

Shakespeare Association of America Annual Meeting  
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### **Shakespeare and His Contemporaries in the 18th and 19th Centuries**

To what extent does the reception and study of Shakespeare in the 18th and 19th centuries still shape our understanding of Shakespeare's dramatic and non-dramatic contemporaries? How were Shakespeare's contemporaries read, reimagined, and received, in various media and in various cultural contexts, across the two centuries? Can we identify patterns of influence and interplay that would be applicable to larger segments of early modern writing, to different authors, and to a variety of genres? Can we speak of a two-way commerce in the history of Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean reception and scholarship? What have we gained and what have we lost in our perception of early modern English writing by considering it through Shakespeare?

Seminar leader: Ivan LUPIC (Stanford University)

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### **ABSTRACTS**

Mark BAYER (University of Texas at San Antonio)

#### **The Rise of American Shakespeare Studies and the Displacement of His Contemporaries**

In the United States, Shakespeare studies emerged as a distinct and institutionalized academic discipline, one that we can still recognize today, during the late nineteenth century. The story of the 'birth' of English studies, as narrated so compellingly by Gerald Graff, is by now well known: enthusiastic amateurs who understood literature humanistically, as a source of moral enrichment, gradually gave way to professional scholar-teachers, philologists who sought through a methodologically rigorous research program that concentrated on questions of biography, etymology and textual transmission to accumulate a reliable set of knowledge about literature, free of prejudice and imposed aesthetic values.

Shakespeare studies, I argue, deviated from this familiar account. Primarily due to the work of a series of influential editors who provided the infrastructure that made the discipline possible, Shakespeare studies in American colleges and universities remained amenable to a humanistic Shakespeare, one rooted in a detailed examination of characters and their ethical dilemmas, long after the rest of the discipline had moved onto more 'scientific' lines of inquiry.

One of the unintended consequences of the durability of a humanist Shakespeare in the American academy was the neglect of Shakespeare's contemporaries. By elevating Shakespeare as a figure of poetic genius, this romantic inspired criticism could dispense with his fellow dramatists to focus solely on Shakespeare's plays, taking the dramatist jarringly out of any historical or linguistic

context in a way that philology wouldn't permit. As a humanist Shakespeare began to permeate the American academy and American editions of his works proliferated, course offerings focused more on a single author than on the overall drama of the period. My overall claim, then, is that historical—and perhaps current—neglect of other early modern dramatists is partially a consequence of a certain way of studying Shakespeare that became institutionally entrenched at a formative moment in the creation of the discipline.

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Huw GRIFFITHS (University of Sydney)

### **“And all this passion for a boy?”: Anachronistic Homoeroticism in Eighteenth-Century Adaptations of *Philaster***

The adaptation of Elizabethan and Jacobean plays in the Restoration and eighteenth century reveals a lot about the way in which the parameters for love between men changed across the long early modern period. The later adaptations often appear to reject celebrations of eroticized male friendship, of classical *philia*, or of conventions of mastery and servitude.

This paper focuses on one example of this: adaptations of Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*. The play obsessively focuses on the erotic potential of the “pretty boy”, Bellario. Bellario is a young woman in disguise but it is a disguise that is not lifted until the last few lines of the play. Jeffrey Masten calls him, “a figure for the possibility of eroticism, a figure always on the verge of eroticization”, and one aspect of the play's investigation into “non-heteronormative possibilities”. Three Restoration and eighteenth-century adaptations of this popular play (George Villiers; Elkhiah Settle; George Colman) deal in variegated ways with the difficulties of confronting, adapting, and comprehending older, potentially anachronistic, concepts of erotic attachment. They change some things about the original play, but they leave others intact, each making very different decisions from the others, especially around the figure of the boy.

I read the later adaptations closely for their complex responses to the potentially challenging ideas that they find in the Beaumont and Fletcher play. In doing so, I aim to make an historicist intervention into the debates around “anachronism” that have shaped recent critical debates in queer Shakespeare studies and the histories of early modern sexuality.

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Christopher HICKLIN

### **Emerson and Non-Shakespearean Early Modern Drama**

Emerson's essays, lectures, and journal notes about Shakespeare are important and well-acknowledged documents in the history of Shakespeare reception in America. In this paper I want to widen focus to include Emerson's writings on other early modern dramatists, specifically “Beaumont and Fletcher” (like most critics until recently, he always spoke of them as a single entity) and Jonson. While Emerson never wrote an entire essay or lecture on Beaumont and Fletcher, and just half an

early lecture on Jonson, he found use for them in the development of his philosophy and criticism. Two of the *Essays: First Series*, for instance, begin with references to Beaumont and Fletcher works, including “Self-Reliance,” probably the most widely-read essay in American literature. This paper will trace Emerson’s use of these and other early modern dramatists individually and in relation to his writings on Shakespeare. Evaluating this history will require a look at what Emerson did and did not take from Coleridge and other critics, as well as his near-miss at being the first person to publicly identify John Fletcher as the co-author of *Henry VIII*. This paper has two overlapping goals: to spotlight an overlooked aspect of Emerson’s literary criticism, and to fill in an important gap in the reception history of “Beaumont and Fletcher.”

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Jeffrey KAHAN (University of La Verne)

### **William-Henry Ireland’s Jonson Forgeries**

William-Henry Ireland’s footnote in history is secure: He is the boy who forged Shakespeare. But Ireland also admired Jonson’s poetry and on several occasions either imitated or forged or made reference to it. These forgeries, however, are not to be read separately from the forger’s infamous Shakspeare Papers. Rather, these papers clarify Ireland’s assessment of Shakespeare *and* of Jonson. If we consider Ireland’s forgeries to be his response to critical opinion, it seems clear that his poem addressed the substance, if not the letter, of Samuel Johnson’s famous “Preface to the Plays of Shakespeare,” in which the editor suggested that Shakespeare’s inevitable rise had been partially impeded by slander. Unable to rise on his own merits, a friend, rival, and in the end, slanderous enemy, had resorted to defaming Shakespeare. Although Jonson is not mentioned by name, given his notorious pronouncements on Shakespeare’s lack of learning and polish, it’s clear who we’re talking about. This paper will argue that Ireland defends Jonson from Johnson’s charges. As Ireland’s forged Jonsons attest, the poet and playwright denies having ever said anything negative about his friend and rival.

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Stephen ORGEL (Stanford University)

### **Imagining Jonson**

From very early in the construction of their reputations—indeed, even during both their lifetimes—Jonson was seen as a foil to Shakespeare; but in the reinvention of Jonson in the eighteenth century, he emerged in significant ways from Shakespeare’s shadow, both as a playwright and, even more strikingly, as a poet.