

# Resurrecting Shakespeare (and His Sisters)

## Workshop Leader: Dr. Emma Whipday

In putting together this workshop, I was inspired by a previous workshop I had been part of (at the SAA 2014) on ‘practice as research’, run by Andy Kesson and Stephen Purcell; and in running the workshop, I drew on the example of the excellent ‘Shakespeare Improv’ workshop, run by Stephen Purcell and Tom Bishop workshop the previous day, in combining a warm-up (involving the auditors) and lots of practical activities with broader methodological discussions, and ending with a q and a. I wanted to give workshop participants the opportunity to explore intersections between archival research and creative practice, in their research and their teaching, in a playful and hands-on way.

My initial workshop description was as follows:

*This hands-on workshop will explore how archival research and contemporary creative practice can ‘resurrect’ lost or overlooked elements of Shakespeare’s theatrical world, from ‘lost’ plays and neglected performance contexts to the works and experiences of women. Participants will collaborate to produce a new form of ‘verbatim theatre’ which resurrects Shakespeare’s world (and that of his sisters).*

In response to the exciting materials provided by the participants, I tweaked the final description in the conference programme, as follows:

*This hands-on workshop will explore 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, ad court records through performance practice and creative play, participants will collaborate in creating a new form of “verbatim theater” that resurrected Shakespeare’s world (and that of his sisters).*

In aiming to create a form of early modern ‘verbatim theatre’, I was building on a recent workshop I ran at the London Shakespeare Centre at King’s College London with Lucy Munro, in May 2017, which brought verbatim theatre practitioners together with theatre historians, social historians, and literary scholars, to explore whether it was possible to use creative practice as a way of approaching the Jacobean ‘lost’ play ‘Keep the Widow Waking’, from which extensive court records survive. In my SAA workshop, I wanted to explore how creative practice could be a fruitful way of approaching a wider range of materials, in a shared and participatory way.

I was very happy with the workshop, and it was a delight to get to work with such brave, creative, playful, and brilliant participants – many offered their own creative work, which I hadn’t dared to expect, and others shared exciting new material, and creative ways of approaching existing material. I really enjoyed the way the interests of the participants took the workshop in directions I hadn’t expected – for example, there was a greater emphasis on creative approaches to teaching than I had initially imagined, which I found really productive.

I discovered that six was the largest possible number for a workshop in this format, where each participant offers an exercise. In a future workshop, I might reduce the number of exercises, in order to enable more time for general discussion.

I have included all group correspondence below, in case it is helpful to future workshop leaders in planning their own correspondence; as the group size was small, and each participant's offering was different, there was also a considerable amount of individual emailing, concerning logistics/casting/developing scenes and exercises, which I haven't replicated here. I found that some of the deadlines I set were a little early for group members, and would take this into consideration in any future workshop organisation. As you'll see below, I offered a wide range of possible responses, in the hope that this would make for a diverse and open workshop, and I was delighted by the range of work that the participants offered, and by the fact that each participant suggested a game, exercise, or scene that could be staged, enabling us to create our own form of 'early modern verbatim theatre', 'resurrecting' real and imagined words from Shakespeare's theatrical world, and that of his sisters – just as I had hoped!

**10/2/17**

Dear workshop participants,

I'm delighted to welcome you to the 'Resurrecting Shakespeare (and his Sisters)' workshop at the 2018 SAA. Thank you for your interest – I look forward to meeting you all in person.

As you know, the SAA requires participants to produce a short piece of work in preparation for the workshop, and I need to confirm this work has been done by 1 February 2018. I'd therefore like to propose the following schedule:

**Friday 15 December 2017:** Each participant to circulate a position paper of not more than 2000 words, together with a short biographical introduction.

This position paper can do one (or more) of the following:

- a) Propose an early modern text to be staged in the workshop, which illuminates a vanished or overlooked aspect of Shakespeare's theatrical world. This can be an extract from: a broadside ballad, a witchcraft trial account, a news pamphlet, a church court record, a scene from a 'closet drama', a letter, a will, or something else entirely. Please attach this text as an appendix to your position paper.
- b) Suggest an archival record or set of records, or a methodological approach, that enriches our ability to 'resurrect' Shakespeare's theatrical world (or that of his sisters).
- c) Offer a creative response (a scene, an exercise, a story, a game, something else) to an archival gap – a lost play or performance context, or another kind of absence.
- d) Explore the role of theatrical practice as research and/or creative practice in early modern studies.

If you would like to circulate your position paper in a different format – a video, an audio file, a diagram, or a prezzi presentation – you are very welcome to do so. Videos or audio files should not be longer than ten minutes. I will circulate all position papers among the workshop participants once the deadline has passed.

**Friday 19 January 2018:** Circulate brief responses to each other's contributions (contributors will be paired once contributions have been circulated).

The workshop itself will involve staging proposed extracts to create a form of 'early modern verbatim theatre', which will then form the basis of our workshop discussions. Due to time constraints, it may not be possible to stage all proposed texts in the workshop, but reading each other's suggestions will enable us to refer to shared examples when discussing the possibilities of this approach.

I am attaching the list of participants so that we can all be in touch with one another in the lead up to the SAA. Please do get in touch if you have any questions about this or any other aspect of the workshop. I look forward very much to working with you all.

Very best wishes,

Emma

**12/21/17**

Dear workshop participants,

Thank you very much to those of you who have already submitted your fascinating position papers. You can see each other's position papers, extracts, and bios in a shared dropbox folder. Please do let me know if you have any difficulties accessing it.

Those who haven't yet sent your position papers, I look forward to receiving them; please could you let me know when I can expect them, and roughly what your topics will be, so that I can pair respondents. And of course, if for any reason you're no longer able to participate in the workshop, please do let me know.

I have paired the papers that I have received so far, as follows:

Balizet - Low

Bertolet - Woodford-Gormley

The deadline for (brief) responses is 19 January; please send your partner your response to their position paper (and any associated extracts), copying me in. For those who haven't yet seen the SAA schedule, our workshop slot has been confirmed as 4pm–6pm on Saturday 31 March. I hope that works for you all.

I look forward very much to meeting you all in person in March!

**3/13/18**

Dear All,

Thank you for sending your wonderful work and helpful responses; I look forward very much to seeing you all for our workshop in a couple of weeks!

As we have two hours, and we're a relatively small group, we should have time to feature each of the extracts/activities/creative pieces that you've prepared.

I will email each of you individually to discuss how this might work for your particular piece, but I'm happy to be guided by you. If you could each introduce your piece, that would be wonderful; ideally, we will spend 2-3 mins on the introduction to each piece, 5-7 mins on the piece itself, and around 5 mins on workshopping/discussion of that piece.

I suggest a structure as follows:

Introduction: I outline the structure, interests, and aims of the workshop, and lead all attendees in a brief warm-up (to encourage everyone to participate!): 10 mins

1) Jennifer A. Low, 'Richard Brathwait, the Actor's Gait, and Female Disguise on the Early Modern Stage'

Readings from Brathwait, and a movement workshop with all attendees, followed by discussion: 15 mins

2) Ariane M. Balizet, 'Lady Rachel Fane's *May Masque at Apethorpe*'

Performance of gift-giving scene from the masque, followed by discussion: 15 mins.

3) Anna (Anya) Riehl Bertolet, 'Vanishing Ink Game'

Performance of classroom activity, using gloves modelled on the ballad, followed by discussion: 15 mins

4) Donna Woodford-Gormley, 'The Reading of (the) Will: Acting Shakespeare's Last Will and Testament'

Performance of an extract from the will, along with a creative classroom activity, and discussion: 15 mins

5) Jim Casey, 'Only Too Much Love'

Performance of Casey's Simon Forman scene, followed by discussion: 15 mins

6) Alicia Tomasian, 'Penelope Rich, Star of the Star Chamber'

Performance of extract from Rich's testimony, followed by discussion: 15 mins

Final discussion: What is the role of creative practice in research and teaching? 20 mins

I encourage you all to read each other's work, so that we can draw on it in our final discussion. I'll be in touch with you all individually over the next couple of days; do let me know if you have any queries or requests in the meantime.

I'll also be in touch to suggest allocated 'parts' for the performance elements of the workshop; if anyone would prefer not to perform, please do let me know. See you soon!

**3/21/18**

Dear All,

Please find attached my current draft of a handout for all participants and auditors, incorporating each of your scenes/materials. Please do check it for any errors I may have accidentally introduced in your section - I put it together on the plane to New Orleans (I'm there now for the RSA), so I'm worried that my plane-brain may have made some mistakes!

Do also let me know if any of you would prefer your materials to be kept for the eyes of the other workshop participants only, and not to be made available for auditors – I generally find auditors get more out of a workshop if they can follow along with a text, but I am of course happy to be guided by you in this. I've also added the handout to our shared folder.

Jennifer, thanks so much for your revised exercise, this looks wonderful. I've pasted your sections from Brathwait into the handout.

Ariane, I've had a go at transcribing the gift-giving scene, in modern(ish) spelling - do let me know if this looks ok, and if there's anything I've got wrong!

Anya, I've added two scenes – the *Hamlet* opening, as discussed, and the opening to *Romeo and Juliet*, as I thought it might work similarly, in terms of your exercise; I thought you and I could demonstrate with *Hamlet* first, and then participants could choose which scene they want to try. Let me know what you think - I'm happy to change this!

Donna and Jim, I've simply pasted your scenes in, as discussed.

Alicia, do let me know if you're happy with the Penelope Rich speech as is, or if you'd like to adapt it further.

I'll be in touch to confirm 'parts' for each section of the workshop soon, based on each of your suggestions/requests.

Do let me know if you have any suggestions/alterations/questions! Also, I was thinking that perhaps we could all go for a celebratory drink following the workshop, if people are available?

Very best wishes,

Emma