

Resurrecting Shakespeare (and His Sisters)

Workshop Leader: Dr. Emma Whipday

This hands-on workshop explored how archival research and contemporary creative practice can “resurrect” vanished or overlooked aspects of Shakespeare’s theatrical world, from neglected performance contexts to the work and experiences of women. Approaching conduct literature, masques, broadsides, wills, diaries, and court records through performance practice and creative play, participants collaborated in creating a new form of “verbatim theater” that resurrected Shakespeare’s world (and that of his sisters).

Extracts from participants’ position papers, and suggested workshop exercises, are included below, in lieu of abstracts.

Jennifer Low (NYU), ‘Richard Braithwait, the Actor’s Gait, and Female Disguise on the Early Modern Stage’

Braithwait's commentaries on gait makes it clear that there was more than one way for each sex to walk. His words may even suggest that one's style of walking derived more from one's social status than from one's biological sex. However, it is evident that one's physical demeanor did not emerge naturally but was taught, studied, and learned. Demeanor was, moreover, situation-specific to some degree. Given Braithwait's ability to note and define different ways of walking, it seems likely that actors would have been aware of locomotion as a means of characterization, and the frequent changes of a female character's sex through disguise would have offered many opportunities for comedic and self-conscious errors, exaggerations, and experiments. For these reasons, I would cite the gait of characters as a probable consideration in the actor's arsenal of character-creation tools, and suggest that the boys and men playing women in the public theaters in early modern London were frequent manipulators of this mode of characterization.

Exercise: Throughout the run of the Rylance *Twelfth Night*, the actors dressed onstage and made up for performance under full light, presumably in order to demonstrate self-consciousness about their all-male production and its relation to original practice. The artifice inherent in having men play women was very much on display, and spectators were never allowed to forget the strangeness of the convention. I would like this practice continued, with the emphasis further enhanced by having an actor (perhaps the one playing Malvolio) read excerpts from Braithwait's conduct-books aloud as the other actors made up for their parts and warmed up for performance with gestures, murmurs of lines and, yes, striding about the stage. This exercise would be a valuable addition whether the cast included male actors exclusively or actors of both sexes--but it would signify differently depending on which choice was made.

Ariane Balizet (Texas Christian University), ‘Rachel Fane’s *May Masque at Apethorpe*’

For scholars invested in recovering and engaging with the earliest history of Shakespeare and girlhood, perhaps no archive is more tantalizing than the collection of recipes, letters, poems, and plays attributed to the teenaged Lady Rachel Fane (1613-1680; later Countess of Bath and Countess of Middlesex) currently housed at the Kent Archives Office. In our attempts at

resurrecting “Shakespeare’s Sisters,” many of us look to records of juvenilia preserved by noble women for a glimpse of Shakespeare’s impact on the cultural production of early modern girls. Fane’s *May Masque*, with its echoes of Shakespeare’s *Winter’s Tale*, *The Tempest*, and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, emblemizes this tradition by offering a seventeenth-century girl’s approach to the expressions of heteronormative love, heterosexual desire, and gendered experiences of family life that are also to be found in Shakespeare’s depictions of sylvan and pastoral heterotopic spaces. While already a dramatic work, the *May Masque* contains within it several lacunae that would reward critical attention via performance. Thinking through Fane’s masque as a girl-authored text has yielded much in the way of Shakespeare’s influence on girls’ writing; consideration of the possibilities for performing the masque, furthermore, may lead us to a more complex view of Fane’s view of Shakespeare, her family, and her own literary identity.

Fane’s 1627 *May Masque*, performed at her family home of Apethorpe Hall in Northamptonshire, begins with a list of the players: a group of children in the home, ranging from four to 15 years. Drawing from her siblings, relatives, friends, and servants, Fane casts her pastoral scene with the young people at her disposal; notably, she does not list herself as a performer, nor does she indicate which child performed each part (although scholars have speculated, for example, that her four-year-old sister Frances, played one of two silent nymphs attending Venus [O’Connor 100]). By conscripting both children and adults to join in the performance, Fane accomplishes the theatrical feat of reorganizing domestic hierarchy according to her own literary imagination.

Exercise: Staging gift-giving scene from Fane’s *Masque*.

Anya Bertolet (Auburn University), ‘Vanishing Ink: A Game’

My text is a broadside “[Some f]yne gloves devised for Newyeres gyftes to teche yonge peop[le to] knowe good from evyll wherby they maye learne the .x. commaundementes at theyr fungers ends. x.....” (1560-70?). My creative response is a game developed on some visual and cultural assumptions presented in the ballad; the game invites the players to consider the implications of these assumptions for early modern theater.

“Some Fine Gloves” offers gloves as “cheating sheets”—a handy reminder of *memento mori* and memory aid for “young people” to keep track of their vices and virtues. While text of the ballad is fairly conventional, the graphic device appearing above the text combines the symbolic imagery (tree, needle and thread, rain, *etc.*) and the verbal explication, and makes its central image, the gloves, a surface for inscription. The gloves are advertised as a convenient New Year’s gift suitable for any one (a clever selling point), so the audience is encouraged to purchase multiple copies. The broadside, of course, would have been a more affordable gift than an actual pair of gloves, even a modest one. The inscriptions around the gloves and on their very surface alternate between black letter and secretary hand, suggesting a mixed methodology where printed type is supplemented by handwriting. Notably, the handwritten portions fill the fingers of the gloves and mark the inserts that distinguish between left and right in moral turns, thus again combining the material, utilitarian meaning and moral significance. While there are no extant gloves from the period bear such elaborate inscriptions, what if some of the early moderns did write on their clothes? Wouldn’t it be convenient for an actor to commit some of the tricky lines to his sleeves, or a pair of plain linen gloves?

Exercise: The Vanishing Ink game is based on the “Fine Gloves” broadside and aims to engage the players with the very nature of the early modern theater’s: putting material culture in service of language. While Frances Teague talks about “speaking properties” in a metaphorical sense (*Shakespeare’s Speaking Properties*, 1991), this game is an answer to the question: what if the theater companies did inscribe their stage props? How would they make the decisions of what, where, to what purpose, and how to inscribe, and how to put this props in action during performance to serve the objects now dual function? After studying the conditions of the Shakespearean theater, the students are asked to consider the challenge of memorizing new plays at an astonishing frequency. Having shared some mnemonic devices popular in that period, the class is invited to create a pair of gloves as an aid that could be used, as discreetly as possible, during performance of a new play.

Donna Woodford-Gormley (New Mexico Highlands University), ‘The Reading of (the) Will: Acting Shakespeare’s Last Will and Testament’

What better place to start resurrecting Shakespeare than at his death, or, more precisely, with the document that bridges his life and death. It was the last text he “authored,” a text he probably wrote when he thought his death was near, and it would have been one of the first texts from which his surviving friends and families could hear his desires, literally his will, after his death. The document is, of course, not without controversy. There has been much speculation about the significance of the “second best bed” left to his wife, with some arguing that this suggests a less than loving and happy marriage, while others point to the fact that Anne would have been provided for by the law and that the giving of this large piece of furniture essentially guaranteed her housing for life with the daughter and son-in-law who inherited the house. The stricken lines, such as the mention of Shakespeare’s son-in-law, are also intriguing. Exploring this document through “verbatim theater” might allow students and Shakespeare aficionados to better understand aspects of Shakespeare’s life and personal relationships as well as to see the inherent theatricality in even non-theatrical Shakespearean texts.

Exercise: I propose a classroom activity in which students act out a reading of Shakespeare’s Last Will and Testament, allowing for commentary by the persons mentioned. I am providing some possible lines, but students who have done some research and have a different opinion about these “characters,” might well improvise or write their own lines. The lines in italics are taken directly from Shakespeare’s Will. In some cases I have wanted to have words that were stricken out of Shakespeare’s will still read, to highlight the changes he made. In these cases I have underlined the words that were crossed out so that they remain visibly different, but can still be read.

Jim Casey (Arcadia University), ‘Only Too Much Love: A Play of Emilia Lanyer’

For this project, I would like to use archival documents to develop a play with Lanyer in the central role. This piece would dismiss the supposed affiliation with Shakespeare and instead explore Lanyer’s character in her own right, with particular attention given to Lanyer’s poetry, ambition, and religious beliefs. I think I want to have the play begin in late September or early October of 1597, when Lanyer meets with the astrologer Simon Forman to ask about her own

fortune and the future prospects of her husband. She will quarrel with Forman, first over his inaccurate predictions and then over his unwanted sexual advances. I don't know how to explain her return visit to Forman on January 7, 1600, but I think I will include that encounter (I think I will have Lanyer arrive prepared to give in to Forman's distasteful demands, either hoping for another child—Lanyer seems to have reported several miscarriages to Forman and probably would have been devastated by the relatively recent death of her daughter Odillya at only ten months old—or to free herself and her husband from dire financial circumstances; either way, she will flee in the end instead). I know I want to include scenes from 1611, the year of Simon Forman's death and the publication of Lanyer's *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*. Forman reportedly predicts the day of his own death and also happens to see *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *Richard II* in 1610 and 1611.

Exercise: Staging the first scene from the play. Because so much of what we know of Lanyer comes from Simon Forman, I have used his *Diary* and *Medical Casebooks* as primary sources (for the latter, please see Lauren Kassell's *The Casebooks Project* (a digital edition of Forman's and Richard Napier's medical records, from 1596–1634: <http://www.magicandmedicine.hps.cam.ac.uk/>). I have decided to spell Lanyer's first name "Emilia" for the play and have added a supernatural element to Forman's predictions.

Alicia Tomasian (William Rainey Harper College), 'Penelope Rich, Star of the Star Chamber'

Penelope found herself defending her marriage in the Court of Star Chamber. The plaintiff, Mountjoy's cousin, claimed she pressed the dying man to change his will, that Mountjoy never considered Penelope his wife. The case involves hundreds of pages of testimony and documents, but her statements take up only two. A close look reveals it is all she needed. Her eloquent, forceful defense of her title as the Countess of Devonshire is, in its own way, as persuasive and dramatic as *The White Devil* or any of the great courtroom scenes in Renaissance drama.

In fact, the court record of her second appearance at Star chamber, May 19th, 1607, captures the battle for that title in its heading. Penelope refused to answer to Lady Rich, which would have been her title had she not been legitimately married to Mountjoy. Her first appearance, May 5th, bears the perplexing title "The severall answers of the right honorable the Ladie Penelope, Countes of Devonshire, one of the defendants, by the name of Penelope, Lady Riche." Upon her return, she seems to have staunchly protested any use of the name Rich, but given that she was in court to fight for her right to inherit and be known as the Countess of Devonshire, the court decided to refer to her only as "the Right Honorable the Ladye Penelope."

Exercise: Looking at her two appearances before the Star Chamber, I want to recreate her fight as a dramatic scene in itself. How might this super-sexy court beauty, a one-time favorite lady of Anna of Denmark, a long-renowned love object, have presented herself to fight for her rights as a widow and mother? Looking at the two National Archive documents recording her statements, I would like to put together a scene in which we hear Penelope comment on the Court's attempt to address her as Lady Rich together with some performance of some of her testimony.