

**TEXTS
SACRED
AND
CANONICAL**
THEIR CIRCULATION
IN PUBLIC CULTURE

RACKHAM AMPHITHEATRE
4.10.2010

A SYMPOSIUM TO HONOR

**Ralph
WILLIAMS**

ON HIS RETIREMENT

TEXTS SACRED AND CANONICAL: THEIR CIRCULATION IN PUBLIC CULTURE

A SYMPOSIUM TO HONOR
PROFESSOR RALPH WILLIAMS

Rackham Graduate School Amphitheatre
University of Michigan
Saturday, April 10, 2010

Public universities are supported by a complex and diverse society comprising believers in a variety of faiths as well as non-believers, too. In such universities, what protocols should govern the study and teaching of literature concerned with one or another religion's version of the sacred? How does or how should religious discourse circulate in public space? Or should it not at all? Must public institutions be functionally atheistic? What happens to the reception of a literary work when something of its original context in the sacred is removed? When, in effect, it becomes a "literary" rather than a sacred work? Alternatively, what happens to the reception of literary works like Shakespeare's that, even as they are not "sacred," become in a sense "canonized"?

RALPH WILLIAMS



This symposium celebrates Ralph Williams, Arthur F. Thurnau Professor of English and a Renaissance scholar with special interests in Shakespeare, the Bible, classical learning, and religion, as he ends a career spanning some five decades at the University of Michigan. Over that time, having taught thousands upon thousands of students (in some years close to a thousand alone) in large lecture courses on Shakespeare, on the Bible, and on Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, he has become one of the more famed, more sought after, and most beloved professors on this campus. He has won numerous teaching awards from the College of Literature, Science, & the Arts and this university, and was named Carnegie Michigan Professor of the Year in 2008. Honored by a vote of students in 1992 with the Golden Apple Teaching Award, he was further recognized by them in 2009 with a Golden Apple Lifetime Achievement Award. Not to be outdone, *The Michigan Daily* has ten times named him “Best Professor.”

Professor Williams has done as well stupendous service outside the classroom, directing the Great Books Program, the University’s programs in Florence, Italy, and the Program on Studies in Religion. He has performed important roles in the LS&A Honors Program, the Studies in Religion Committee, the Medieval and Renaissance Collegium, and the (then) Program in Comparative Literature, filled a number of major offices in the Department of English, and has served on important committees elsewhere in the university, these too numerous to mention. One might note—observing just the recent past—his crucial role in maintaining our continuing relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company, which has seen him as a valuable collaborator in a number of its ventures. Highly regarded as a public speaker, Professor Williams has served as an important ambassador to off-campus communities of alumni and other well-wishers to this university, not just here in Michigan but across the United States. Many of his lectures have been video recorded for public broadcast, and these, fortunately, will be available to future generations.

Professor Williams’ publications include an edition of Marcus Hieronymus Vida’s *De Arte Poetica* (1976), *Palimpsest: Editorial Theory in the Humanities*, ed. with George Bornstein (1993), *I Shall Be Spoken: Textual Boundaries, Authors, and Intent* (1993), and *Judaism, Christianity, & Islam: a Sourcebook*, with Eliav Yaron and Alexander Knysh (2007). He and George Bornstein have also edited an extensive series of books with the University of Michigan Press on the theory and practice of textual editing.

SCHEDULE OF EVENTS



9:30-10:00 *Coffee, etc.*

10:00-11:30 **WELCOME:** *Michael Schoenfeldt*, Chair, Department of English

INTRODUCTION: *Theresa Tinkle* (University of Michigan)

KEYNOTE: *Sarah Beckwith* (Duke University), “Changes of the Heart: Metamorphosis, Recognition, Conversion in Some Shakespeare Plays”

11:30-1:00 *Break for lunch*

1:00-2:30 **PANEL I:** *David Potter* (University of Michigan), Moderator

Gabriele Boccaccini (University of Michigan), “Beliefs are Facts, Too! Teaching Theology Historically in a Secular, Multi-Religious Environment”

Theresa Tinkle (University of Michigan), “The Bible in History”

Sherman Jackson (University of Michigan), “Islam and the Public University: Between Our Reasons for Concern and Our Concern for Reason”

Alexander Knysb (University of Michigan), “Islamic Studies in the American Classroom: Between Pedagogy and Academism”

2:30-2:45 *Break, coffee, etc.*

2:45-4:15 **PANEL II:** *Steven Mullaney* (University of Michigan), Moderator

Eric Jager, University of California, Los Angeles, “Augustine’s *Confessions*: Sacred Autobiography/Secular Classic”

Karla Taylor (University of Michigan), “Dante, Philology, and Teaching Religious Literature in a Public University”

Michael Schoenfeldt (University of Michigan), “Teaching George Herbert and John Milton to Believers and Non-Believers”

John Parker (University of Virginia), “Why Take Pre-Modern Drama Seriously? Some Thoughts on Piety, Scholarship and Play”

4:15-4:30 *Break, coffee, etc.*

4:30-5:00 **CLOSING COMMENTS:** *Ralph Williams*

PARTICIPANTS



Sarah Beckwith, Marcello Lotti Professor of English and Professor of Religion and Professor and Chair of Theater Studies, Duke University, is the author of *Christ's Body* (1993), *Signifying God* (2001), and *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (in press). She was for several years editor of the *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* and has recently co-edited *Premodern Shakespeares* for *JMEMS*. She is also one of three editors overseeing a new series with the University of Notre Dame press called *Re-Formations*. She works on medieval and renaissance drama, medieval religious writing and culture, Shakespeare, and ordinary language philosophy (the work of Austin, Wittgenstein and Stanley Cavell). She is currently working on two essays, "Shakespeare's Private Linguists," and an essay on morality plays called "Language goes on Holiday," as well as a book project on Shakespeare and "changes of the heart."

Gabriele Boccaccini is Professor of Second Temple Judaism and Christian Origins, Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan, and visiting Professor at both BIBLIA (Italy) and the Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism (Detroit, Michigan). Founder and director of the Enoch Seminar, editor-in-chief of the journal *Henoch: Studies in Judaism and Christianity from Second Temple to Late Antiquity* and of *4 Enoch: The Online Encyclopedia of Second Temple Judaism*, he is the author of *Middle Judaism: Jewish Thought, 300 BCE to 200 CE* (1991), *Portraits of Middle Judaism in Scholarship and Arts: A Multimedia Catalog from Flavius Josephus to 1991* (1992), *Beyond the Essene Hypothesis: The Parting of the Ways between Qumran and Enochic Judaism* (1998), *Roots of Rabbinic Judaism: An Intellectual History, from Ezekiel to Daniel* (2002), as well as numerous articles, and the editor of six volumes of collected essays.

Sherman Jackson, an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, is Professor of Arabic and Islamic Studies, Department of Near Eastern Studies, Professor of Afro-American Studies, Center for Afroamerican and African Studies, and Visiting Professor of Law, University of Michigan. He is author of *Islamic Law and the State: The Constitutional Jurisprudence of Shihâb al-Dîn al-Qarâfi* (1996), *On the Boundaries of Theological Tolerance in Islam: Abû Hâmid al-Ghazâlî's Faysal al-Tafrîqa* (2002), *Islam and the Blackamerican: Looking Towards the Third Resurrection* (2005), *Islam and the Problem of Black Suffering* (2009), *Sufism for Non-Sufis: Ibn Atâ' Allâh al-Sakandari; Tâj al-'Arûs* (forthcoming, 2010), and numerous articles on various aspects of Islamic law, theology, and history, and on Islam and Muslims in modern America. Listed by the Religion Newswriters Foundation's ReligionLink as one of the top ten experts on Islam in America, he was named in 2009 as one of the 500 most influential Muslims in the world by the Royal Islamic Strategic Studies Center (Amman, Jordan) and the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding.

Eric Jager, Professor of English, University of California, Los Angeles, earned his Ph.D. in medieval literature at the University of Michigan (1987) and taught at Columbia University before moving to UCLA. In *The Tempter's Voice* (1993), he examined Augustine's theories about language and the Fall and, in *The Book of the Heart* (2000), the medieval metaphor of the self-as-text. His most recent book, *The Last Duel* (2004), about a famous trial by combat in medieval France, has appeared in eight languages and was adapted for television by the BBC.

Alexander Knysh, Professor of Islamic Studies in the Department of Near Eastern Studies, University of Michigan, obtained his doctorate from the Institute for Oriental Studies (The Leningrad Branch) of the Soviet Academy of Sciences in 1986. Since 1991 he has lived and worked in the United States and (briefly) in Britain. His research interests include Islamic mysticism and Islamic theological thought in historical perspective as well as Islam and Islamic movements in local contexts (especially Yemen, North Africa and the Northern Caucasus). He has numerous publications on these subjects, including five books, among them *Ibn 'Arabi in the Later Islamic Tradition: the Making of a Polemical Image in Medieval Islam* (1999), *Islamic Mysticism: A Short History* (2000), and *Islam in Historical Perspective* (forthcoming, 2010). He is also a section editor for Sufism on the editorial board of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* (3rd edition).

Steven Mullaney, Associate Professor of English at the University of Michigan, teaches early modern literature and cultural theory, with a special interest in drama and other modes of cultural performance. He is the author of *The Place of the Stage: License, Play, and Power in Renaissance England* (1988, 1995) and numerous articles on early modern symbolic and material cultures, European first-encounters with New World cultures, reformation historiography, and the formation of publics and counter-publics in sixteenth-century Europe. For the past five years, he has been a founding member and principal investigator in *Making Publics: Media, Markets, and Associations in Early Modern Europe, 1500-1700*, an international, multi-disciplinary, collaborative research project funded by the Social Science and Humanities Research Council of Canada. He is currently working on a study of the reformation of emotions in sixteenth-century England.


John Parker, Associate Professor of English at the University of Virginia, wrote his senior thesis on Shakespeare's sonnets under the direction of Ralph Williams and graduated from Michigan with Highest Honors in 1994 before going on to the University of Pennsylvania for his doctorate. He is the author of *The Aesthetics of Antichrist: From Christian Drama to Christopher Marlowe* (2007), along with several book chapters, articles, and reviews. His interests include classical, medieval and Renaissance drama, the New Testament, Patristics, Luther, and German philosophy after Kant—especially Marx, Nietzsche and Adorno. He is currently at work on a book-length project dealing with the Christianization of Seneca.

David Potter, an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, is Professor of Greek and Latin in the Department of Classical Studies, University of Michigan. His recent publications include *Literary Texts and the Roman Historian* (1999), *The Roman Empire at Bay 180-395 AD* (2004), *Emperors of Rome* (2007), *Ancient Rome: A New History* (2009), two edited collections, *A Companion to the Roman Empire* (2006) and *Life, Death and Entertainment in the Roman Empire* (co-edited with David Mattingly, a second edition of which is forthcoming this year), and he served as area editor for Roman History for the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Greece and Rome* (2009). A sometime sports columnist for the *Chicago Tribune's RedEye*, he was chair of the Senate Advisory Committee on University Affairs (2008-9).

Michael Schoenfeldt is Professor of English and Chair of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan. He is the author of *Prayer and Power: George Herbert and Renaissance Courtship* (1991), *Bodies and Selves in Early Modern England: Physiology and Inwardness in Spenser, Shakespeare, Herbert, and Milton* (1999), co-editor of *Imagining Death in Spenser and Milton* (2003), and editor of the *Blackwell Companion to Shakespeare's Sonnets* (2006). He has just completed *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Poetry* and is currently working on a book entitled *Reading Seventeenth-Century Poetry*.

Karla Taylor, Associate Professor of English, University of Michigan, teaches medieval literature, with a special interest in Chaucer. Author of *Chaucer Reads the 'Divine Comedy'* (1989) and a number of articles on Chaucer, she is finishing a book on Chaucer, Gower, and their early readers. From 2004 to 2009 she was director of U-M's Program in Medieval and Early Modern Studies.

Theresa Tinkle, an Arthur F. Thurnau Professor, is Associate Professor of English, University of Michigan. She is the author of two monographs: *Medieval Venuses and Cupids: Sexuality, Hermeneutics, and English Poetry* (1996), and *Gender and Power in Medieval Exegesis* (forthcoming). She has written numerous articles and co-edited two volumes: *The Iconic Page in Manuscript, Print, and Digital Culture* (1998), and *Chaucer and the Challenges of Medievalism: Studies in Honor of H. A. Kelly* (2003). Her primary research interests are in the fields of medieval Latin and English literature, religion, and gender studies.



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THE RALPH WILLIAMS AWARD

Each year, the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of Michigan provides hundreds of students with courses in their major field of study and thousands of others with instruction in writing, literature, culture, rhetoric, and communication. While the universal nature of these subjects provides an impetus for many who enroll, a significant reason for the Department's enduring popularity is its legacy of award winning teachers, many of whom have become the subject of long-standing legends and countless campus conversations. Without question, among the most well-known, longest serving instructors to have engendered such discussions is Professor Ralph Williams. For four decades, Williams drew to his lecture hall—his stage, really—not only registered students but also passers-by, visiting parents, other professors, and alumni. He has, through his unique talents, enriched and entertained, enlivened and educated so many thousands of young lives during his tenure at the University. Who else but Williams could have drawn a full house for a voluntary Sunday evening discussion of the Book of Job? Or convincingly told his students, “You’ll soon get used to Middle English”? Or helped bring to Ann Arbor the Royal Shakespeare Company? While his retirement in 2009 left holes in many hearts, his legacy of superior instruction and lecturing lives on in his colleagues who have helped to make English a crucial academic hub for undergraduates at Michigan.



The Ralph Williams Excellence in Teaching Award

To extend Professor Williams' impact for many years to come, the Department of English Language and Literature has established an annual award to encourage and cultivate the unique talents that great lecturers bring to their classes. The Ralph Williams Excellence in Teaching Award will recognize the achievements of those English faculty members who follow Professor Williams' example, reaching a broad undergraduate audience with the best that literary study has to offer. Gifts of all sizes can contribute to the success of this fund and to the ongoing excellence in undergraduate teaching at U-M. Both expendable and endowed gifts are welcome as we strive for a goal of a \$100,000 endowment to provide \$5,000 in annual support.

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