabethan Prose Narratives* (Oxford, 2011), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198119913.001.0001; Mark Netzelof, *Agents Beyond the State: The Writings of English Travelers, Soldiers, and Diplomats in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford, 2020), https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198857952.001.0001; individual chapters on Gascoigne's work at the Inns of Court appear in Bruce Smith, *Ancient Scripts and Modern Experience on the English Stage. 1500-1700* (Princeton, 1988) and Howard B. Norland, *Neoclassical Tragedy in Elizabethan England* (Newark, 2009). The whole

works were edited by John W. Cunliffe: see *The Complete Works of George Gasoigne*, 2 vols (Cambridge, 1907, 1910). The current standard edition is *George Gascoigne: A Hundreth Sundrie Flowres*, ed. G.W. Pigman III (Oxford, 2000), https://doi.org/10.1093/actrade/9780198117797.book.1. For selected references to Gascoigne's dramatic works see the individual essays of this Issues in Review section.

5 Silvia Bigliazzi, '"A Tragedie Written in Greeke": How *Jocasta* was Made "Classical"', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 95–114, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5854.

6 Stephen Orgel, *Wit's Treasury: Renaissance England and the Classics* (Philadelphia, 2021), 2, https://doi.org/10.9783/9780812299878.

7 See Silvia Bigliazzi, 'The Strange Case of the Signing Chorus what Was Not There. On the Authority of Authorities', *Greek Source on the Early English Stage? Fifteen New Essays*, ed. Silvia Bigliazzi and Tania Demetriou (Pisa, 2024), 71–107, https://doi.org/10.13136/knnr2f44.

8 See Bigliazzi, "A Tragedie Written in Greeke"', for references.

9 Silvia Silvestri, '"To Coosen the Expectation": George Gascoigne's Moral 'Poses' in *Supposes*', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 115–32, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5856.

10 See ibid, especially nn 5 and 6.

11 Cristiano Ragni, 'Between the Stage and the Page: Printed Marginalia in Gascoigne's *Supposes', Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 133–44, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5855.

12 Emanuel Stelzer, 'The Anglo-Catholic Perspective of George Gascoigne's 1572 *Masque of Montacutes*', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 145–156, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5847.

13 Cicero, *De Officiis. On Duties*, trans. Walter Miller (Cambridge, MA, 1913), 3.15, 330.

14 Niccolò Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ed. and trans. Tim Parks (Harmondsworth, 2009), 70.

15 Baldassarre Castiglione, *The Courtyer by Count Baldessar Castilio Diuided into Foure Books*, trans. Thomas Hoby (London, 1561; USTC: 505873, book II, 'Dissimulacion', np.

16 Laurie Shannon, 'Poetic Companies. Musters of Agency in George Gascoigne's "Friendly Verse"', *GLQ* 10.3 (2004), 453–83, 453.

17 Carla Suthren, 'Through the Looking Glass: Reflections of the Prodigal Daughter', *Early Theatre* 27.2 (2024), 157–70, https://doi.org/10.12745/et.27.2.5868.

18 Ibid, 157–70.

19 Hamrick, '"Set in portraiture"', 1.