

Abstracts: New and Revised Narratives of the Theater
Shakespeare Association of America Conference, St. Louis, 2014
Chair: June Schlueter, Lafayette College

Group 1

Douglas Arrell, University of Winnipeg

“Who Influenced Whom?: Putting Aside the Narrative”

Usually discussions about which one of two texts influenced the other are driven by an historical narrative about the likely dates of the two texts and other facts we think we know about them. But narratives in this period often rest on very meager and questionable information and presuming that we know the sequence of events can lead to distorted thinking. It is a useful exercise to consider the two texts apart from the narrative and ask whether there are intrinsic elements that may suggest which text is prior. In this paper I look at two pairs of plays, Munday’s *John a Kent and John a Cumber* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and *Troilus and Cressida* and Heywood’s *The Iron Age*. I point out that the conventional narrative has dictated that the first influenced the second, but that looking at the plays apart from this narrative suggests the influence went the other way. I consider a variety of intrinsic factors in coming to this conclusion, including closeness to a source, unclear or illogical elements that might suggest careless borrowing, and signs that one author had a stronger motivation for originating a motif.

Roslyn L. Knutson, University of Arkansas, Little Rock

“Inter-play Borrowings: What are they good for?”

Scholars have used inter-play borrowings as evidence of authorship (Boas, Tucker Brooke), chronology (Taylor, Charlton and Waller), and repertorial membership (Cairncross, Hart). A consistent thread in arguments for the value of inter-play borrowings is a belief in the compositional priority and dramatic superiority of the texts borrowed *from*. The texts borrowing lines, consequently, are often considered to be “bad,” as in “memorially reconstructed.” An exemplar of the argument that inter-play borrowings identify inferior, player-constructed, memory-dependent scripts is *Stolen and Surreptitious Copies: A Comparative Study of Shakespeare’s Bad Quartos* by Alfred Hart (Melbourne and London: Melbourne University Press, 1942). Earlier in 2013, I began an examination of Hart’s claims for a “Pembroke Group,” which has influenced not only the assignment of plays to the repertory of Pembroke’s Men, 1592-3, but also opinion on the provenance and quality of their scripts. I got only as far as Hart’s collation of inter-play borrowings across three plays: *Edward II*, *The First Part of the Contention*, and *The True Tragedy of Richard Duke of York*. For this seminar, I plan to complete an assessment of Hart’s “Pembroke Group.” My purpose is to interrogate the assumptions that led Hart and others to offer inter-play borrowings as evidence for repertorial membership and textual provenance as well as to offer an opinion about the value of those borrowings generally as evidence.

Matt Vadnais, Beloit College

“Your summe of parts’: Adjusting the New Narrative of Performance Texts”

The suggestion that early modern performance practices altered the way that early modern playwrights wrote plays has offered critics a means by which we might read printed early modern play texts simultaneously as authored and collaborative artifacts by focusing our attention on the parts of printed plays that served extra-textual functions in performance. However, in addition to offering us a means by which we might better understand how a specific play may have been written for performance, this revised narrative of theatrical practice offers opportunities to compare the practices of different early modern playing companies by comparing the printed play texts written for them. The reason to do so is simple: we must be careful not to assume that playing conditions—though always marked by a scarcity of rehearsal and the use of cued parts—were identical throughout Shakespeare’s career. This short seminar paper looks closely at the unusual ways in which the earliest printings of plays attributed to Shakespeare, specifically those attributed to Pembroke’s Men, negotiated the rigors of early modern performance in order to better understand early modern playing conditions prior to 1594.

Group 2

Gina Di Salvo, Northwestern University

“The Saint Play, A Revision”

An enduring narrative in the study of English drama is that saint plays were a product of the Middle Ages and became extinct at the advent of the Protestant Reformation. However, nine saint plays appeared on the professional stage between 1594 and 1640. As scholars increasingly consider non-Shakespearean drama and turn to plays such as *The Virgin Martyr* by Thomas Dekker and Philip Massinger and *Saint Patrick for Ireland* by James Shirley, saint plays are appearing more frequently in criticism. When these works are addressed, however, the genre continues to be framed through received narratives of periodization—that is, as medieval, Catholic, and/or religious—when, in fact, the theatrical depiction of saints in the Middle Ages was not always a religious event and, furthermore, rarely took the form of dramatic *vita*, as exemplified by the exceptional Digby *Conversion of Saint Paul* and *Mary Magdalene*. A reconsideration of the wide range of medieval theatrical practices in concert with the early modern repertory, I argue, establishes a new history of early English theater in which the saint play emerges as an early modern genre. By focusing on the saint play, I consider the relationship between historiography and criticism and examine how narratives of medieval theater impact the study of early modern drama.

Siobhan Keenan, De Montford University

“Beyond the Renaissance Closet: Amateur Playwriting, Manuscript Drama and the Example of *The Twice Changed Friar*”

The manuscript plays written by amateur Renaissance playwrights in England have often been defined as ‘closet’ dramas, written to be read rather than performed. Recently, scholars such as Marta Straznicky have begun to challenge the idea that such dramas were routinely ‘antithetical to the stage’ or exclusively ‘private’ in mode (2004:417). Fresh reason to question such traditional theatrical narratives and, in particular the assumption that amateur manuscript playwrights wrote exclusively for ‘the closet’ and an audience of ‘literary’ readers is arguably afforded by the four anonymous early seventeenth-century plays found in a manuscript owned by the Newdigate Family of Arbury Hall (Nuneaton). Attributed by Trevor Howard-Hill to family member John Newdigate III (1600-42), each of the four plays appears to be written with the possibility of performance and staging practicalities in mind. As an example, this paper focuses on the evidence afforded in this regard by the final play in the miscellany, *The Twice Changed Friar*. Based on a tale in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*, the play, which has never been published and which is thought to be unique to the Arbury manuscript, dramatizes the comic story of a criminal-turned-friar who disguises himself as Cupid in order to seduce a merchant’s wife.

Rebecca Munson, University of California, Berkeley

“Theater Without Theaters: Playbook Marginalia and Audience Expectations”

The term “theater history” applies to the field of study most concerned with the evolution of theater as an institution—its changing venues and spaces, conventions and practices. Largely, the work of theater historians is distinct from that of the book historians who study the printing, publication, and distribution of playbooks. Playbooks have largely been regarded as belonging to the book historians and bibliographers, some of whose most foundational work began with the study of printed plays. The proper place of printed drama in the study of the early modern theater remains a site of disagreement and prompts many still-unresolved questions: did printed plays grow out of stage success or, as in famous cases like *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, contraindicate it? Were playbooks really as popular as we have assumed or were they a relatively minor subgenre of entertainment? To what extent has our perception of the prominence of certain playwrights, companies, and genres been skewed by an overemphasis on extant printed copies, neglecting the implications of things like lost plays or drama in manuscript? All of these are valuable questions that I hope we, as scholars, will continue to investigate. They are not, however, questions I aim to address directly in this paper, though I hope that some of the evidence I present will add to the discussion. I am interested, first, in the process of gathering and analyzing the material evidence of early readers of playbooks and, second, in advocating for the profound effects of reading drama on the evolution of the English theater. This is an exploratory paper, an

invitation to begin a conversation about how best to uncover, organize, and analyze the relatively untapped resources of annotated plays.

Group 3

David Kathman, Independent Scholar, Chicago

“What Really Happened in 1576?”

Since the nineteenth century, historians of the Elizabethan theater have told a nice, tidy tale about how the first custom-built playhouse in England, the Theatre, came to be built. In this narrative, players were accustomed to playing in London inns and other open spaces, until in 1574 the Puritanical city authorities banned plays within the city (in some versions of the story) or at least greatly restricted them. The players responded by retreating to the suburbs, where James Burbage and John Brayne built the Theatre in 1576, just outside the reach of the Lord Mayor and aldermen. This narrative has been remarkably resilient in popular histories of the Elizabethan stage despite the emergence of significant problems, such as the fact that four London inns continued to host plays regularly for twenty years after 1576, and the fact that Burbage and Brayne’s company performed at two of these city inn-playhouses in the late 1570s, after the Theatre was operational. In this paper I will build on the previous work of Bill Ingram and Larry Manley, among others, to suggest that economic factors played a much larger role in the events of 1576 than the standard narrative allows, and that suburban playhouses would probably have been built even if the London authorities had never raised any objections to playing.

Alan H. Nelson, University of California, Berkeley

“Vice and Virtue in St. Saviour’s Parish, Southwark, 1570-1643”

It is a commonplace of theater history scholarship that Bankside playhouses were situated among drinking-houses, bear-baiting rings, and brothels of the South Bank of the Thames. The aim of my research is not to challenge this commonplace, but to search for confirmatory or exculpatory evidence in contemporary documents. William Ingram and I have been working for some three years on documents from St. Saviour’s, the parish which included Boroughside (the north end of Borough High Street leading directly to London Bridge), Clink Liberty, and Paris Garden Liberty (see URL below). Within the two liberties stood all four Bankside playhouses: The Rose, the Swan, the Globe, and the Hope; also the various Bear-baiting rings. Parish documents of interest include Token Books (the subject of our website), Presentments, Views or Surveys of Inmates, and maps. To these will be added Thomas Nash’s obscene manuscript poem “A Choice of Valentines”; and printed books and pamphlets. I am also on the lookout for new classes of applicable documents. I anticipate that these documentary sources will confirm but also enrich the weakly-documented characterizations of Bankside which have circulated in Shakespeare scholarship since the late nineteenth century.

Existing website:

<http://www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/things-to-do/visiting-the-city/archives-and-city-history/london-metropolitan-archives/the-collections/Pages/token-books-st-saviour.aspx>

Kara Northway, Kansas State University

“I bed you forweill frome the baregarden’: Interpreting an Early Modern Actor’s Spelling and Handwriting”

Douglas Bruster recently referred to Shakespeare’s spelling and handwriting as “the DNA of Shakespeare’s words.” This genetic metaphor suggests naturally predetermined writing. For some in the theater, however, the physical act of writing was perhaps more complex. An artificial and self-conscious approach to writing is seen in an undated manuscript by minor actor John Alleyn, Edward Alleyn’s nephew. Alleyn’s 531-word letter requested permission to court the daughter of a Mr. Brune/Burne (not William Bourne, as assumed). J. P. Collier, who in 1843 provided the only transcription, failed to recognize the influence of Alleyn’s London dialect, dismissing the letter as “ignorant” and omitting revisions. How far did Alleyn go to correct his phonetic spellings for the rhetorical situation or to create special effects? And how did the letter-writing location, Beargarden 3A (1583-1614), influence these choices about language-appropriateness? I argue that Alleyn’s revisions signal unease about social perceptions of popular London English pronunciations and reflect deliberate decisions to convey a particular voice. In Bruster’s terms, Alleyn mutated his own orthographical

DNA. My transcription of this little-known document sheds new light not only on one actor's pronunciation and sensitivity to the reception of his voice, but also on the literacy of hired men.

Elizabeth E. Tavares, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

“Playing With Others: Reciprocity, Repertory, and the Lord Strange's Men, 1592–93”

In the narratives theater histories tell about the relationship between playhouses and players, the Lord Strange's Men and Henslowe's Rose Theatre serve as an important early instance of explicit long-term collusion between a landlord and theatrical tenants. We know that the company relied heavily on Christopher Marlowe for both new and revival properties, were early adopters of the joint-stock model for sharer ownership, carefully balanced generic offerings of English history plays with Turk campaign plays, and consistently innovated with stage technologies, from which human immolation became a signature device. This paper sketches two additional repertorial practices indicative of the Strange's Men house style: tandem stagings with the Admiral's Men, and the cultivation of Turk campaign plays. The playing conditions of the Rose just after renovation offered higher production values in a number of material ways. In general, this enlargement enabled the Rose to facilitate evolved representations of dramatic scale, something of particular use to Strange's ongoing cultivation of Turk plays. Using *The Battle of Alcazar*, *The Jew of Malta*, and *A Looking Glass for London and England* as exemplum of the two tactics, I argue that the 1592–93 season brings into relief the changing relationship between increasingly professionalized playing companies and the dedicated playing spaces of London by interrogating models of reciprocity that included the very ones the company themselves were adopting.