

**Artisanal Knowledge and the Stage**  
**Seminar Leaders: David J. Baker and Mary Floyd-Wilson**

**ABSTRACTS**

Debapriya Sarkar

“bring forth a wonder”: The Limits of the Knowing Subject in *The Tempest*

In the early modern period, “wonders” represented both objects and emotions and marked the limits of nature’s order. In *The Tempest*, Prospero’s art is predicated on separating the wondrous object from the subject who examines it. In their “historical epistemology” of wonders, Lorraine Daston and Katharine Park examine wonders both as “passions and objects” which signal links between “subjective experience” and “objective referents” (16). Daston and Park claim that the emotion of wonder and wonders as objects operated simultaneously to produce knowledge, but like Prospero, they separate the knowledge producer who experiences wonder from the objects of wonder he or she examines.

In this paper, I argue that in order to fully examine the complexity of “wonders” one must turn to wonders like Miranda and Caliban, who expose the fallacy of subject-object divisions. Both wonders and wondering, they challenge their reduction to objects as they experience the emotion of wonder and know “thing[s] divine.” While Miranda’s wondering proliferates meanings and is partially controlled by Prospero, Caliban employs the duality of wonders to rebel, threatening to level all hierarchies. Prospero appropriates the language of wonder to reinstate divisions but fails to fix Miranda or Caliban only as wondrous objects. Prospero’s actions leave him with a political power divested of “art”; he has to renounce his “rough magic” for his “dukedom.” The play highlights the transformative capacity of wonders that can wonder, refusing absolute subject-object divisions that reinstate normative approaches of knowledge production predicated on the absolute power of the knowledge producer.

Sarah E. Parker

“‘Doctor She’: Helen’s Ambiguous Role as Healer in *All’s Well That Ends Well*.”

This paper considers the various and often conflicting representations of medical knowledge in Shakespeare’s *All’s Well That Ends Well*. In the play’s opening lines, the threat of the French king’s death looms large, and his sickness serves as the narrative device that launches Helen’s maneuvers to win the nobleman Bertram in marriage. Yet in order to convince the king that he should submit to her treatment, Helen must create for herself a more advantageous position than was typically accorded women claiming medical knowledge. Helen’s position does not fit neatly into the context of contemporary medical debates about the relative merits of theoretical and practical medicine. The King and members of his court express incredulity at Helen’s claims to knowledge, since the

court's learned doctors trained in theoretical medicine had already tried every remedy in their power. In further contrast to these learned court physicians, Helen is introduced with language that associates her with magic or sorcery. Yet in spite of these associations with popular and empirical medicine (often connected with women in the polemics of learned physicians), it is also clear that Helen learned her art from her father, a "much famed" physician. This paper explores the play's presentation of the contours of these contemporary debates in order to understand why Helen is presented as an unclassifiable medical practitioner. This disruption of attempts to classify Helen as a practitioner may ultimately be related to other challenges that the play poses to its audience as an ironization of comedy as a genre.

Hillary Nunn

"Old Women" and "Old Ladies": Assuming Vocational Identity in the Early Modern Theater

Cast lists and speech headings in early modern plays reveal a number of characters referred to simply as "Old Woman" or "Old Lady." While plays often encourage audiences to link such women with inn keeping and witchcraft, my chief interest lies in examining scenes where these otherwise unnamed older women are portrayed in relation with medical practice. Calling on Margaret Pelling's and Wendy Wall's observations regarding the multifaceted nature of early modern women's domestic work, this paper explores how the era's plays conjure – and incorporate – audience members' preconceptions regarding home medicine, often for comedic effect.

Without any clear links to family or occupation, "Old Women" and "Old Ladies" commonly seem disconnected from the plays' social networks and broader plot. The dramatic action nonetheless encourages audiences to see these women as possessing their own brand of vocational knowledge, often related to health care. This presumed access to specialized knowledge routinely brings the old women ridicule rather than respect, both from playhouse viewers and from other characters within the action. The labels "Old Woman" and "Old Lady" thus tempt audiences to link such characters with secret, even "deceptive" health practices unfolding in private realms, rather than in public view. As a result, the presentations of unnamed older women in plays like *The Duchess of Malfi* and *Wit of a Woman* invoke playgoers' own private experiences with medicine and its perceived mysteries to communicate a sense of unease about home-based treatment more generally.

Benjamin V. Beier

Able Artisans: Poetic Knowledge in Shakespeare's *Midsummer Night's Dream*

This paper, first, will expound a broad definition of artisanal knowledge (often called poetic knowledge) present in the Realist epistemological tradition of Aristotle and Aquinas which Renaissance figures, such as Francis Bacon, inherit and question. After giving a brief description of two challenges to this understanding of knowledge, the rehabilitation of curiosity and the revolt against Aristotelian conception of form, the paper will culminate by turning to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* to try to determine where Shakespeare's sympathies lie in this debate.

This play is particularly suited to an examination of artisanal knowledge because of the vivid depictions of Bottom, Peter Quince, and the rest of the rude mechanicals. By examining these rude artisans themselves and the "civilized" human characters, the paper will argue that, at this moment in his career, Shakespeare accepts the existence of the poetic mode of knowledge—as formulated in the Realist tradition—in the mimetic universe of his play, while emphasizing the benefits of obtaining further degrees of knowledge, along with the attendant limitations and temptations of the higher modes of knowing.

Carolyn E. Brown

Secular Pragmatism versus Scholasticism in *Love's Labour's Lost*

Shakespeare portrays the men of *Love's Labour's Lost*—the King of Navarre, Berowne, Longaville, and Dumaine—as dedicated to the cerebral life, setting up an academy of learning and determined to gain "fame" (1.1.1), not through involvement in the "world's debate" (1.1.172) or warfare in which one acquires titles, lands, and power, but through cultivation of a scholastic, contemplative existence by which one acquires admiration and renown. Shakespeare mocks the kind of scholasticism the men pursue, one removed from pragmatism, by making the pedant Holofernes and Armado, so enraptured with pretentious diction that they fail to communicate even a simple message, into comical and extreme reflections of the King and his companions. The life the King intends to pursue with his fellow devotees resembles that of a religious man, not a ruler, abstaining for three years from the pleasures and duties of life. He becomes a representation of medieval monasticism—a relic of a bygone era. That he intends to resign from public life and never thinks pragmatically of who will rule in his stead highlights his lack of political savvy. Berowne rightfully predicts "these oaths and laws will prove an idle scorn" (1.1.300), making the King and his court into a laughing-stock rather than scholarly icons. The King's dedication to medieval concepts in a burgeoning new age of secular values will prove a "barren task" (1.1.47), rendering him a gullible victim of proponents of a new world view, such as the Princess, not dedicated to lofty intellectualism but political maneuvering. That women are banned from the men's academy highlights the educational limitations of most early modern women, with their

knowledge largely deriving from life experience. Shakespeare's women in the play have a practical understanding of the world, and they come to Navarre on a political mission—to get Aquitaine, which the King holds “in surety” for an unpaid loan, at no cost to the French. Because the men lack a pragmatic understanding of the world of politics, the women masterfully dupe them without the men even recognizing they have been bamboozled.

### Katherine Schaap Williams

Writing about the practice of physic, Timothy Bright notes in 1580: “for as Physicke itselfe is an art, and the action artificiall, and not of nature, so are the instruments of the same action artificiall, and not naturall.” In Bright's formulation, physic depends upon the skillful transformation of natural objects into effective mechanisms of cure, an artful/artificial transformation which produces material effects and displays the knowledge of the practitioner. The art of physic is crucial to *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play that marks Helena's power to heal the king in opposition to the failure of “most learned doctors” (2.1.114). Critics have focused on Helena's social status and gender in relationship to her practice of physic as she capitalizes upon her skill to challenge social conventions through marriage to and subsequent pursuit of Bertram, her reluctant husband. Moreover, as the play dramatizes Helena's knowledge of physic, it juxtaposes Helena with Parolles and his performance of courtly behavior in order to elevate his social status. Helena and Parolles both assert specific forms of knowledge—of physic and of a courtier code—to authorize their actions, and both employ instruments of artifice to advance their skill, but they achieve vastly different results. This essay explores the logic of efficacy through physic—deployed in the play from the King's healing to the Duke's meditation on war as a bloodletting exercise—and courtier practice to examine how the play tests the effectiveness and instrumentality of different kinds of artful knowledge.

### Nora Corrigan

St. Crispin in the Workshop: Craftsmanship and Government in Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman*

William Rowley's *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* (c. 1617-18) provides a heavily fictionalized account of British resistance to Roman tyranny and the origins of the English church, set during the reign of the co-emperors Diocletian and Maximinus. The protagonists, British princes named Elred and Offa, are fleeing the Roman persecution of Christians; they assume the names of Crispin and Crispianus and become apprentices in a shoemaker's shop. Rowley's play harks back to a cluster of popular historical works from the 1590s which celebrate the St. Crispin legend or shoemaking more generally, including Deloney's *The Gentle Craft*, Shakespeare's *Henry V*, and Dekker's *The*

*Shoemaker's Holiday*. Like these earlier texts, *A Shoemaker, A Gentleman* associates the English commons with community and good fellowship. However, I shall argue that this play breaks with its predecessors by imagining a historical past in which artisans have the opportunity to educate their rulers about their craft and its values, to the mutual benefit of both aristocrat and commoner. "The world treads not upright," observes Cicely, the shoemaker's wife, as she witnesses Roman abuses, "methinks it had need of a good workman to mend it" (1.2.149-50). By the end of the play, the world has been mended – thanks, in large part, to the close contact between the younger generation of royalty and the shoemakers. Remarkably, Rowley envisions the craftsman's shop as a place for manufacturing not only shoes, but virtuous princes.

Katie Shrieves

In this paper, I hope to consider how Jonson's masques present and interrogate different modes of knowledge. The masques typically deprecate experiential or craft knowledge as foolish or even malevolent: for example, the lore of herbs and magical objects recited by the witches in *The Masque of Queens*, or the deceptive, foolhardy, and abusive alchemical practice that Mercury rails against in *Mercury Vindicated from the Alchemists at Court*, "as if the title of philosopher, that creature of glory, were to be fetched out of a furnace" (ll. 42-44). These examples of practical knowledge contrast with the seemingly perfect and absolute wisdom of James, source of "light sciential" as Ethiopia declaims in *The Masque of Blackness* (l. 242), and the "Sol and Jupiter of this sphere," as Mercury says (ll. 95-98). A consideration of different sources of knowledge pairs naturally with different modes of interpretation, which Jonson makes clear when he states that the antimasquers in *Queens* will not explain their own meaning, "[f]or to have made themselves their own decipherers . . . had been a most piteous hearing," and "a writer should always trust somewhat to the capacity of the spectator" (ll. 92-99). This paper will explore several questions: In what ways does Jonson depict knowledge gained through practice, and how does he contrast it with other types of knowledge or ways of knowing? How might the audience interpret "mute hieroglyphic" of costume, scenery, and physical performance, and to what ends? How do "ways of knowing" (e.g. experience/practice, academic/theory, or revelatory/intuitive understanding) intersect with "ways of interpreting" the spectacle of the masque?

Sally Romotsky  
Shakespeare's Tailors

Early modern tailors were a common target of insulting jest, as in Kent's derisive statement to Oswald in *King Lear*: "A tailor made thee . . . a stonecutter or a painter could not have made [you] so ill." The numerous references to tailors by Shakespeare's

characters indicate that the dramatist often exploited the contempt shown towards tailors as effete and easily intimidated or greedy and not to be trusted. Historically, however, many early modern tailors are recorded as substantial citizens who actively participated in social, religious, and political affairs. In the 1500s the Merchant Taylor's Company was one of the twelve great livery companies of London, having evolved from a medieval guild of working tailors to an influential trading company.

Four of Shakespeare's tailor characters, the unnamed tailor Petruchio hired in *The Taming of the Shrew*, the mild-mannered Starveling of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and Feeble and Dommelton of *2 Henry IV*, depict artisans with highly admirable traits. They have virtually none of the stereotypical dishonesty, timidity, and lack of craftsmanship that common lore attributed to tailors. Instead, these lower class tradesmen possess a sense of dignity and self-possession that, tellingly, contrasts with the aristocratic figures who mock, use, and abuse them. Shakespeare, who had numerous familial connections to the garment-making trades, may be re-acting to and perhaps subtly correcting popular prejudices.