

## “Tudor Musical Theater: the Sounds of Religious Change in *Ralph Roister Doister*”

Katherine Steele Brokaw, University of California-Merced

[kbrokaw@ucmerced.edu](mailto:kbrokaw@ucmerced.edu)

Early Tudor drama is often neglected in discussions of (dis)continuities between the religious and secular. This paper argues that Nicholas Udall’s mid-century *Ralph Roister Doister*, often called one of the first secular comedies on the English stage, negotiates religious change. Performed throughout the reigns of Edward VI, Mary, and Elizabeth, the play was heard by audiences of mixed religious subjectivities, from schoolboys to both Protestant and Catholic monarchs. Recent work on early Tudor drama maintains that pre-public Protestant drama was both religious and comedic/secular. I query this dialectic by exploring how the secular and religious work together in the music of *Roister Doister*.

The many songs of Udall’s play—from street ballads to the parodied psalmody Merrygreek sings for Ralph’s faked funeral—resurrect sounds that echo with England’s turbulent religious pasts. The parody of the death ritual at once mocks traditional rites and acknowledges their cultural cache through restaging. Theatrical music—often seen as a comic, secular distraction—engages with contemporary religious debates and by its nature leaves itself open to various interpretations. The play’s irresolution about music reveals the complexities of early Tudor religious aurality and the sort of personal attachments to traditional music that led to the retention of so much musical rite in the Anglican compromise. The larger argument of my project is that instead of moving from religion towards secularity, the (musical) drama of the sixteenth century recognizes a new sense of contingency, a sense of both the conflict and compatibility of the rapidly shifting state religions of Tudor England. That is, drama does not move away from representing mysteries, but rather opens itself up to more complex and subtle ways of confronting these mysteries; the end of my paper will gesture towards the way this is realized in the music of *The Winter’s Tale*.

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## *Rethinking Shakespeare's Secularity*

ABSTRACT: Shakespeare and the Resistance of Wonder to Secularization

Dr. Martin Dawes

The prime source of wonder for early moderns was God, or the divine works that Job finally conceded to be “things too wonderfull for me” (Geneva Bible, *Job* 42:3). Yet the exploitation of the topos in all sorts of discourses, from science and exploration to pageantry and drama, offers one measure of the period’s secularization. Playwrights such as Marlowe and Shakespeare may have appropriated the religious rhetoric of wonder simply to fill the theatres, reasoning that their characters’ wonder would transfer to the audience. In spite of its commodification, however, this rhetoric would arguably have helped to imbue the plays with religious significance for audiences raised on the Bible, and may still do so for us today.

This paper will confine itself to testing this hypothesis on three different uses of wonder in Shakespeare: the “wonderful” victory in *Henry V*, which the King immediately attributes to God; the “deal of wonder” in the resolution of *The Winter’s Tale*, which has been taken as evidence of Catholicism; and the “torment, trouble, wonder, and amazement” of Prospero’s magic in *The Tempest*, which for some critics operates like divine justice but to others smacks of colonialist mastery. I will suggest that, if the topos of wonder carried providentialist implications that early audiences would have grasped with little effort, it behoves us to make more effort to grasp them today.

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“Wooing words: secularising language and the language of secularism” / Abstract

Tobias Döring (LMU Munich)

When Jonson coined his famous phrase and praised Shakespeare as “not of an age but for all time”, he was in fact using the language of secularism, placing the work of his colleague strictly outside the realm of the secular which, following its Latin etymology of *saecularis*, principally means ‘belonging to an age, a generation’. When G. J. Holyoake, who in Victorian England coined and championed the term *secularism*, described the attitudes behind it with the phrase “He who is afraid to know both sides of a question cannot think upon it”, he was using the rhetorical ideal of arguing *in utramque partem* which, we might say, is most powerfully realized in dialogic arguments or conflicts played out on the stage; dramatic form and stage performance would thus lend themselves especially to secular mind-sets. In what ways, then, can our reading of Shakespearean theatre engage with such conflicting accounts of its status and effects? How do we gauge its critical position between the claims of sanctified as opposed to secularised value? And, most importantly perhaps, what evidence do Shakespeare’s actual plots or figures offer that they may themselves engage with these issues?

In this paper I would like to pursue such questions by turning to some scenes of wooing in plays like *Much Ado* where the power of words to change the world is put to a decisive test. Following Thomas M. Greene’s distinction between “conjunctive” and “disjunctive” theories of language, I understand the latter to be allied to prevailing notions of the secular. Words of wooing, on the other hand, are best experienced to be effective when they manage somehow to ally themselves to reality. Therefore, scenes of wooing may try out the verbal force traditionally mustered in religious rites, turning Shakespeare’s theatre into a space where such conjunctions are played out.

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John Cox, *The Devil and the Sacred in English Drama, 1350—1642* (CUP 2000)

Thomas M. Greene, *Poetry, Signs, and Magic* (U Delaware P 2005)

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C. John Sommerville, *The Secularization of Early Modern England* (OUP 1992)

Erin E. Kelly, Assistant Professor  
Department of English  
University of Victoria  
ekelly@uvic.ca

### Shakespeare's Offstage Conversions and Religious Drama

This paper will show that Shakespeare's plays exist on a continuum with, and respond to earlier, often explicitly religious, drama as they deploy various strategies for representing religious experience through theatrical performance. A number of Shakespeare's plays feature conversions, but the majority of these transformations take place offstage. Comparing the indirect representations of religious conversion in *1 Henry IV*, *2 Henry IV*, *Henry V* and *As You Like It* to the scenes of conversion in earlier plays such as *The Famous Victories of Henry V* and *New Custom* reveals Shakespeare's awareness of the implications of performing religious subject matter. Scenes of conversion in earlier drama always expose a gap between the performer and the event being performed, even when such dynamics undercut intended devotional or polemical messages. By omitting a single conversion scene from his three plays about Prince Hal becoming King Henry V, Shakespeare makes his character seem a political schemer but not an insincere Christian. *As You Like It* ends happily in part because "an old religious man" converts the evil Duke Frederick – but also because this reported conversion seems simple and complete in ways a fully staged change could not. The conversion of Oliver in the same play, which he reports after the fact, puts an audience in a position where they can be thrilled (and perhaps troubled) by the performative qualities of religious identity while stabilizing the fact of the transformation. These cases do not constitute evidence of secularism in Shakespeare's plays. Rather, they demonstrate great sensitivity to the religious debates and cultural anxieties vivified whenever religious subject matter was staged.

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Doug Eskew  
Colorado State U-Pueblo  
doug.eskew@colostate-pueblo.edu

### **Abstract, SAA 2012**

My paper will look at messianism in *Richard II*, concentrating on (that locus classicus of politicotheological:) the deposition scene. My interest concerns philosophic systems that place importance on the distinction between the sacred and the secular, the divine and the human, the political and the theological. In this way, I am interested in 1) recent work on the apostle Paul as a literal and representative link between the ancient Jewish and Greek worlds and that of Rome-centered Europe, 2) Hegelian accounts of the trinitarian tradition, 3) Derrida and theology. My questions of the messianic in *Richard II* will include, how does the text register resistance to divisions of the sacred and the secular? how does the text acknowledge contradictions inherent in such distinctions? what do resistances to these distinctions say about early modern structures of knowing? what do they say about our own ways of thinking?

I may title the essay, "Beyond Sacred and Secular in Shakespeare's *Richard II*."

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**Rethinking Revenge**  
**Kasey Evans**  
**Abstract for “Rethinking Shakespeare’s Secularity”**  
**SAA 2012**

This paper will investigate the genre of theatrical revenge tragedy—and specifically *Hamlet*, for the sake of keeping things Shakespearean—as a perverse experiment in the new theology of Reforming and Reformed England. Specifically, I am interested in the way in which the reciprocal, recursive structure of revenge constitutes a strange form of memorialization and even resurrection, preserving the animus—in the sense of both the spirit and the antipathy—of the deceased. How does revenge, and its theatrical performance, compare to ways of relating to the departed that were available in the Old Faith of pre-Reformation England? Does revenge represent a secularization or a continuation of the beliefs and concepts that once tied the living to the dead (Purgatory, intercessory prayers, rituals of mourning and bereavement)?

This initial foray into revenge tragedy represents part of a longer, emergent book project provisionally entitled *Renaissance Resurrections*, which focuses on the way in which cultural, psychic, and devotional energies formerly devoted to the Catholic Sacraments find new literary and textual outlets during and after the Protestant Reformation.

Craig Bernthal, *The Trial of Man: Christianity and Judgment in the World of Shakespeare* (Wilmington, DE: ISI Books, 2003).

Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

R.L. Kesler, “Time and Causality in Renaissance Revenge Tragedy,” *University of Toronto Quarterly* 59.4 (1990): 474–87.

Edward T. Oakes, “Hamlet and the Reformation: The Prince of Denmark as ‘Young Man Luther,’” *Logos: A Journal of Catholic Thought and Culture* 13 no. 1 (Winter 2010): 53-78.

Thomas Rist, *Revenge Tragedy and the Drama of Commemoration in Reforming England*, *Studies in Performance and Early Modern Drama* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Susan Frye, 'Shakespeare's "Secularization" and the Shadows of Mary Queen of Scots'

I have begun tracing the presence of Mary Queen of Scots in several of Shakespeare's characters. These include the Queen in *Hamlet*, whose husband's death in the garden is oddly suggestive of the drawing showing Mary's second husband, the King of Scotland, murdered under a tree. They include as well the queens of history plays and romances whose trials evoke the harrowing rituals used to imprison and then execute Mary. For example: either Shakespeare felt intensely about Katherine of Aragon's innocence, or his version of her trial in *Henry VIII* draws on the widespread cultural sympathy that Mary's recent trials and execution stimulated, especially but not exclusively among English people who were Catholic or Catholic-leaning.

While sidestepping the predictable argument about one-to-one correspondence between Shakespeare's characters and the queen of Scots, I want to examine where these correspondences occur and what they might mean. In view of the topic of the seminar, my questions for this paper are likely to include, Do these shadowings of Mary shed light on the mix of Catholic and Protestant elements in his plays, especially in a play like *Hamlet*, which strives in part to erase the Reformation, and in a play like *Henry VIII*, whose subject is arguably the Reformation itself? What does it mean to have such a moment of sympathy for a woman under trial in *Henry VIII*, when the staging of Katherine's self-defense is swallowed by the play's progress toward the christening of Elizabeth Tudor and the prediction of James I's rule -- a Protestant outcome made possible by James's mother, Mary Queen of Scots. And if we think further about "secularization" in terms of the movement from medieval mystery cycles to Shakespeare's commercial stage, what are we to make of these plays' trials of Katherine or Hermione, which derive in part from the mystery cycles' staging of the trials of Christ? On the whole, the presence of Mary Queen of Scots in Shakespeare's plays seems to provide ways to see how contemporary political and religious issues helped preserve moments of "medieval" ritual within the commercial theater.

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Woodbridge, Linda and Edward Berry, eds. *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age*. Champaign-Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992.

Gloria Olchowy  
Abstract for SAA 2012 Seminar “Rethinking Shakespeare’s Secularity” Paper  
December 1, 2011

My paper “Bearing Lear” challenges views which interpret the play either as lacking of both, and analyzes the play in relation to the competing ideologies concerning the nature of the divine and of the maternal which inform the historical moment at which the play was written and performed.

The paper first looks at the versions of motherhood in contention in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It examines the traditional forms of motherhood which are affiliated with the divine, encourage a greater fluidity of the genders, enable women to exercise considerable control over their sexuality and fertility and clout in their families and communities, and connect productive and reproductive contributions—even going so far as to construe the “feeding” of bodies as a form of “re-production,” and to cultivate an understanding of family based on charitable, not genealogical, relations, and on the “reproductive” capacity of feeding, rather than breeding, bodies. The paper then explores the reformers’ “new motherhood,” which, more recognizably oedipal, clearly separates the feminine from the masculine, severs the maternal from God’s body, from charitable works and remunerative employment, and from the knowledge and means with which to prevent or end pregnancy, and strives to enclose motherhood in the household. By doing so, the new motherhood reduces the influence, independence, and income of women while enlarging the scope of the paternal.

The paper goes on to consider King Lear in relation to the clash of these radically different paradigms for the construction of God, gender, mothers, fathers, children, and families. It explores the range of divine, parental, filial, and familial formations, and puts forth the argument that the play ultimately affirms the value of the inherited—as opposed to the “new”—concepts and practices of motherhood.

John Parker, University of Virginia

"The Catastrophe of the Old Comedy:" King Lear, Astrology and Christian Atheism

I'll try to build here on two antithetical ways of reading *Lear*, with the hope of finding a central place for "secularity" in the long history of Christian drama. The first way of reading sees in Edmund's diatribe against the stars a modern repudiation of supernatural causes; this interpretation tends as a consequence to position the play — if not Renaissance tragedy more broadly — on a continuum stretching through Enlightenment skepticism to various contemporary, supposedly non-Christian atheisms (Kott, Elton, Dollimore). The second way of reading sees a play haunted by the historical imminence of Christianity, especially with respect to the figure of Cordelia, while laying occasional emphasis on the incomplete, abortive nature of its actual arrival (Roche, Wittreich).

I would like to dwell on the perpetual imminence of Christianity with respect to Edmund's "atheism." My first hope is to place his animus against the stars among the many Christian attempts to discredit pagan astrology — a form of disenchantment that lent to the star of Bethlehem an overdetermined, "catastrophic" aura of enlightenment: upon seeing the baby Jesus, according to one tradition, the Magi turned away from astrological superstition. My second hope is to argue that Edmund's metatheatrical quips both anticipate (in the setting of the play) and recall (at the time of its performance) the medieval Christmas dramas in which this "maidenliest star of the firmament" twinkles on a seeming bastard.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

Joseph Wittreich, "Image of That Horror": History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in "King Lear" (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1984).

Gianni Vattimo, *After Christianity*, trans. Luca D'Isanto (New York : Columbia University Press, 2002).

Holly Pickett  
[picketth@wlu.edu](mailto:picketth@wlu.edu)

Washington and Lee University

Sacred Sound Effects: Pagan, Protestant, and Catholic Audition in *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*

The representations of pagan religious ceremonies in *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* raise important questions about the so-called secular/sacred divide in early modern England: *Whose* sacrality would have counted as sacred? Would a pagan's? For Shakespeare and his co-authors, can a sense of "the religious" exist outside of Christianity? Both *Pericles* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* depict ancient religious sacrifices in seemingly positive (or at least neutral) ways. What are we to make of those depictions? Would an early modern playgoer have simply "allegorized away" the pagan vehicle to arrive at a Christian tenor in such scenes? Or are Shakespeare, Wilkins, and Fletcher inviting their audience members to experience the sacred in new (because so old) and foreign ways by accepting at face value these scenes' depictions of holiness?

By focusing on the sensuous ceremony—and, more specifically, the musicality—at work in the plays, I hope to map the contested territory of the holy in these late romances. To what extent would they have been understood in light of contemporary debates within the English Church about the role of ceremony and even music in the church? While a Reformist fear of idolatry is usually associated with images, some Reformers worried about the power of music to corrupt Christians, as well. For that reason, many English churches banned instrumental and polyphonic music. In both *Pericles* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, music takes on divine qualities, staking a very definite claim in contemporary debates about its power to inspire or corrupt.

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Jennifer R. Rust, Assistant Professor of English, Saint Louis University

“Coining God’s Image”: the Fiscal Theology of the Mystical Body in *Measure for Measure*.

My paper argues that the pervasive economic tropes (figures of coinage, profit and usury) in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure* mingle secular and sacred concepts of social order and sovereignty. *Measure for Measure* belongs to a hybrid era in which emergent secular notions of economic life exist in tension with older, medieval tropes of mystical economy. While secular notions of political economy and the commodity form are clearly developing at this time, economic language also continues to convey powerful ideas about the integrity of the social world as a *mystical body*, a sacramentally constituted form of life. Attention to patterns of economic language in Shakespeare’s dark urban comedy can deepen our understanding of how the play questions the social bonds that constitute the commonwealth of fictional Vienna and historical seventeenth century London.

The rhetoric of coinage and economy in the play gestures toward two distinct schemes of value that perpetually contaminate each other throughout: sovereign authority (political) and mystical community (sacramental). As Kantorowicz shows, the conceptual link between the *Christus* (Church) and the *Fiscus* of the state (the royal “purse” or treasury administered by the sovereign) lies in their status as *res nullius* (property of no one and everyone). Economic figures in Shakespeare’s play amount to a rhetorical *res nullius*, a common rhetorical property that characters use to shape their agendas, but which also always escapes their purposes, taking them in directions away from their intentions, whether toward materialistic or mystical schemes of value.

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Peter Lake with Michael Questier, *The Antichrist’s Lewd Hat: Protestants, Papists and Players in Post-Reformation England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002).

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California Polytechnic  
Email: pstegner@calpoly.edu  
Telephone: (805) 458-8365  
Marlowe's Friars, Shakespeare's Friars

On the early modern stage, friars appeared frequently and, in general, represented the hypocrisy, lechery, and corruption of the Roman Catholic Church. Critics have pointed to the presence of benevolent friars in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Measure for Measure* to identify Shakespeare as an exception to this widespread anti-fraternalism. They often contrast his positive treatment of friars with Marlowe's dark vision of Catholic religious orders, which reaches its apotheosis in *Doctor Faustus*' command to Mephistopheles to change into a Franciscan friar because that "holy shape becomes a devil best." Yet placing Marlowe and Shakespeare's friars in this oppositional relationship tends to elevate the complexity of Shakespeare's relationship with Catholicism at the expense of Marlowe's staging of the traditional religion. At the same time, it diminishes their significant points of contact. More specifically, I argue in this essay, Marlowe and Shakespeare's presentation of friars not only evokes, but also sustains the strong association between friars and the sacrament of confession both before and after the English Reformation. On a theatrical level, the use of mendicant attire also establishes a series of memorial connections between the former roles of friars, both dramatic and cultural, and the traditional sacramental order they represent.

Select Bibliography:

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2. Robert I. Lublin, "'A comely presentation and the habit of admiration reverend': Ecclesiastical Apparel on the Early-Modern Stage," *The Sacred and the Profane in English Renaissance Literature*, ed. Mary A. Papazian (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2008): 57-83.
3. Garrett Sullivan, *Memory and Forgetting in English Renaissance Drama: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Webster* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).
4. Penn R. Szitty, *The Antifraternal Tradition in Medieval Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986).
5. Gary Taylor, "Forms of Opposition: Shakespeare and Middleton," *English Literary Renaissance*, 24 (1994): 283-314.

**Abstract:** Shakespeare, Paul, and the Body: “The eye of man hath not heard”  
Jennifer Waldron (jwaldron@pitt.edu)

Why does Shakespeare’s Bottom paraphrase Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians (2:9) when he awakens from his dream: “The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man’s hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report what my dream was”? (4.1.207–10). Why does he mangle this gospel verse synaesthetically, crossing hearing and vision, tasting and touching? If we take Protestant phenomenology (or religion more generally) to be fundamentally antimaterialist, this “rare vision” might seem to mock religious claims to transcendent truth. From this perspective, Bottom’s “gross materiality” must be opposed to the true Pauline “spirit,” and any mixing of the two necessarily results in parody. By extension, theater itself must be “secular and secularizing” if it favors “performance itself” over the endorsement of “any particular doctrine,” as Anthony Dawson has proposed. I argue against this position here, suggesting (with historian Jonathan Sheehan) that this very tendency to oppose the “profane” material world with the “transcendent truths” of the sacred is itself a function of a long process of secularization. We cannot take as a given the disenchantment of the body or of “everyday” life more generally. Turning the methods of historical phenomenology toward early modern religion, I suggest that in post-Reformation England, “abstract” doctrinal disputes were tightly interwoven with bodily experience, everyday life, and the ability to marshal various kinds of material evidence for the workings of God in the world. More particularly, by showing how early Protestant views of the body regularly resisted disenchantment, this essay offers a new angle on Shakespeare’s secularity, especially as it concerns theatrical performance itself.

Readings:

Anthony Dawson, “The Secular Theater,” in Kenneth J. E. Graham and Philip D. Collington, eds., *Shakespeare and Religious Change* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 238–260.

Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Harvard, 2010).

Jonathan Sheehan, “Sacred And Profane: Idolatry, Antiquarianism And The Polemics Of Distinction In The Seventeenth Century,” *Past and Present* 192 (2006): 35–66.

Richard Strier, “Martin Luther and the Real Presence in Nature,” *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 37 (2007): 271–303.

Alexandra Walsham, “The Reformation and the ‘Disenchantment of the World’ Reassessed,” *The Historical Journal* 51 (2008): 497–528.

“Titus’s Undermined Jest”

William West, Northwestern University

If we are to rethink Shakespeare’s secularity, we first need to think about what, in relation to Shakespeare’s theaters and the culture they were part of, and in Shakespeare’s texts and the culture that they continue to be part of, is talked about as secularity, religiosity, fidelity, profanation, and the like. The many recent works of criticism or cultural history that touch on the question of Shakespeare’s secularity have introduced a confusing array of assumptions that collapse religion or secularity as content (so a representation of Christian tropes is necessarily religious, for instance), religion into secularity as a history (the ‘secularization hypothesis’ and lots of work in political theology), and something like religion and secularity as forms (Agamben’s thinking about profanation). In this paper I will try to begin my rethinking of Shakespeare’s secularity by asking some of the things that *secularity* seems to mean in some studies of Shakespeare and related fields, and what kind of purchase it might provide for them. After reviewing some uses of *secularity* as a critical or historical term, I will take a stab at a formal definition of it as a stance against the *re- in representation*. I expect to do this through readings of some moments in Shakespeare’s plays that seem to me to demonstrate a turning-away from the possibilities of representation, not towards unrepresentability, but towards something that we might obscurely call fittedness, or the responsibility of presentation, notably in *Titus Andronicus*.

In addition to the works that have probably been suggested by many of us, like Schmitt’s *Political Theology*, Blumenberg’s *Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, Taylor’s *A Secular Age*, or Said’s *The World, the Text, and the Critic*, I’d like to suggest the following five articles as some that I have found especially helpful in framing my own thinking and rethinking of secularity and the cultures of early modernity:

- Giorgio Agamben, “In Praise of Profanation,” *Profanations*. Transl. Jeff Fort. New York: Zone Books, 2007: 73-92.
- Stathis Gourgouris, “Transformation, not Transcendence.” *boundary 2* 31 (2004): 55-79.
- Victoria Kahn, “Introduction” to “Early Modern Secularism.” Special Issue, *Representations* 105 (2009): 1-12.
- Jeffrey Knapp, “Good Fellows,” ch. 1 of *Shakespeare’s Tribe*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002: 23-57.
- Lupton, Julia Reinhard. “The Religious Turn (to Theory) in Shakespeare Studies.” *English Language Notes* 44 (2006): 145-49, a special issue on “The Religious Turn”.

Jay Zysk  
University of New Hampshire

### ABSTRACT

Shakespeare's Secular Priests: Amorous Rites and Holy Rites in *Romeo and Juliet*

This essay interrogates the critical reliance on “secular” as a marker of distinctly “non-religious” or “non-sectarian” ideologies; it does so by drawing attention to the earlier ecclesiastical etymologies and uses of the term. The earliest use of *secular* (ca. 1290) in English defined “clergy living in the world and not in monastic seclusion” (*OED*, I.1) in addition to signaling the more commonplace distinction between church and world. The term was also included in the Catholic Mass when the priest invoked God’s blessing *per omnia secula seculorum*, or “through all ages of ages.” Thus, our assumptions about secularity were not necessarily those of early moderns, for the term we now use to define Shakespearean drama as non-religious exposes the ecclesiastical and liturgical lexicons from which it derives.

When so culturally and semantically historicized, the “secular” conflates church and world rather than stands as the irreligious correlative to a sacramental system dismissed as part of a medieval past. *Romeo and Juliet* draws on this intersection of church and world by making “amorous rites” (Juliet’s term) somehow dependent on holy rites, especially confession and marriage. The play’s complex secularity accounts for the ways in which Romeo and Juliet work around the political feud that separates their families by resorting to the sacramental activities of the church as embodied by friars and their worldly involvements. In a series of brief readings, I situate these arguments in response to recent critical appraisals of the play in terms of sexual politics, subjectivity, and queer studies. These interpretations treat Romeo and Juliet’s desire as exclusively non-religious rather than as insinuated within ritual paradigms and performances. First, I show how confession (or “shrift”) serves as a front for marriage. I then discuss how the sonnet scene meshes popular poetic forms with liturgical and devotional tropes of pilgrimage and image worship, and is later materialized in a staged marriage ritual at Friar Laurence’s cell (a scene represented as a Catholic nuptial liturgy in Franco Zeffirelli’s film). I conclude with a discussion of Friars Laurence and John, who take their work beyond the cloister of a monastery. In this sense, they are “secular priests” -- priests who also play a crucial role in developing some of the play’s literary concerns, namely genre. Friar Laurence’s decision to stealthily marry Romeo and Juliet makes their union possible and pushes the play toward the comic register (albeit briefly). And Friar John’s inability to deliver the letters to Romeo catalyzes the play’s tragic end. By investing and involving themselves in the world, these priests prove central to the play’s negotiation of church and world as well as its collation of comedy and tragedy.

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