

2016 Shakespeare Association of America Seminar

**EARLY MODERN WOMEN AND TRAVEL:  
LOCAL HISTORIES AND GLOBAL DESIGNS**

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**ABSTRACTS**

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*Mapping Shakespeare's Women*

How do women in Shakespeare's plays travel both literally and metaphorically? My paper takes an experimental approach to answering this question based on an initial data set of all the places mentioned in two of Shakespeare's plays compiled as part of the early stage development of the Shakespeare on the Map Project, a digital project aimed at mapping all the locations in Shakespeare's plays: <http://www.shakespearemap.org/> As the groundwork for mapping all the locations mentioned in the plays I am adding geographic encoding the existing TEI versions of the Folger Digital Texts (<http://www.folgerdigitaltexts.org/>), tagging geographic locations where action takes place in the plays, locations that characters allude to in the text, and locations that are referenced in adjectives (e.g. "Ethiophe" or "French").

My paper for this seminar will look at the locations encoded in this way for one comedy, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and one tragedy, *Othello*, and analyze the relationship between female characters and the place names in these plays. What can we learn about the geographic places women appear and travel between, the places they refer to, or the places names they use to metaphorically describe themselves and others? Do the number or kind of places referred to by male and female characters differ? I will be both examining the way women in the plays relate to place names and, at the same time, exploring the potentials and limits of a data driven methodological approach to such questions.

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*Desdemona and Mrs. Keeling*

*Othello*'s tragic outcome requires Desdemona's journey to Cyprus, a voyage she initiates against expectation: the general's demand for "fit disposition" for his wife yields to her entreaty, "Let me go with him" (1.3.236, 259). Seconding the request, Othello cites "the young affects / In me defunct" (263-4) to allay stereotypic male fears of female sexuality and dismiss the suspicion that—as Venus disarmed Mars, or Cleopatra's presence at Actium puzzled Antony (*A&C* 3.7.10)—Desdemona would distract him from his service to the state. The Duke left it to the couple to decide, "Either for her stay or going" (276).

By contrast, the directors of the London East India Company denied a similar request by General William Keeling that Ann Broomfield, his wife since 1610, accompany him. She was pregnant. This was a critical assignment projected to occupy five years. Commanding the fleet carrying England's first royal ambassador to India, Keeling was charged to re-organize and oversee the factories in the India Ocean. Governor Thomas Smythe reported that Keeling and his wife "doe both" request "leave for her to goe with him, to remaine in the Indies so longe time as he shall staie there" (*Court Book*, 8 Nov 1614). Some members held it "very fitting in regard of the quiet of his mynde, and the good of his soul, which otherwise could hardlie be settled to live soe longe from his wife, as a curse befalleth those that keepe man and wife asunder." This view did not prevail. When Keeling defied his employers and smuggled her aboard off Sandwich, they ordered him to put her ashore or resign his commission.

Women were welcome aboard ships of the Virginia Company, whose membership and management overlapped with the EIC's. Why was Ann Broomfield denied her husband's Eastern voyage? My paper will explore the question.

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*In Pursuit of the Anthropophagi: Desire and Danger of Women's Travel in Othello*

Early in Shakespeare's *Othello*, the Moor recounts Desdemona's rapt obsession with his travel tales, of one whose "greedy ear [would] / Devour up my discourse" (1.3.148-149) at every available moment. Moreover, it is the exoticism of Othello's global travel narratives that arguably arouses Desdemona's desire for adventure in the Moor's eastern world, a desire that will prove her doom. Indeed, her wish "that heaven had made her such a man" butts up against the gendered constraints imposed on women's travel in Shakespeare's early modern England. While travel was represented as furthering the education of young men in early modern England—witness Nash's *The Unfortunate Traveller*—it was deemed perilous to women. Yet, while cultural admonitions against women's travel were ostensibly designed to protect them from the very real dangers

found within global trading routes, such constraints likewise constituted a means of behavioral control. That Desdemona actively pursues travel within Othello's exotic world is ultimately rendered as desire for erotic adventure.

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*“In th’habiliments of the goddess Isis”: Marian Mobility, Black Madonnas, and the Cleopatra Complex*

In his account of his travels through Italy, Michel de Montaigne lingers on his experience visiting the Holy House of Loreto—believed to be the house from Nazareth where the Virgin Mary was born—and details the miraculous conveyance of the house from Galilee to Slavonia and ultimately to Loreto itself. This journey, Montaigne explains, is lamented by “Sclavonians” who “are wont to come here to worship,” and “as soon as they catch sight of the place from their barks at sea, they set up a cry . . . with many protestations and promises added, and beg Our Lady to return to their land.” The travels surrounding this house register the religious desire for a material Marian connection, but the mobility behind both the history of the house and the various visitors who journey to see this Marian site also registers the cross-cultural energies of this Marian pilgrimage site. Of rather significant weight is the fact that Loreto houses a black image of the Virgin Mary.

This paper examines the cultural appeal of Black Madonnas in the early modern period to scrutinize how the shaping of religious and national identity along the racial lines of skin color was concurrently influenced and compromised by stories of, and encounters with, Black Madonnas. Considered alongside Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, and with Celia Daileader's keen view of the “Cleopatra Complex” in mind, Black Madonna narratives in European and trans-Atlantic settings offer an interesting nexus through which to explore the influence of an original black, foreign femininity on perceptions of a Christian identity that was increasingly coded as white.

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*Women and the Travels of Colonial Discourse in Shakespeare's Plays*

As the influential work of Louis Montrose has shown, English explorers such as Sir Walter Raleigh employ the language of gender to describe newly discovered lands in the Americas as a virginal woman. In the context of the Mediterranean, on the other hand, European travels were characterized by a fear of captivity and conversion as well as the increasing concern with the Ottoman encroachments on Europe. In her analysis on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, Barbara Fuchs suggests that American and Mediterranean contexts should be read as intersecting; that while the gendered dynamics in the play work to contain a threat of Islam (figured in Claribel's marriage to the King of Tunis), it

also recalls “the more common gendered colonist trope of ravishing a newly discovered land.” Fuchs’s intertextual analysis underlines how Europe’s experience of being the target of another empire become closely associated, “temporally, materially, and rhetorically,” with its flourishing empire-building experience.

This essay considers Fuchs’s intertextual method to further examine the ways Shakespeare employs the language of gender to dramatize the formulation of colonialist ideologies. In *Othello*, Shakespeare dramatizes the Islamic threat to Venetian patriarchy as one that simultaneously concerns both land and women. The alleged abduction of Desdemona by “the Moor” is thus coupled with the threats of the Turks advancing on Venetian land, in this case, Cyprus. My intertextual analysis primarily focuses on how *Othello*’s abduction of Desdemona serves as a “counter-metaphor” to Caliban’s attempt on Miranda in order to explore the process in which these gender discourses that figure the world of Islam as a “ravishing other” traveled across the Atlantic to further England’s colonial endeavors in the Americas. The effects that these gender discourses have when superimposed from one context to another suggest that the formulating process of colonialist ideologies traveled as narratives of invasion intricately inverted into discourses of expansion.

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*English Women, Romance, and Global Travel in Thomas Heywood’s The Fair Maid of the West, Part 1*

Bess, tavern wench turned tavern owner turned cross-dressing pirate in Thomas Heywood’s *The Fair Maid of the West, part 1*, presents a narrative of transformation from domestic labor to upwardly mobile (emphasis on mobile) woman. If, as Kathryn Schwarz argues in *Tough Love: Amazon Encounters in the English Renaissance*, invoking the exotic Amazon provides society an opportunity “to talk about the quotidian and the domestic” (5), Heywood’s Bess, in many ways, works against the domestication of the Amazon through multiple transformations that increasingly resist singular definitions of gender. These transformations come about through both changes in economic circumstance and change of geographic location. The play’s historical backdrop, the Islands’ Voyage, completes the transformation of Bess into a world-travelling pirate by erasing her dead (or so she believes) fiancé’s body; that is, her encounter with the Azores, a port-of-call that functions as the cross-roads to world commerce within the play, erases her future domestic plans in England and allow her to fully commit to her high-seas adventures. Bess presents Early Modern audiences with both an extension of Queen Elizabeth as a world traveler through her state-sanctioned pirates, and a commoner who substantially alters her identity through increasing geographic distance from England. Instead of a domesticated Amazon, Bess gives us a domestic turned Amazon through encounters

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*The Trajectories of a Colonial Subject: Pocahontas' Choreographies of Ritual, Travel, and Dance*

Made famous by Captain John Smith's *The generall historie of Virginia, New-Englande, and the Summer Isles* (1624), the Powhatan woman known as Pocahontas served as a tenuous political bridge between the English colonizers and her people, especially through her marriage to John Rolfe and voyage with him to visit the Jacobean court in 1616-1617. She teaches us about non-European women's roles in English colonization despite the lack of her own written narrative. This paper reads her nonverbal movements through space and between groups of people as evidence of her multiple identities, including ambassador, agent of colonial propaganda, and independent individual. Her moving body both reproduces and escapes from the patriarchal colonial discourse that uses her as a legitimizing symbol for English conquest of the New World. Her apparently spontaneous "rescue" of John Smith from ritual execution establishes her body and its movements as powerful vehicles for reconciliation between the American Indians and the colonists. Similarly, whether as a free agent, a captive, or wife of Rolfe, her ambassadorial movements between Powhatan and the English colonists carry political authority, nonthreatening intimacy, and trust on both sides. The trajectory of her trip across the Atlantic and visits with courtiers to promote investment in the Virginia Company make her both a passive and active agent of English colonization. Her movements map out a network of financial supporters for this struggling colony and represent the humanity of all American Indians while simultaneously enacting their willing subordination to the male English husband/planter. Her attendance at the court performance of Ben Jonson's masque *The Vision of Delight* highlights the hybridity of her identity: she too was dressed in an elaborate costume and moving through careful choreographies intended to celebrate English sovereign authority over her. In London court spaces, she embodied both masque and antimasque discourses of order and disorder, Englishwoman and 'other.' Finally, her pained silence and withdrawal from Smith when they meet in London introduces the possibility of resistance, rejection, and hostility from her and the nation for which she stands.

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*Generic Shadows in the Archive*

Valerie Forman and Jean Howard argue for the development of two new Jacobean dramatic genres—city comedy and tragicomedy—genres which seem to infect the archive as well. When stranger women pop up in the early East India Company records, they are unstable signifiers. Miriam Khan, the recently widowed bride of William Hawkins, sought repayment of his expenses from the company. She seems hardly bereft,

quickly consoled, or deeply pragmatic, since she received the assistance both of her brother-in-law and a new fiancé, another EIC captain. Nicholas Ufflett, Hawkins' servant claiming arrears in his wages and eager for appointment, reported to the Company that the seemingly poor widow actually possessed a valuable diamond ring and a bag of diamonds. On the return to Agra, observers gleefully reported Towerson's attempts to discover the wealth of his bride.

This story of the widow, the disappointed groom, and the spying servant could be a city comedy plot. The servant himself could be a player in a comedy who discovers that his loyalty to a corporation is a premature discourse that cannot efface dominant expectations of loyalty to a master. The struggle over the widow's repayment unfolds, the servant is reprimanded, and the widow is carried off by a second husband. It's the perfect plot for a city comedy. Yet a generic instability remains. A broader perspective reveals that Miriam Khan's new husband was Gabriel Towerson, who later features as an exemplar of English masculine fortitude, suffering with dignity both torture and execution by the perfidious Dutch at Amboyna.

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*Sailing to India: Women, Travel, and Censorship in the Seventeenth Century*

Sir Robert Sherley's journey to Mughal India in the early seventeenth century accompanied by Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley and an entourage of English peers and their wives was remarkable in more ways than one. During her stay Lady Powell, the wife of Sir Thomas Powell, gave birth to a child, the first born to an English couple in India. The journeys of Lady Powell and Lady Teresa Sampsonia Sherley, however, came at a time when the English East India Company prohibited the wives of its own factors and Captains from accompanying them to the East Indies. Despite numerous pleas from the factors, the Company in the early seventeenth century refused to change its mind. Company factors in India, as well as Sir Thomas Roe—English ambassador and one of the staunch critics of spousal travel—wrote about Sherley and his companions. This paper is interested in examining these exchanges regarding the women who were part of the Sherley entourage. Did they draw the same type of criticism that the Company women did? To what extent did class and race play into the attitudes of Englishmen and the English Company regarding the presence of wives in the East Indies?

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*Desdemona's "Divided Duty": Gender and Courtesy in Othello*

When Desdemona travels beyond the bounds of her father's home to elope with Othello, she violates a central tenet of patriarchal constructions of appropriate femininity, a construction marked, as Peter Stallybrass notes, by three homologous signs—the closed

mouth, the closed body, and the closed door. When she insists upon traveling with her new husband to Cyprus, her subversion is still more pronounced. Indeed, according to Lena Cowen Orlin, Desdemona's "very request to accompany Othello there is the most troubling—and most portentous—instance of her agency." But if Desdemona begins by transgressing, both in her speech and in her travel, normative gender conceptions, by the end she seems to embody perfectly early modern ideals of feminine submission, a transformation that has proven perplexing to readers of the play. Even as some critics have found that Desdemona "challenges all feminine ideals of the period," others have maintained that her "tragic state stems from slavish conformity" to the traditional Renaissance ideal of a wife's relation to her husband, "that of an obedient child."

This paper will seek to reconcile critical perspectives on the two seemingly incompatible visions of Desdemona the play provides—the one aggressively defiant, the other meekly acquiescent. While readings of Desdemona have differed markedly in the past, they nonetheless have remained overwhelmingly consistent in the discursive model according to which they judge her relative obedience or subversion. Desdemona has been read almost exclusively against the backdrop of domestic ideals of what we might call, as Ann Rosalind Jones suggests, the "bourgeois wife." But as the daughter of a senator with a voice "potential as double as the Duke's" (1.2.13-14), Desdemona clearly resides within the highest social strata of Venetian culture. By locating Desdemona's behavior—her speech, her education, and her travel—among a set of courtly conduct manuals from Castiglione's *The Book of the Courtier* to Guazzo's *Civil Conversation*, this paper will argue that we might fundamentally reimagine the nature of Desdemona's tragedy.

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*Taking it to the Streets:*

*Collectively Researching Women's Movements in the Streets of Early Modern London*

In this paper, I will discuss the experience of designing a course module in pedagogical partnership with the Map of Early Modern London (<https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca>). Over the course of a semester, my students collectively wrote an extended encyclopedia entry on "Women in the Streets," learning about women's movements through Early Modern London, the various restrictions that were placed upon those movements, and the ways in which women negotiated both their spaces and the expectations placed upon them. The course was developed in pedagogical partnership with the Map of Early Modern London and in collaboration with Dr. Jesse Sharpe, a research librarian at the University of Houston specializing in the early modern period. I will discuss the practical applications of the module and the theoretical applications of learning about women's spaces in a course that otherwise focused on gender and genre. The real experiences of the women my students researched interacted with the fiction, including plays, ballads, housewifery manuals, and pamphlets, that my students came across during both our course and their own independent research into a particular class or type of early modern woman, ranging from domestic servant to noblewoman. The practical requirements of the course included scaffolding the skills

necessary for independent in-depth library research, collective writing and editing in groups of four and across all 28 course authors, and developing an encyclopedia entry for the web environment. While my students learned skills in public writing, editing, and research that will benefit most English majors beyond the classroom, they also developed a nuanced understanding of the way that early modern women's use of space, from prostitutes in stage coaches, to "keepers" treating plague victims, to independent hucksters on street corners, and even to Queen Elizabeth washing poor women's feet on Maundy Thursday, reflected, created, and challenged restrictions and expectations placed upon women in the early modern period.

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*Precarious Travel, Gender, and Narration in Shakespeare's Pericles, Prince of Tyre and Margaret Cavendish's The Blazing World*

Both Margaret Cavendish, in *The Blazing World* (1666), and William Shakespeare, in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre* (c. 1608-9), represent the stage as a sea and the sea as a stage. They also commit, in these texts, to revealing the difficulties and failings of that representation. In Part II of *The Blazing World*, when the Empress returns to her world, she dazzles "her Country-men" by "appear[ing before them,] ... born' or supported above the Water, upon the Fish-mens heads and backs, so that she seemed to walk upon the face of the Water," but she is careful to preserve the illusion by keeping her audience at a distance (237). In *Pericles*, the narrator Gower asks the audience to create a ship at sea in their minds: "In your imagination hold / This stage the ship, upon whose deck / The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speake" (3 Chor. 58-60.) This exhortation draws attention to the drama's reliance on audience participation and also echoes Gower's description of the "fine fancies" with which he will fill the audience's minds as he describes Thaisa's pregnancy. In this essay, I examine Pericles's, Thaisa's, and the Empress's maritime voyages and their nearly-fatal encounters with the sea, as well as Gower's and Cavendish's narrator's strategic representations of these events. I argue that Shakespeare and Cavendish invite their audiences to focus on the precariousness faced by travelers, by narrators and playwrights who represent sea travel, and by characters who traverse gender boundaries. Thaisa and the Empress, in particular, seem simultaneously to control and to be shaped by the maritime environments through which they travel, enmeshed in a fluctuating power relationship with their male counterparts and with the environment itself.

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*Travelling Companions: Shakespeare's As You Like It and the Book of Ruth*

This essay examines an underappreciated reference to the Book of Ruth in

Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, arguing that the biblical text not only serves as a source for the play, but also helps frame the play's exploration of female identity, alienation, mobility, inventiveness, and, eventually, social reintegration. Although the Book of Ruth remains one of the most beloved stories of the Old Testament, the work has made surprisingly few *direct* inroads in Western literature, especially prior to the eighteenth century. Besides a handful of extant sixteenth- and seventeenth-century sermons and commentaries, along with an anonymous poetic retelling entitled, *Ruth Revived* (1639), the biblical text is referenced only sparingly in the English literature of the period. Those references are nonetheless significant and suggest the culture has absorbed the story: for example, in one of his sonnets, John Milton insists that his beloved is like Ruth and Mary in that she has eschewed the easy path to "labor up the hill of Heav'nly truth"; in John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, Mercy's decision to travel with Christiana to the Celestial City leads another character emphatically to declare her "a Ruth." Like Bunyan, Shakespeare's account of female travel in *As You Like It* inspires an allusion to Ruth at a crucial moment in the play: when Celia decides to leave her father and the court to follow her exiled cousin Rosalind into the forest of Arden. In tracing the implications of that allusion, this paper aims to show why the Book of Ruth is an important backdrop for the play, how Shakespeare (and consequently his contemporaries) would have interpreted that text, and what allusions to Ruth's story reveal about the nature of female travel in early modern culture. Insofar as writing itself constitutes a creative journey, the Book of Ruth became in this case Shakespeare's own travelling companion.

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*"Paths to dwell in": Maps of Memory and Lady Anne Clifford's "Way"*

This paper examines representations of seventeenth-century female aristocratic travel through one of the era's most notable women, Lady Anne Clifford. It contends that the collective and prolific textual outpourings of Clifford (covering the years 1603 to 1676) offers insight into a range of understudied practices, habits, and patterns of movement undertaken and represented by women of the upper class. These are women who might have, for example, simultaneously embarked on grandiose domestic progresses over substantial distances and yet found themselves immobilized by exile or by the gendered social norms that largely restricted their day-to-day movements to specific sites or particular modes of transport. Far from a leading static, isolated life in country estates, Clifford exhibited a fascination with mobility, both in her actual life and in her writing. Clifford's various forms of life writing record constant, near dizzying bouts of outdoor walking, circuits between her own estates, and visits to fellow gentry by horseback and by coach, as well as periods of relative stasis. My goal in this exploratory paper is twofold: first, to read Clifford's records *as* travel writing; and, second, to see what new picture of women's mobility might emerge in doing so. Broader questions include: In what ways are the everyday spatial practices of elite women like Clifford gendered? How might we compare her experiences to those of someone like Margaret Cavendish? And, finally, how do atypical forms of travel writing like Clifford's inform

our understanding of both travel practices and ideas about mobility in the early modern period?

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