SAA 2015
Shakespeare and Early Modern Historiographies

Abstracts

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Condensing Chronicles: Shakespeare's Historiography in *King Lear*

Shakespeare's revisions to the ancient history of Britain in *King Lear*, as recounted in the sixteenth-century chronicles, have long puzzled critics: Samuel Johnson, for example, complained that Shakespeare broke the "faith of the chronicles," by killing Cordelia. In *King Lear*, Shakespeare treats the historical elusiveness of pre-Roman Britain that troubled historians as an opportunity to alter the source narratives freely, exacerbating the gradual destruction of the ancient British kingdom depicted in the chronicles. How does Shakespeare's collapse of multiple chronicle narratives of ancient, interfamilial, internecine war—the war between Cordelia, Goneril and Regan; the war between Goneril and Regan's sons; and the war between Ferrex and Porrex (dramatized in *Gorboduc*)—in *Lear* reflect on his representation of the ancient British kingdom, what might this condensation suggestion about Shakespeare's historiographic practices?

Joseph Bowling
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Abstract

Staging Brute History in *Cymbeline*

I argue that *Cymbeline* performs the problem of legendary history as report in order to reflect on the importance on reception rather than the veracity of legendary history. With this in mind, I contextualize the play's investment in the Brute history through such texts as Richard Harvey's Philadelphus (1593), Henry Lyte's The Light of Britayne (1588), and Thomas Fenne's Fennes frutes (1590): each struggles, I argue, to relocate the truth of Britain's legendary histories from their historical or genealogical accuracy to the reenaction of ancient virtue in the present. In other words, the truth of the legends lies in the present rather than the past. Cymbeline, I posit, stages a similar presentism: just as the interpretation and reception of reports determine the identity of the subject of the report regardless of its accuracy — Innogen's chastity, for example — the Brute legendary history also provides, as it did for James I's propaganda for unification, a fantasy for reimagining the true British identity.

Philip Goldfarb
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Abstract

Thanes Becoming Earls: *Macbeth* and the Discovery of Feudalism

The late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries saw the rise of a new historical account of medieval society based on a feudal model of hierarchical vassalage. In this essay, I argue that Shakespeare took advantage of this new historiography when depicting medieval Scotland in *Macbeth*. Focusing on the play's often-neglected last speech in which Malcolm creates earls in Scotland, I examine how Shakespeare's plays shows a Scotland transitioning between two types of feudal law. I demonstrate both the existence and the significance of this transition by drawing on the work of various Renaissance British historians, most notably the Scottish jurist Sir Thomas Craig, as well as through close readings of the text of *Macbeth* itself. This feudal context allows us to see how the final speech gives hope that Malcolm's reign will heal Scotland of the ills it has suffered during the play.

Brian Harries
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Abstract

Confessional Historiography: Engaging the Doctrine of the Chronicle Histories on Stage

The Jacobean plays concerned with Henry VIII, primarily Rowley's *When you See Me you Know Me*, and Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII*, wrestle with questions of understanding the events surrounding the king's role in the English Reformation. At the center of these questions are several issues of Henry's spiritual and theological correctness as he acts on behalf of the one true Christian faith, the English state, and his own soul. I argue that these concerns have their roots in chronicle histories such as Holinshed's *Chronicle* and Foxe's *Actes and Monuments*, which present the events according to distinctly doctrinal positions. As such, these works serve as religious and confessional instruction through historical examples for a newly Protestant people. As the subject matter is adapted for the stage in the early 17th century, however, the project becomes one of critical examination, which considers the explanations put forth by the earlier historians.

Deanna Malvesti Danforth
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Abstract

Constructing Historiography/Refiguring Myth: Shakespeare's Rumor, Chorus, and Henry V

This paper argues that Shakespeare's portrayal of Rumor, the Chorus, and Henry V in *2 Henry IV* and *Henry V* refigures the etching of Fama leading the chariot of Mars in Vincenzo Cartari's influential Italian mythology, *Gli Imagini De I Dei De Gli Antichi* [1571], in order to suggest that a great monarch must successfully manage rumor in order to script an enduring legacy. In fashioning Henry V as a glorious and conquering Mars who uses rumor for his own purposes (instead of allowing it to run haphazardly before him), Shakespeare critiques contemporary myth-making and the political strategies of Elizabeth I's triumphant reign. Elizabeth I's own connection to Shakespeare's Henry V and the management of rumor most strikingly appears in the iconography of the "Rainbow Portrait" [c. 1600] where Elizabeth is depicted as mythic herself, a figure of Minerva who has appropriated the forces of rumor for her own purposes.

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Abstract

The Dull Character of Our Historians: The Intertextual Historiography of Edward II

Elizabeth Cary's *The History of the Life, Reign, and Death of Edward II*, written c. 1626-1627 and published in 1680, was the first political history written by a woman in early modern England. Critics have frequently treated Cary's history as a topical commentary on favoritism and corruption during the reigns of James I and Charles I, and seen her unique depiction of Queen Isabel as indicative of her personal and gendered interests. This essay reads *The History*'s complex representations of Isabella's queenship with attention to Cary as an author of early seventeenth-century political history who carefully shapes material she draws from her chronicle history and historical drama sources within a tradition of political history-writing that includes male writers such as Thomas More and Francis Bacon. Situating Cary's *History* within a broader pattern of early modern historiography's surprising representations of women's agency and political power provides an opportunity to better understand Cary's account of Isabel's queenship and identifies her authorial concerns and strategies as those shared with, rather than divergent from, the male political historians, chroniclers, and playwrights of the early modern period who were also interested in questions about royal women's roles in politics.

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Abstract

Historiography on Trial: Cross-Examining Historical Narratives in *Henry VIII*

Early Modern historiographers borrow from each other, but also alter the historical narrative in both subtle and dramatic ways. Early Modern English plays that dramatize historiographical materials cheerfully alter those materials to fit their genre's needs, but also must negotiate the potential obfuscation or confusion that multiple historiographers introduce to the subject. This is particularly apparent in Shakespeare and Fletcher's *Henry VIII* trial scenes for Buckingham and Katherine of Aragon. Each of these trials has corresponding historiography in Hall, Holinshed, and/or Foxe *Henry VIII* challenges the seemingly linear narrative of historiography, and highlights the variances of that narrative, through the genre of a trial by presenting conflicting evidence from the source material. The audience becomes both eyewitness and jury, ultimately positioning the scenes as corrective to, and necessary augmentation of, historiographical approaches to remembering and explaining historical events.

Anne-Marie E. Schuler
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Abstract

Corruption and Accommodation in Shakespeare's *All Is True*

The chronicle history play held an important place the England's cultural production within the late sixteenth century, especially as a literary appropriation of history and storytelling of the nation's native history. However, by the accession of James I, dramatists had established the chronicle history play as a genre with a particular cultural function of participating within the public discourse of politics and political discourse. In this essay I examine Shakespeare's *All is True* as a play that responds to the changing political dynamics that occurred in England as the female queen is replaced by a male patriarchal monarch. This changed was marked by a paradigm shift from ideals of conciliar rule and an emphasis on the giving and relieving of advice, to a court marked by absolutist ideals. The play depicts the genuine political significance of this historical change and the effects it had on the practice of counsel. I argue that Shakespeare brings to the fore the problem when good counsel degenerates into accommodationism. The political world of the play unveils the conditions that cause accommodationism, especially political evasiveness within a religious and political unstable court. Religion, I contend, becomes the dramatic site of tension between the monarch's royal prerogative and the practice of good counsel. The play's representation of religio-political change depicts a political world where the ideal of counsel is subsumed to bureaucratic administration, corruption, and unpredictability.

Elizabeth E. Tavares
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Abstract

A Race to the Roof: Cosmetics and Contemporary Histories in the Elizabethan Playhouse, 1595-96

In response to the limited critical conversation around the evolution of the Heavens, this essay first sketches a brief micro-history of this stage technology, and second, theorizes possible socio-economic factors that may have influenced its development. These nodes of possible influence included a boom in printed contemporaneous histories, a fad for Mediterranean plays, and the concomitant adoption of brownface stage paints. The paper tests a model of Elizabethan theatrical reception that accounts for the material strategies of playing companies alongside their repertory and conditioned by the shared knowledge the companies imagined playgoers bringing into the playhouse. In doing so, I argue that the Heavens capitalized upon playgoers expanding shared knowledge of England's place within a global history while providing a cultural space in which to interrogate England's changing relationship to their Mediterranean neighbors.

Denise A. Walen
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Abstract

Exiling Margaret in Shakespeare's *Richard III*

This essay concerns itself with the reasons Queen Margaret is often eliminated from many productions of *Richard III*. In brief, Shakespeare's earliest textual critics condemn her presence in the script as ahistorical. More contemporary performers argue that she is a confusing presence for audiences unaware of English history. A few critics in the nineteenth-century complained that she was vulgar and not appropriately feminine enough for stage representation. Later textual critics and performance reviewers and theorists argue that her invective and lamentation is tedious, un-dramatic, and non-theatrical. This essay will examine the history of the character in performance and will analyze the literary theory that supports Margaret's elimination on the one hand, even as it explains her importance to the play on the other. The essay ultimately argues that Margaret is a casualty of the stage versus page debate, too long appreciatively considered a rhetorical, choric figure that lacks agency in the action.

Simone Waller
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Abstract

Thomas More and Temporal Community

This paper explores the literary and political legacy of Thomas More in two sixteenth-century accounts of his life, his self-authored epitaph and William Roper's *Life of More*. Written three years before and approximately twenty years after More's death respectively, these early works utilize forms of direct address to manipulate the temporality of More's relationship to their readers, performatively creating community across time through a narrative interplay of temporal proximity and distance. The paper demonstrates how the maintenance of such "temporal communities" was central to More's religio-political project in his late career. In the process, it illuminates the ways that these two works that claim to merely memorialize More in fact actively facilitate his continued political action by placing him in dynamic relation with the readers of their contemporary presents. It then turns to the late sixteenth-century collectively authored play *Sir Thomas More* as a limiting case for such temporal politics.

H. Austin Whitver
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Abstract

"Let these their heads / Preach upon poles": Historiography and Ventriloquism through funerary display in Marlowe's *Edward II*.

Tombs, funerals, and other public displays centered on the dead show up frequently in Elizabethan History plays. However, while other authors focus on the power of funereal display to recount historical fact, Marlowe seems more intrigued by the potential of such spectacles to craft fictions. In his history play *Edward II*, Marlowe explores the vast fictive potential of displays for the dead, both temporary and permanent. Both Edward II and the nobles that oppose him attempt to use the dead to advocate their cause; just as the actors on stage delivered Marlowe's "mighty line[s]" to craft a narrative, so the living tried to push their chosen account of events through displays (or the lack thereof) for the dead. Both sides fail, however, in ways that demonstrate their shortcomings; neither is able to fully grasp the historiographic power of displays for the dead. It eventually falls to Edward III, Edward II's son and heir, to unify the country and prove his suitability for the throne through his carefully constructed funeral arrangements for his murdered father.

Lehua Yim
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Abstract

Beyond the River Sala: Fluvial Discourse and the Politics of Placed History in *Henry V*

Antiquarians such as Harrison, Lambarde, and Camden focus on rivers as central to writing about history. In this paper, I will argue that such a river focus offers these writers a means to write history deeply intertwined with place. This place-based historical writing is akin to that which is associated with battlefields or the heraldric use of the manor as a locus of genealogical succession. In contrast with these two highly politically charged kinds of places, rivers offer (at least seemingly) more politically neutral historical topoi that the antiquarians might use to write about and analyze local history as it relates to a larger vision of a county or a realm. This paper will put in conversation Shakespeare's *Henry V* (definitions of "Salic" lands in relation to the Elbe and the Sala; Hal's relationship to the River Wye) with parts of *Harrison's Description of Britain* and Camden's *Britannia* in order to illuminate the legal and political stakes of using rivers as historically meaningful places in the development of late Tudor "historiography". Of particular interest is the tension in these writings about history between a right to rule based on conquest/invasion vs. a genealogically sanctioned and continuous flow of inheritance rights.