

SAA 2015
Seminar 11. Entertainment and Early Modern Plays

Seminar Leaders:

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Hardin Aasand

TNK, Inc.: Masquing, Morris Dancing, and the Marketplace

Shakespeare and Fletcher's *The Two Noble Kinsmen* owes its dramatic structure to its Chaucerian source and to the rural festivities and court masques that reflect Elizabethan and Jacobean aesthetics. The play thus presents an oddly hybrid structure that crosses temporal and stylistic boundaries. Beginning with the opening masque of Hymen and its dramatic interruption by three weeping widows who insist on Theseus and Hippolyta's postponement of their nuptials, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a play rife with ceremony, artifice, and May Day dances. Most striking in its structure is the play's staging of an opening ritual perhaps more fitting for a masque closure and Theseus's half-hearted admission that there is little to applaud in the play's resolution:

For what we lack
We laugh, for what we have are sorry . . .
. . . Let us be thankful
For that which is, and with you leave dispute
That are above our question.

The frustrated closure, as Lois Potter notes in her Arden edition, is often supplemented in productions by an interpolation, an unscripted coda that restores the rural ambience of the Jailer's Daughter, whose madness and plangent voice lent themselves to the May Day festivities of Act 3.5. Perhaps this is an example of life imitating art, an echo of the pastoral May Day festivities and morris dance that similarly saw the co-opting of the Jailer's Daughter to bring closure to the nuptial dance for Theseus and Hippolyta. In this essay, I want to explore this play's insistence on formal ceremonies that fail and impromptu moments that succeed.

Emma Depledge

Entertainment and Early Modern Plays During the Ban on Acting, 1642-1660

I wish to explore the relationship between early modern plays and popular entertainments by examining the ways in which drolls (abbreviated plays designed for surreptitious performances), ballads, and commonplace books may have stood in for stage plays during the various bans on acting imposed from 1642 to 1660. Like Dale B.J. Randall (*Winter Fruit: English Drama, 1642-1660*), I am keen to question existing thinking when it comes to defining what does and does not constitute a dramatic text. Equally, building on Susan Wiseman's work (*Drama and Politics in the English Civil War*), I hope to highlight why 1642 to 1660 should by no means be seen as a period devoid of dramatic entertainment. My paper will argue that alternative forms of entertainment, many based on Shakespeare plays, continued to thrive during the Puritan bans on stage plays (later extended to include ballads too), thereby highlighting links between popular entertainment and early modern plays while shedding light on a little-studied period of Shakespeare's authorial afterlife.

Alison Findlay

"Some Country Sport" (TNK 3.5.96): Entertainments in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Two Noble Kinsmen*

My paper will consider how *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* blur the boundary between drama and paradramatic entertainments by setting in parallel fragments of popular English entertainments (morris; May Day; ballads; games) and elitist classical culture symbolised by the Athenian court. These plays are unlike *The Shoemakers Holiday* or *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*, in which popular festivals and customs grow out of a distinctly English environment. Instead, popular entertainments are presented to royal or noble spectators in the fictional worlds of Shakespeare and Fletcher's texts. Spectators at the commercial theatre are offered examples of household drama, a multi-dimensional form in which many different types of entertainment, none of them original, blend and clash. I will make brief comparisons to Elizabeth's Entertainment at Norwich (1578) and to country house entertainments (e.g. by Thomas Campion, Lady Rachel Fane, Lady Mary Wroth) to illustrate. Why Athens should be the gateway for such a curious interweaving of mythic, classical and folkloric elements in *Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Two Noble Kinsmen* will be explored with relation to the 'country' of England or Britain. While it was struggling to establish its authority on the foundations of classical Greek models, this ambition was radically unsettled by early modern Greece's subjection to the Ottoman Empire. Both plays use sharply contrasting styles of 'country sport' in order to dramatize the confusion experienced by spectators constituting themselves as national subjects from a cultural heritage of English customs, classical history and myth. Shakespeare and Fletcher's artful dramatization of courtly and popular entertainments are sites where nostalgia, fears, insecurities and ambition converge. 'Country sports' thus offer a resonant space for early modern spectators and readers to rethink their place(s) in communities of the present.

Sara Gutmann

Sovereignty, Maritime Politics, and the Elizabethan Estate Entertainment

This essay looks at how *maritime poetics*—that is, the metaphor of the land-sea border—is engaged by the estate entertainment, the most ecological artistic practice of the early modern

period. The estate entertainment combined elements of great hall drama, medieval mumming and allegory, jousting, and royal entry ceremonies with a real geography to be sculpted as the occasion demanded. No genre more explicitly ties sovereignty to the landscape than the estate entertainment, acted on and in the elements. The entertainments for Elizabeth I at Kenilworth in 1575 and Elvetham in 1591 included a variety of spectacles centered in and around large water features where the sovereign body was placed in relation to aquatic environments and narratives. These entertainments represented Elizabethan sovereignty poised on the border between land and water. The water features of these estates were integral components of the entertainments, allowing them to resonate in larger geopolitical terms by mapping onto the local landscape an imaginative maritime geography.

Conor O'Sullivan

"Many who carry their eares in their eyes": The Lord Mayor's Show and the Problem of Spectatorship

This paper, which will eventually form part of a dissertation chapter along with readings of various Elizabethan/Jacobean royal processions and progresses, will examine the annual Lord Mayor's Pageant with an eye toward understanding the role of the spectator in it. My larger project is interested in problems of spectatorship, in what it means for the display of public power for audiences not to play their roles properly; this paper will detail how spectatorship is figured in various of the Lord Mayor's Pageants in an effort to determine what peculiar pressures and anxieties surround the spectatorship of explicitly civic, rather than royal, performances. It looks at the printed texts of several pageants, by different Stuart-era playwrights (I'm still trying to cull the list of pageants down to something manageable), and reads speeches, descriptions of actions, and authorial notes in order to understand how the pageants' creators saw the relationship between performance and audience; it also examines some of the eyewitness accounts of the pageants (there are a few, almost all written by foreign visitors to London) to try to come to a fuller understanding of how the crowd saw itself in relation to the performance. Ultimately, I will attempt to come to an understanding of civic spectatorship that might be read interestingly alongside a study of theatrical audiences.

Kevin Quarmby

"I am tied to the stake, and I must stand the course": Blindness and Bear-Baiting in *King Lear*

When Gloucester preempts the loss of his eyes, with this allusion to standing the course while tied to a stake, his words enjoy a resonance with bear-baiting that is as recognizable today as when Shakespeare's audience first watched the horrific torture inflicted on the hapless duke. Less noticeable to a modern reader, however, is the resulting imagery of both of blinding and baiting, associated in this instance with an aspect of such sporting entertainment that removes the spilling of animal blood from the jaws of dogs and into the hands of men. Bears such as Blind Robin, Ned of Canterbury, Harry Hunks, and Sackerson, all offered an alternative spectacle to the bear-baiting arena, where unfortunate sightless creatures were mocked and whipped by human tormentors, rather than canine ones. With recent scholarship about the smell and sensual impact of such entertainments in mind, this paper explores the blinded bear-baiting phenomenon, and offers an alternative reading to the bear/blind association, which in

turn foregrounds several instances of like paradramatic referencing in an early modern performance context.

Lauren Shepherd

Entertaining Madness : Diagnosing Performed Madnesses on the Early Modern Stage

This paper will attempt to uncover performances of real or feigned madness in 1-3 plays, in conjunction with the physician diagnoses on stage of those characters. The paper will then connect those performances and diagnoses with common conventions and medical practices with mentally unstable patients – specifically drawing from the history of Bethlem Royal Hospital, and Bridewell, inclusive of patient documents where applicable. The overall aim of this paper is to draw connections between the medical community and the stage – particularly the use of “madhouses” as a form of popular entertainment, and the transference of “madhouse” behaviours (both from doctors and patients) from the clinical environment through to the performed entertainment of the stage.

Kristina Sutherland

Dressing Up the Lower Class: Carnavalesque Celebration of Merchants in *The Shoemaker's Holiday*.

Thomas Dekker's *The Shoemaker's Holiday* revolves around merchant Simon Eyre and his cobbler apprentices, including Lacy, the son of a nobleman who uses disguise to evade his relatives and marry the woman he loves, and Rafe, a wounded veteran of the French wars who returns to find his wife engaged to a rich and insistent suitor. Over the course of the merry play, Eyre becomes mayor, Lacy secures his marriage, and Rafe rescues his wife from her potential second marriage. My paper will examine the use of song, disguise, pastries, and other carnivalesque items to celebrate these low class men as triumphant over the upper classes.

John C. Tompkins

The Coventry Isaiah in Pageant and Progress

This essay presents a new way of looking at the redacted Coventry text called *The Shearmen and Taylors' Pageant* by examining the connection between Coventry's vanished mystery cycle and two royal entries that town presented in the latter half of the fifteenth century. This connection appears most readily in the character of Isaiah the Prophet, who appears in the pageant to prophesy the coming of Christ. Scholarship has located the origin of the mystery-play Isaiah in Latin liturgical drama, but I argue that we can learn more about the place of the Old Testament prophet by looking to the reviser of the text, Robert Croo. Croo's work revising the pageant demonstrates his concern with production and his knowledge of and attention to the performance history of the city. Reading Isaiah this way distances him from the Latin *Ordo Prophetarum* and finds in him a figure from Coventry's past that would have inspired pride and nostalgia in a city mired in economic recession.

Laura Williamson Ambrose

**The Device of Travel: Technology, Mobility, and Performance
(or, Seventeenth-century Hybrid High-“Performance” Vehicles)**

My paper for this seminar offers me an opportunity to expand my work on domestic travel and technology in light of pre-existing forms of mobile entertainments: ceremonial barges, pageant wagons, Lord Mayor’s shows, and even royal progresses. In particular, I hope to use these entertainments as a way of opening up a curious and fascinating narrative account of local journeying from 1607, *A True Relation of the Admirable Voyage and Travell of William Bush*. Like Kemp and Taylor, Bush places tremendous emphasis on the performative aspects of his journey and on the throngs of “audience” members who appear at various stages along the way. Unlike his fellow domestic journeyers, though, Bush rarely employs his own two feet – his is a ride in a handmade amphibious boat-car, one which he takes great pains (figuratively and literally) to row down the Thames in a ceremonial spectacle of ingenuity for the last leg of his journey. Bush’s account, like many early modern entertainments, lies at the intersection of performance and material culture. In what way might Bush (and other domestic traveler/performers, for that matter) be responding to other amphibious water pageants, processions, and shows? In other words, how does technology enable its own kind of performance? What I’d like to argue here is that early modern entertainments play a crucial role in shaping how the English understood their relationship to mobility and to technologies of mobility more broadly. How one moves is as essential as where one goes.