

# Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference

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Volume 12

Article 1

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2021

## Front Matter

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### Recommended Citation

Isaacson, Emily (2021) "Front Matter," *Selected Papers of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference*: Vol. 12 , Article 1.

Available at: <https://ideaexchange.uakron.edu/spovsc/vol12/iss1/1>

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## Introduction

Emily Isaacson, *Heidelberg University*

**M**arietta College played host to the 43<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Ohio Valley Shakespeare Conference in the summer of 2019. Conference attendees gathered to consider the theme “Shakespeare Nations.” The conference included performances of *Romeo and Juliet*, a presentation of the history of the OVSC, and workshops run by the American Shakespeare Center, and a plenary session featuring Ruben Espinosa of the University of Texas-El Paso, giving a talk entitled “This Shakespeare, that America.”

As always, the sessions managed the central idea of the conference, including conversations about teaching, about performance, about philosophy, about religion – and generally about the ways that people make use of Shakespeare. From these sessions, the papers of this volume emerged, and you will find that they reflect the diversity of the papers given at the conference.

First in this edition of *The Selected Papers* is Mary Jo Kietzman’s “Covenant Orthopraxy and Shakespeare’s Idea of the Nation,” in which the author discusses the links between the religious identity (or identities) possible in the texts and the secular nation emerging in the early modern era. Kietzman suggests that “Because the plays made auditors wrestle with biblical concepts and apply biblical stories to secular situations, they enabled audiences to work through the dilemmas of post-Reformation religious experience.” Central to Kietzman’s discussion is the Hebraic concept of covenant, of binding oneself to another. In the context of the early modern period, though, this becomes a secular covenant, rather than a religious connection. To explain this, Kietzman presents the case of *Titus Andronicus* and *The Merchant of Venice*, examining the conflicts arising from broken covenants and the attempts at justice.

Following this discussion, the issue moves *Richard III*, both the historical figure and the dramatic figure in Shakespeare’s plays and various adaptations of the play in Dan Mills’ “O monstrous fault, to harbor such a thought!”: Physiognomy, Deformity, and Ethics in Literary, Artistic and Screen Depictions of Richard III.” Mills’ essay is interested in interrogating the various depictions of the “monstrous” king, untangling the the

representations of Richard's physiognomy as propaganda, alongside the historical evidence for Richard's actual physical body. That physiognomy is so deeply tied with representations of Richard's inward evil, which raises questions of ethics in performance, for Mills. Comparing portraits of Richard with the play itself, as well as twentieth century adaptations (Laurence Olivier and Al Pacino's most specifically), Mills concludes that the Shakespearean version of Richard (and its descendants) has so influenced our understanding of Richard that we've lost sight of the actual, historical king.

Conner Moore's essay "*King Lear* and the Unreality of Countries" is next in this issue. Here, Moore explores the ways that *Lear* allows us to understand nation-states as social constructs. To do this, Moore reads closely the scenes with the divided map at the beginning of the play and with the armies at Dover at the end. Moore explains that *Lear*, in the end, cannot even recognize his own nation, thus affirming the idea that the nation state itself is constructed.

Finally, the issue includes Gabriel Rieger's essay, "The Iron Queen and the Paper Crown: Imperial Anxiety in the Minor Tetralogy," which returns us to the War of the Roses; more specifically, Rieger is interested in examining the role of women, and Margaret in particular, in the tetralogy. Carefully examining her place in the *Henry VI* plays, he concludes that this ahistorical Margaret is central to understanding the English nation-state both retrospectively for the Tudors, but also in their own historical moment. This imagined Margaret becomes, for Rieger, a nightmare that fuels a "fantasy of national abasement." Margaret haunts the English both in the play and beyond.

In these essays, we see a number of approaches to the texts; but all focus on the centrality of what it means to build a nation and what Shakespeare's work contributes to that building.

We want to thank all readers and all contributors to this issue. Without your help we cannot make this work happen. Thank you, also, to Hillary Nunn for her assistance.