

Seminar Leaders: Alan Stewart (Columbia University) & Laura Lehua Yim (San Francisco State Univ.)

Christopher Foley, *Univ. of California, Santa Barbara*

"Reading the records of civic management in early modern London, up close and at a distance"

As my title suggests, the primary archive(s) in which I am interested are the vast records of civic management in early modern London, particularly those pertaining to London's most pressing environmental and public health concerns. In fact, these records actually span a number of separate "archives": the Remembrancia (official correspondence between London's civic officials and Privy Council), the Journals of the Common Council, the Repertories of the Aldermen, the recorded minutes of Wardmote Jury Proceedings, etc.

My current book project, *Cities, Stages, Bodies: Mediating Public Health in English Renaissance Drama*, argues that these archival records represent a productive critical backdrop against which we might read certain environmentally engaged Renaissance plays in a new critical light. For example, how might the civic records of London's municipal grain storage program at the turn of the seventeenth century help us to understand Shakespeare's *Coriolanus* (especially the tragic, yet communal, sacrifice of the play's anti-hero) in a new critical light?

While my current book project thus seeks to highlight the critical potential of reading these records civic management "up close" by way of traditional literary critical practices, a second major aim for me in this seminar paper will be to consider how--and to what extent--new digital-humanistic methods of "distant reading" (such as various corpus-linguistic analyses and data visualizations) might provide a new critical pathway to reconstructing early modern London's environmental and public health history.

Loreen L. Giese, *Ohio University*

"*Sara Porthowse v. William Porthowse*: Lessons from the Archive"

The vivid descriptions, fertile scenarios, and rich language in surviving ecclesiastical records from early modern England are both their strength and weakness. While the fecundity of these records can cause readers to become absorbed strictly in their narratives and rhetorical strategies, such a narrow focus can also result in misleading perspectives. Thus, these narratives need to be examined within the legal framework in which they were produced. This paper considers the topic of agency within a representative suit from a London ecclesiastical court (*Sara Porthowse v. William Porthowse*) to illustrate the need to examine this type of archival source within its specific legal context—such as the kind of case, record, and complaint, and the record's stage in litigation. As the Porthowse case shows, only by reconstructing this context can we understand the complexity and social function of these sources.

Anne Gill, *Independent Scholar*

"Mistress Overdone – fact, fiction, faction? Aberrant older women in the London Bridewell Court Records"

How true to life was Mistress Overdone, or Mistress Horsleach, or even Birdlime? These and many other lower-class women, presented on-stage by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, have frequently been used by both historical and literary critics as factual examples of women operating in the sex trade

of early modern London. But how accurate is the dramatic depiction of these women? There is an archive readily available on-line which seems oddly underutilised in recent literary criticism which contains a pantheon of such women – the London Bridewell Court Records. It is these records that I will bring to the attention of this seminar.

Using some of the transcriptions of the records which I have studied, I shall argue that the dramatic representation of the largely illiterate women involved in the London sex trade is only partially accurate. There is much here that calls into question the way that older women in particular are presented in early modern drama and begs the question – are the dramatists really making mockery of old bawds or is there a deeper misogynistic mockery of all older women engaged in successful businesses? The records, I shall argue, at least provide a window into the factual world of lower-class Londoners and should not be ignored.

Andrew S. Keener, *Northwestern University*

“Language Exchanges: Noel de Berlaumont’s *Colloquia* and Renaissance Drama”

My paper investigates possibilities for research in early modern drama emerging from a deep and largely unfamiliar archive of polyglot language manuals entitled *Colloquia et dictionariolum*. First published in 1530 and issued in at least 149 editions across Europe through the early nineteenth century, the *Colloquia* contains a series of seven dialogues focused on the mercantile activities of buying, selling, bartering, and debt repayment. With attention not only to these books’ content, but also to the typography, binding materials, and marginalia in surviving copies, I will place the *Colloquia* in conversation with William Haughton’s *Englishmen for My Money* (1598). Traditionally known as the first “city comedy,” this play features a Portuguese usurer, his three half-English daughters, three foreign merchant-suitors (a Dutchman, a Frenchman, and an Italian), and their poorer English rivals. Altogether, in analyzing the variety of vernaculars and accents in this comedy as a theatrical application of the multi-columned foreign languages in the *Colloquia*, I propose we revisit the sub-genre of “city comedy” with recourse to the extensive variety of polyglot language manuals extant in the period. Against this forgotten archive, the plays known today as “city comedies” or “London comedies” take on a distinctly cosmopolitan character.

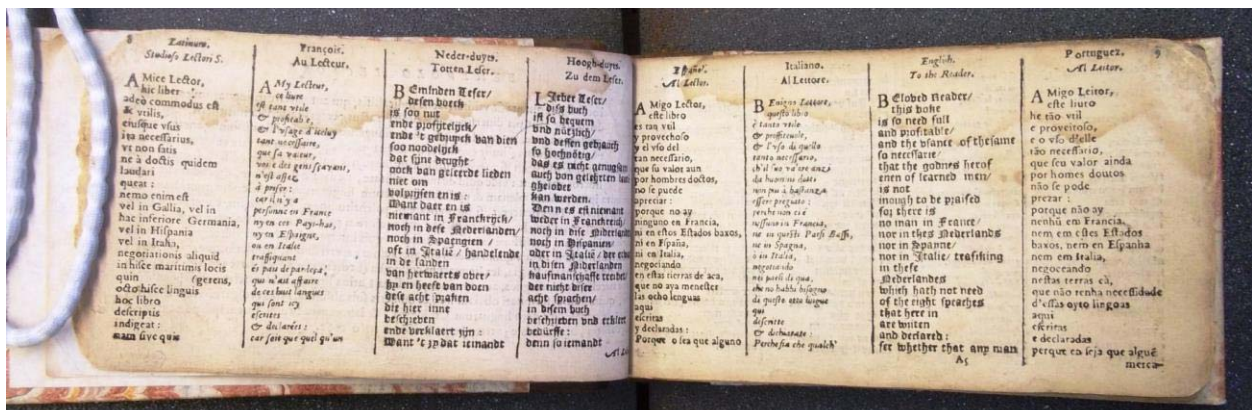


Figure 1: *Dictionariolum et colloquia octo lingvarum* (Antwerp, 1662), Northwestern University shelfmark 413 D554

Laura Kolb, *City University of New York - Baruch*

“Wily Geeses: The Literature of Advice in Shakespeare’s England”

This paper tracks the overlooked genre of economic advice—which is often as much about conduct as it is about finances—as it shows up in a wide range of sources. Rather than examining a body of texts unified by medium, origin, or function, I look at how certain precepts and clusters of precepts recur in an array of texts: in print and in manuscript, in private letters and commonplace books and in publicly circulating documents. The paper consists of three parts: first, it offers an overview of the “places” of advice (the kinds of texts in which economic counsel appears; the situations that seem to occasion the writing-down of advice) along with an account of some of the formal features of advice passages. Second, it moves to a close-up examination of two frequently repeated injunctions: the command to be “close” or “secret” about one’s affairs and the command never to “stand surety” or sign a bond for a friend’s debt. Finally, the paper suggests ways in which advice literature might help us read other texts—texts less obviously intended as “equipment for living”—through a brief reading of *The Merchant of Venice*, whose plot unspools from the violation of commonplace economic advice.

Natasha Korda, *Wesleyan University*

“Shakespeare’s Laundry: Feminist Futures in Counter-archives”

For over a century “Shakespeare’s laundry” has tainted archival labor with the stigma of women’s work. The “washing-bills of great men” was first deployed in relation to Shakespeare by Sir Leslie Stephen, founding editor of the *Dictionary of National Biography*, when in 1877 he complained of scholars “gaping for every scrap of knowledge about the petty details” of great men’s lives, including even their “washing-bills,” and reserved particular scorn for those who would search out “similar information about Shakespeare.” By the early twentieth century, the phrase had become so familiar that one critic simply referred to “the washing-bill method of research.” Yet this gendered discourse has long had its feminist discontents. Leslie Stephen’s own daughter, Virginia Woolf, thus appropriated the laundry-trope in her fictional biography *Orlando* (1928), where Orlando is delighted to hear that Shakespeare’s “poetry was scribbled down on the backs of washing-bills.” In *A Room of One’s Own* (1929), she argued that literary texts “are not spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures,” but “attached to grossly material things,” encouraging scholars to search in “parish registers and account books” for the remnants—including washing-bills—of the material conditions that led to Shakespeare’s flourishing and the silencing of his sisters. Although Woolf’s legacy has had a seminal influence on feminist criticism of Shakespeare, the taint of women’s work continues to cling to the study of material culture and archival ephemera. This essay retraces first-wave feminist critiques of early (male) positivists’ deployment of the washing-bill trope to lay the groundwork for a reconsideration of contemporary feminist scholars’ enduring attachments to hands-on work with archival materials, and to argue that such scholarship should not be construed as a backlash against theory, as “redolent of the logic of fetishism,” or even worse, as a form of “tchotchke criticism,” but that to grasp its theoretical stakes we must reconceive our archive of theory to make room for the descriptive richness and affective as well as political investments of feminist work in counter-archives.

Richelle Munkhoff, *University of Colorado –Boulder*

“Gleaning the Archive: Micro-data and Macro-narrative in Parish Churchwardens’ Accounts”

This essay considers what literary scholars can bring to the interpretation of account books kept by parish churchwardens. These documents span extraordinary lengths of time, from the Middle Ages through to the 19th century and later. In the earlier periods, churchwardens are responsible only for paying for the maintenance of the church building, and for the objects and items necessary for worship (e.g., books, vestments, candles, decorations). From the 16th century, the parish is charged with the charitable care of its inhabitants, so later documents record the distribution of regular poor relief, as well as payments for items such as nursing the indigent ill, feeding, clothing and educating orphaned or abandoned children, and plague management costs. Overall, the archive of the churchwardens’ accounts consists of a list of single-line entries of expenses – each with a short description followed by a number – arranged by roughly by date, and by year. On the surface, these documents may seem too fragmented to be of interest to literary scholars, but I argue it is precisely our skill with interpreting repetition, absence, and juxtaposition that make us particularly good readers of the accounts. And because the accounts cover such large expanses of time, we should look to these ‘forgotten archives’ for stories that span traditional periodization breaks. I use the example of my own research on ‘searchers,’ women who determined cause of death from the 16th to the 19th centuries, to show how we might ask new questions if we consider what larger narratives might be revealed by paying attention to the very minute evidence given us in the churchwardens’ accounts.

Jen Mylander, *San Francisco State University*

“Recovering Everyday Reading in Probate Records of the Seventeenth-Century Atlantic World”

Even otherwise strong scholarship frequently relies exclusively on evidence of printing to make arguments about the impact of early modern print, despite the fact that print only has an impact when it is circulated and read. The history of reading is an elusive subject, demanding that we layer a range of evidence to reconstruct ephemeral practices. Probate records are essential records for social historians and yet they remain under-utilized by literary scholars. Probate inventories, although a simple list of the deceased’s possessions, can convey surprisingly rich glimpses into reading in centuries past. My essay will focus on this rich archive for those interested in the ways material culture intersects with and influences textual culture. Although records of book ownership are rare among non-elite early modern women and men (either in Britain or its Atlantic world), I will introduce seventeenth-century probate inventories from a range of colonial locations as case studies of the value and use of English imprints. I hope our seminar will work to articulate the opportunities offered by material history as it is captured in period probate records.

Kirk Quinsland, *Fordham University*

“*The Alchemist* in The Blackfriars”

This paper uses topographical details found in the papers of the Loseley Collection (1489-1682), housed at the Folger Shakespeare Library, to explore the extent to which we can understand early modern plays as site-specific or site-responsive. I focus on the Blackfriars to argue that even plays that seem to have no immediate connection with this part of London may still have specific topical, topographical, or geographical features of the district woven into them. Using Ben Jonson’s *The Alchemist* as a case study, I offer one means—conduits supplying water to the district—by which we can examine the ways in which geography bends language. My contention is not simply the obvious claim that plays lose or

change meanings over time, but rather that not considering plays as site-specific or site-responsive pieces of drama has resulted in a loss of meaning without our having noticed that such meaning even existed. The work of recovering this lost meaning requires crossing temporal boundaries, asking us to use the archive to re-inhabit a London that has long disappeared in order to understand the relationship between plays and the vanished spaces in which they were performed.

Carolyn Sale, *University of Alberta*

“ ‘He carries his house on his head’: A Cottage Made of Turves, *As You Like It*, and the Charter of the Forest”

As the leading historian of the early modern English common law, J.H. Baker, has noted, the volume of unexamined records in the legal archives is so great that the English law of the period must properly be declared unwritten (and, in his view, probably always will be). Baker’s predecessor S.F.C. Milsom’s concern was, instead, that certain understandings of law are irrecoverable; the records (no matter how numerous or how few they are in relation to any given concern) will always be on their face silent about the cultural presumptions that make them and their various terms possible. How, then, does a literary scholar navigate these records? For a materialist, the imperative to do so is great, given that the records (as voluminous or inarticulate as they may be) may be our only possible source of certain forms of cultural knowledge. I here put a single legal record, PRO E 134/2Jas1/Mich4, to the test in relation to early modern understandings of the legal space of the royal forest. My quarry: a socio-legal logic at work in the play that the case (*I dare to venture*) illuminates, and that clause 14 of the Charter of the Forest (1217) helps me pursue.

Valerie Traub, *University of Michigan*

“The Syntax of the Map”

My forgotten archive concerns that of *cartes à figures*—so called “baroque” maps decorated with human figures which were the most popular form of world, continent, and country maps in seventeenth-century Western Europe. As has long been noted, maps bounded by images of the nation’s, continent’s, or the world’s populace inscribe ideologies of race, ethnicity, nationalism, and empire by linking geographical to cultural difference. My paper asks what is gained and what is lost when we shift attention away from an exclusive focus on ideological content to the map’s spatial organization or what I would call its *syntax*. Using formal analysis to approach the epistemology of these maps, I examine the conceptual and cognitive functions of borders and insets, of homogenous space and invariant scale, and of the imposition of a coordinate system. I examine the import of proximity and similitude as well as difference and othering, asking how the cartographic grid organizes the diversity of humankind and how its imposition of literal degrees of difference and similarity challenges the binary paradigm typically used to read these materials.

Kathryn Will, *Monmouth College*

“Proving Coats: Reading Heralds’ Records”

My paper, an addition to my in-progress monograph on heraldic literacies in English prose and drama, complicates early modern portrayals of heralds as medieval caricatures (in Shakespeare’s case) or pedantic con artists (in Jonson’s). During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, heralds were freelancers who conveyed military messages, recorded notable battle deaths, and identified the names

and insignia of tournament participants. After they were incorporated into the Tudor royal household, their duties included visiting rural counties to verify the names and devices of local gentry. Records of these visits include lists of gentry organized by county, alphabetical indexes of names and corresponding devices (some partially or fully sketched), and pedigree trees and charts. Both heralds and deputized arms painters contributed to these forgotten archives, which are housed in London’s College of Arms and scattered among English and American libraries’ special collections. Some individual records invite sustained analysis, while as a whole, the archive reveals an intriguing economic and social nexus encompassing the Crown, royal heralds, artisans, and rural gentry. By illuminating the material and cultural contexts in which these documents were produced, I provide new readings of heraldic discourse in other contemporary narratives, including Shakespeare’s history plays, Jonson’s *Staple of News*, and the Langham *Letter* on Queen Elizabeth’s entertainments at Kenilworth.

Deanne Williams, *York University*
“Lady Rachel Fane and her Books”

Lady Rachel Fane (1613-1680) is the author of one complete dramatic work, “May Masque” (1627), that was preserved, along with some poetic and dramatic fragments and miscellaneous translations, in her childhood notebooks, now at the Centre for Kentish Studies in Maidstone. A rare and important example of early modern girls’ writing, the “May Masque,” composed when Fane was about thirteen, was produced in an atmosphere that promoted not only girls’ education but also dramatic composition: the autobiographer Lady Grace Mildmay was her grandmother, and her brother was the playwright, Mildmay Fane. This paper examines and analyzes the evidence of Lady Rachel Fane’s girlhood reading in British Library MS Add. 34220, the Catalogue of Books at Apethorpe, Fane’s family home. Dated 1707, this inventory lists 1602 editions of Chaucer and Samuel Daniel, Jonson’s 1616 *Works*, and Spenser’s 1611 *Faerie Queene*, recalling the volumes depicted in Lady Anne Clifford’s Great Picture (1646) that memorialize her education and reading tastes. I have not found evidence (yet) of a family copy of Shakespeare’s works. Existing scholarship on Fane emphasizes its Shakespearean elements, but I shall read Fane’s work, including her less well-known fragments, in light of the wider range of authors reflected in this book inventory.

