The Common
Seminar Leader: Carolyn Sale

ABSTRACTS

Charlotte Artese
"They will not intercept my tale": Classical and Folk Traditions in *Titus Andronicus*

In *Titus Andronicus*, two of the horrors committed by Aaron and the Goths derive from folktales. Aaron tricks Titus into severing his hand with the same ruse used by the black slave in the traditional story "The Revenge of the Castrated Man," in which a man castrates or otherwise mutilates himself in order to save his two sons from death. The villain murders the sons anyway, just as Titus is presented with the heads of Martius and Quintus. The mutilation of Lavinia surpasses that of Philomel in Ovid, the explicit source for the plot, in that her hands as well as her tongue are cut off. This elaboration suggests the well-known folktale "The Maiden Without Hands," elements of which appear in several scenes. While the Romans associate themselves with Roman literature, the Goths are not associated with the vernacular folk tradition only. Aaron and the Goths are just as likely as the Romans to refer to Virgil or identify Horace, and just as quick to see Lavinia as Philomel. Rather, the Gothic party incorporates traditional stories into Roman literature, just as Tamora says she is "incorporate in Rome." They vulgarize the shared classical culture, making it "base, common, and popular," to quote Pistol. The play's resolution entails a return to Ovid—Titus' revenge on Chiron, Demetrius, and Tamora does not add to but rather simply doubles Philomel and Procne's revenge on Tereus. Likewise, the Roman narrative of Virginius dooms Lavinia to death—in the folktale, the maiden without hands has her hands restored and survives to enjoy a happy marriage. The Goths incorporate themselves in the end, as Tamora eats her sons, and are excluded, as her corpse is "throw[n]…forth" and Rome is purified. The clash of cultures in the play is also a clash of traditions, with the Goths attempting not to destroy classical traditions in favor of their own, but rather infiltrating the classical sources with European folktales. The play's practice is that of the Goths, as the play itself elaborates the Roman stories with gothic folktales.

Mary Blackstone
Coriolanus and the Performance of Commonwealth at Oxford

Commonwealth, Antonio Negri and Michael Hardt's recent book, reveals the ongoing capacity of this word to capture the imagination in the context of 21st century globalization, but it also demonstrates the wide variations in meanings which have been associated with the title word from its emergence in common usage in the 16th century to the present day. Shakespeare makes considerable use of the word across his canon, but by far the most contested treatment of "commonwealth" and related terms and concepts is found in *Coriolanus*. Frequently cited as Shakespeare's last tragedy and dated between 1606 and 1609, the first public performance date

for the play has caused editors some difficulty because the public theatres were closed so much in this period due to the plague, but what they have failed to recognize is that the King's Men continued performing on tour in the provinces throughout this period and those locations could well have seen the play before the Globe Theatre audiences did. This paper focuses on a potential performance of *Coriolanus* in Oxford (which has more records of King's Men visits than any other town at this time) in 1610, and it argues that Shakespeare and the King's Men actively participated in the popular negotiation of the meaning and significance of "commonwealth" and contributed to the varied concepts associated with it in England during the first half of the 17th century. An understanding of the nature of this negotiation must be derived from an examination of not only Shakespeare's use of the term in *Coriolanus*, but also its intersection with the use of the term in other popular performative contexts—proclamations, progresses, ceremonial events, sermons, local dramatic entertainments and affrays. Far from promoting or even presenting a single perception of "commonwealth," *Coriolanus* as performed by the King's Men in early 17th century Oxford would have contributed to what Catherine Belsey has called an "interrogative" performance text with potentially divergent reception.

Eric Byville
Rejecting the *Sensus Communis* in *Timon of Athens*

In this paper I propose to argue that in *Timon of Athens* Shakespeare stages a rejection or a refusal of the common, particularly of the *sensus communis* or "common sense." I situate my argument generically by reading Shakespeare's play as one that combines the invective voice of Elizabethan verse satire and the antisocial ritual of Senecan tragedy. At the beginning of the play Timon treats all his private wealth as common, sharing it with his friends. But when he goes bankrupt and this false community of generosity and credit dissolves, Timon reacts by turning into a bitter satirist who rails against his society and also, I argue, performs a bizarre parody of Senecan revenge. He goes from embodying a skewed exaggeration of the philosophical ideal of gift-giving celebrated in Seneca's *De Beneficiis* to arranging a satirical reenactment of the tragic banquet served in Seneca's *Thyestes*. I suggest that there is a certain logic to Shakespeare's fusion of satire and tragedy in this play, located in the way that the two genres converge in their denial of the *sensus communis*.

Cyndia Susan Clegg
Star Chamber and Sermons: Constructing a Common Ground

Considering books and readers can prove fruitful for discovering a common ground. This burgeoning interest in print culture, ironically, has reminded us that other aspects of Elizabethan and Jacobean culture were also important. Sermons (especially those read from the two printed books of homilies when a church lacked a learned minister), ballads sung in ordinaries, the

theatre , even the law courts, all contributed to a common cultural experience. Here I want to revisit a moment where a book, a play, a court of law, and sermons together constructed a common ground. Since the intersection of a dramatic performance, probably Shakespeare's *Richard II,* a book, John Hayward's *The first part of the life and raigne of King Henrie the IIII*, and the Essex rebellion is well known to Shakespeareans, to return to this might appear to be an exercise in irrelevance. I am not, however, interested in the question of whether or not the play performed on the eve of the rebellion was Shakespeare's, nor am I interested in the debate of whether or not this was a true rebellion. Instead, I want to look at this as an extraordinary instance where we can actually see a common ground being forged—a common ground that has informed generations of scholarship on Shakespeare's England.

Andrew Griffin
Contenting Ourselves With the Present in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*

My paper will speak to many of the issues that Charlotte Artese's paper takes up, specifically where she discusses the 'vulgarization' of a 'shared classical culture' by *Titus*'s Goths as they make this shared classical culture "'base, common, and popular.'" Instead of dealing with Romans, Goths, and *Titus*, however, I'm interested in Londoners and in the way that similar issues are broached, negotiated, and complicated in Jonson's *Bartholomew Fair*. Where Charlotte's reading of *Titus* will parse the strategies by which the Goth's insinuate themselves in a Roman community by communalizing and appropriating Roman stories, I argue that Jonson's play attempts to establish a sense of community in early modern London by disarticulating the city from the classical stories that were often mapped onto it by playwrights, pamphleteers, historians, writers of civic pageants, and other urban encomiasts. Working against a critical tradition that takes seriously Jonson's classical allusions in *Bartholomew Fair*, I argue that Jonson works to ironize these allusions in his play; in doing so, I argue, he leaves Londoners to figure themselves in terms that are foreign to a tradition whereby they might understand their world by appeal to its homology with an imaginary past through the image of Troynovant, say, or through James VI/I's fantasies of a uniquely English Augustinian reign centered on London. In *Bartholomew Fair*'s ironization of the classical allusions through which London was often made meaningful, I argue, Jonson ultimately posits a vision of community predicated on a historically specific – presumably singular and unique – set of social networks that determined contingently. "The common" in this sense – as the set of shared features or characteristics or behaviours or institutions or networks whereby subjects might organize themselves communally – becomes a synchronically sociological, rather than a historical, fact: it becomes an unhistorical matter of the historically *sui generis* space of early modern London.

Trish Thomas Henley
Common Justice and Common Women in *Measure for Measure*

The very title of *Measure for Measure* announces the play's preoccupation with issues of justice. Using *Promos and Cassandra* as a source, Shakespeare differs from his source play in the attention given to the Duke. In Shakespeare's retelling, both the Duke, using divine right, and Angelo, using corrupt judgment, reveal themselves to be flawed arbiters of justice. Two other noteworthy changes demonstrate Shakespeare's abiding interests in early modern justice: first, he lessens the significance of the prostitute character; second, his Cassandra character, Isabella, refrains from having sex with the corrupt justice figure. These three changes create a play where the crimes committed are not clear cut. Thus, the play becomes a dialectic between various modes of early modern justice. The word "common" is used seven times in *Measure for Measure*. "Common" modifies everything from executioners to ears to houses of prostitution and the state. This essay explores the various instances of "common" in the play, arguing that Shakespeare uses the play to rehearse anxiety over divine right, on the one hand, and corrupt judges on the other. The ambiguous examples of "common women" in this play expose the problems with labeling and punishing offenders in a consistent and fair fashion. This paper argues that Shakespeare's play is an early expression of the tension between absolutism and common rule, a tension which, in the world of the play, is ultimately irresolvable.

Roze Hentschell
"Impersonal Ideals": The Early Renovation Efforts of St. Paul's Cathedral

Scholars have long noted the increased secularization that London's St. Paul's Cathedral precinct underwent over the course of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It was, of course, a common space for a myriad of business and social activities. It is important to keep in mind, however, the profound sway that religious culture still held over the London. Despite the Norman cathedral's somewhat schizophrenic identity in post-reformation London, St. Paul's still drew the devout. And yet, for all the religious activity that still occurred at Paul's, we find in the *textual* output of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century a pervasive concern with the moral decay taking place all around it. This degeneration came to be associated with the physical condition of the Cathedral itself. The dilapidated state of the church and particularly the absent spire, which had burnt down in 1561 never to be replaced, became a material symbol for the lack of religious fortitude of London and its inhabitants. In the first half of the seventeenth century, several authors spoke out strongly in favor of church renovations, suggesting that the condition of God's primary house in England reflected badly on the city itself, and also harmed the souls of its denizens. As I will argue, attempts to re-imagine a repaired St. Paul's were necessarily also attempts to reclaim a sacred London. In particular, I will look at three texts that argue—to varying degrees and to diverse effect—for the repair of Paul's: Thomas Dekker's *The Dead Term* (1608), Henry Farley's *Complaint of Paul's to all Christian Souls* (1616), and John King's sermon *On Behalf of Paul's Church* (1620). The texts show the importance that Paul's had in the quotidian lives of average Londoners; it was a geographical landmark and source of pride. But more than this, Paul's represented nothing less than true north on the moral compass of the city. At stake in its repair was a spiritual renovation

of the souls of London's sinners and a redefinition of the common perception of this sacred space.

John Higgins
Riots and the Formation of Commonwealth in Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*

My paper will discuss the way in which discourses surrounding riots over common land differed from records of historical practice, and the way in which the contradictions between discourse and practice get incorporated into Beaumont and Fletcher's tragicomedy *Philaster*. Most discussions of peasant and lower class political action associate riots with a "many-headed monster," made up of uncontrollably violent peasants either pursuing a series of irreconcilable interests, or recklessly bent on removing all social distinction from the commonwealth. Historical records of riots, however, reveal the extent to which this common prejudice differed from reality. Most riots were carried out with specific goals in mind – most often the recovery of access to enclosed common lands, or the enforcing of price regulations in the market – and the actions of rioters were for the most part quite controlled. Virtually all violence during riots in the Elizabethan and Jacobean period was aimed at property and not individuals, while peasants frequently pooled resources to hire counsel, and attempted to obtain aristocratic support (successfully in many cases) and strategically adapt their methods to fit within the law. Part of what causes this difference between the discourse and the practice of rioting, I argue, is the fact that aristocratic authority during the period actually *relied* upon popular support and assembly, in the form of practices like the hue and cry and the conscription of soldiers for public defense, in order to maintain order. Gentlemen understandably feared the possibility that these forces might turn against them if ungoverned, while rioters sought to appropriate them for their own purposes when faced with what they perceived to be acts of injustice.

What we see in the riot that ends Beaumont and Fletcher's play is a use of a dramatic *deus ex machina* that relies upon the potential for common citizens to organize themselves, while also capturing the different social interests involved in their ability to do this. The play's hero and title character gets released from prison by armed citizens, but insists that they disband after he has been freed. His courtier Dion simultaneously celebrates the prospect of the citizens to restore Philaster to the throne, but also derides the rioters as poor, cowardly, and disorganized. The citizens themselves not only prove to be brave and well organized, but also demonstrate a unique sense of political legitimacy based upon charisma and martial force, rather than birth or divine right.

William Kerwin
Satires of Dispossession: The Common in Marston's *Scourge of Villanie* and Shakespeare's *King Lear*

The history of English Renaissance satire, in verse form and on the stage, evolves in conjunction with shifting perceptions of the common. The rise of the verse satire in late Tudor England, culminating in a flurry of competing pamphlets in the 1590s, reflects and perhaps helps create a radically conflicted sense of the shared and the private, and central to that history were pulls between traditional and modern patterns of land-ownership. Older Tudor complaint and satire was grounded in a stable, rurally-based "commonweal," but by the 1580s satirists were less firmly "moored" to a stable and traditional culture, and wavered between a praise of an older rural, communal life and a membership in a new urban sensibility based on individual conscience, accumulation of goods, and self-fashioning. My paper explores these conflicts shaping the common and the uncommon in John Marston's verse satires and Shakespeare's *King Lear*. Both texts are justly famous for their representation of men who demonize women and sexuality, but just as central to their satiric vision is a persistent and even obsessive concern with the loss of older patterns of common rural life. I consider passages that treat rural life from a distance—the distance of Marston's urban coterie and of Shakespeare's London playgoers—and that represent changes in who does what with rural places. Focusing on moments conveying various senses of dispossession, I ask how urban confusion about the loss of common lands helps shape literary forms. How does satire, with its strange blend of the elegiac and the angry, help us understand a culture's understanding of the common? And how do new ideas about the common help us understand satire?

Brian Knight
"Speak What We Feel": Commonplaces in *King Lear*

It is a commonplace of criticism that early modern drama is rife with commonplaces. But if aphorisms and commonplaces are taken to be kernels of static truth, then their inclusion in drama needs to be explained – that is, how are we to reconcile ostensibly static commonplaces with the inherent dynamism of stage drama? I will address this apparent incompatibility of aphorism and drama by looking at how aphorisms are used in *King Lear*. *Lear* presents a dramatic world in which aphorisms are used not to shore up the existing social hierarchy, but rather to cling to that hierarchy after it has already ceased to exist. Commonplaces make an implicit claim to normative truth, but the tragic context of suffering and recalcitrant experience challenges the legitimacy of this claim; the aphorisms in *Lear* appear to be inadequate attempts to interpret the events on stage. This inadequacy isn't the whole story though, for we see that the use to which commonplaces are put in large part determines how their efficacy should be evaluated. When Gloucester uses commonplaces to blame his misfortunes on the gods, we see the inevitable inadequacy of aphorisms to account for suffering – pain, madness, and death exceed the capacity of crystallized nuggets of wisdom. But when commonplaces are used as organs of counsel, their effect can be more substantial. By analyzing the aphoristic counsels of Kent, Edgar, and the Fool, I hope to elucidate some of the roles of commonplaces on the stage,

and to suggest that they allow Shakespeare both to acknowledge the limits of expression as well as to explore the possibility of expressive innovations.

Vimala Pasupathi
Humor in Common: The Muster, The Multitude, and the Funny Business of War

My paper will examine the notion of the "common" as it applies to a specific rank of soldier, a designation attained and bestowed at sites of conscription in the shires. I will discuss Shakespeare's references to and depictions of common soldiers in scenes of local musters in 1 and 2 *Henry IV* alongside those in other drama, from *The Famous Victories* (ca. 1588), *The Shoemaker's Holiday* (1599) and *The Knight of the Burning Pestle* (1607) to *The Tragedy of Valentinian* (1612). The similarities in these scenes raise a number of questions, among them why they are generally comic, even when they appear in works that are not primarily comedic in aim or tone. Certainly, the comedy—and sometimes comedic violence—set in motion when ruling elites acquire common soldiers parodies and offsets the tragic nature of warfare, providing some cathartic release for an audience whose members can be grateful that they themselves have not pressed for militia service. Still, I wonder if there's something else going on as well. I've been writing about the militia's history as an institution that enforces the English idealist conception of warfare as a common or collective enterprise, and these scenes may do more than make fun of that conception or temporarily alleviate the anxiety caused by its logical conclusion. I don't have an argument yet, but look forward to developing one with the use of our excellent seminar bibliography.

Elizabeth M. Sturgeon
"Print it for a president": Reforming the Commonwealth of the Law in *The Mirror for Magistrates*

The Mirror for Magistrates has long been relegated to the dustbin of literary history for what has been criticized as its common, antiquated medieval form and content (Hadfield, Lewis). Yet it is precisely the book's claim to the common tradition of classical history, what Plato identifies as a critique of "the government of a common weale" (63), which positions the book in the long line of literary and historical forbearers from Plato to Boccaccio. In addition to the claim to uphold the *de casibus* tradition of placing a metaphorical mirror before history's actors to depict the "goodness or badness of the rulers" (64), the book also claims that it should be "print[ed] for a president to remayne for euer" (73). Thus, while the book has been derided for its common, conventional history, the first lament in the 1559 edition, in particular, takes aim at the common law, itself, to critique the administration of justice during the reign of Richard II: "In the common laws our skill was so profounde, / Our credite and aucthoritie suche and so esteemed, / That what so we concluded was taken for a grounde, / Allowed was for lawe, what so to vs best semed" (75). The authors and the speakers in *The Mirror for Magistrates* seem to want to have it both ways: in the preface, they piggy-back on the common tradition of Roman and Italian

literary history if only to disparage it, and in the first lament they claim originality—to "print it for a president"—so to as to rewrite literary legal history.

David Summers
Hamlet and Jacques: Commonality, Particularity and Virtue Ethics

The recent interest in Shakespeare as a thinker has led us to revisit questions of philosophy in his work. As a portrayer of characters in narratives rife with challenging moral and ethical dilemmas, the turn to philosophical ethics is only natural. The neo-Aristotelian approach often called virtue ethics, with its sharp focus on narrative, *phronesis*, and the concept of guiding virtues, is an especially productive theory for analyzing how Shakespeare deals with character, identity and moral agency.

All ethical systems are predicated on an assumption of a certain degree of commonality among persons. Indeed, the rigidity of many deontics systems derives from an assumption that we are all much the same, that justice and fairness is achieved when we are all treated alike—as we ourselves would like to be treated. The humanist agenda of the sixteenth-century was fascinated with the use of "commonplaces"—Erasmus it seems never ceased collecting his "adages"--as a way to guide moral judgments when they needed to be made. Virtue ethics relies to some degree on many of the conclusions about what the good is that can de derived from deontic theory, but it opens some space for both narrative and identity particularity in the act of making moral judgments.

This essay aims to examine the efforts of two rather different characters, Hamlet and Jacques, as they each serve as both arbiters of moral judgments, and individuals seeking to assert their radical particularity of identity. Both of these characters are caught in a tension between the acceptance of that commonality essential to both an ethical awareness of others and membership in any community, and the inner conviction that one is unique, that one's situation is unparalleled, and that one is in some sense truly isolated from community. It is, perhaps, this tension that marks Shakespeare's sense of melancholia more than any other attribute.

Jeff Theis
Common Theft and Appropriation: Shakespeare's Robin Hoods and the Spatial Politics of Woodland Commons

In the past fifteen years, scholars have renewed their focus on Shakespeare's appropriation of the Robin Hood legend as it engages early modern politics. Most of the focus has been on *As You Like It* and Duke Senior, and to a lesser extent Rosalind's, engaging the contested identities of Robin Hood. In particular, Richard Wilson sees Rosalind's huntress disguise and subsequent purchase of land to help Corin as an attempt to ameliorate the social tensions brought on by early modern enclosure and the rise of absolute property rights. Meredith Skura examines the gentrification of Robin Hood on the English stage, and my own book argues that Duke Senior's

link to Robin Hood helps him see that forests are unstable sites that cannot be controlled by human concepts like property. Finally, Edward Berry considers Shakespearean Robin Hoods mainly in terms of hunting practices.

None of these approaches really considers how central the concept and practice of English commons in woodland culture is in Shakespeare's various Robin Hoods. Robin Hood distinctly engages the concept of nature as a common resource that should be accessible to all, and nature as a common was rendered spatially and socially through English commons. Most important, English woodland commons construct forest areas neither as a place external to the social nor as something that can be turned into absolute property; rather, woodland commons render the forest as a distinctly social site where nature and various strata of society are mutually constituted. By considering the social-environmental aspects of forest commons through the Robin Hood legend, Shakespeare also interrogates how the social and the natural are defined through theft and violence. My own paper will examine Robin Hood references in *As You Like It, The Two Gentlemen of Verona,* and *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Each of these works constructs the Robin Hood legend in different ways, but they all interweave antisocial, potentially anarchic behavior with communal values that sometimes derive from common access to nature and sometimes are set in contrast to a more restrictive definition of nature, property, and the human relationships that are predicated on land use practices.