

Paper Abstracts
“The Church”
SAA 2013

Katharine Cleland

““Are you fast married?”: The Lack of a Public Church Solemnization and Turning Turk in *Othello*”

Literary scholars have long noted the instability of Othello’s religious identity, particularly in relation to his sexuality. This criticism, however, has not fully considered how the issue of clandestine marriage plays a role in questions of conversion and religious identity in the play. Clandestine marriages became increasingly controversial in early modern England after the standardization of the marriage ritual. Since the public church solemnization became a vehicle through which couples confirmed their commitment to the nation’s new rituals and ideals, participating in a clandestine marriage (or elopement) called a couple’s intentions and even their very identities into question. Indeed, the controversial social practice destabilized the couple’s religious affiliations since it became a hallmark of Catholic recusants. The fact that the ecclesiastical courts could punish the participants of a clandestine marriage, but not invalidate an irregular union, further contributed to the confusion and anxiety concerning what made a legitimate and proper match. I will argue that the act of elopement undermines Othello’s conversion to Christianity, setting the play’s domestic tragedy into motion. To make this argument, I will first demonstrate the importance of public church ceremonies in establishing a uniform religious and national identity in early modern England, and the detrimental consequences that could occur when couples bypassed the legitimating effects of a public church solemnization. Unfortunately for Othello, the impossibility of obtaining approval for an interracial marriage prevents a public church ceremony, and its validating effects, from taking place.

John D. Cox

“Shakespeare’s Prayers”

Prayer is a distinctive speech act, which occurs innumerable times in Shakespeare’s plays and poems. Many examples are “emptied out,” to use Stephen Greenblatt’s phrase—vestigial prayers from the pre-Reformation mass, for example, in form of oaths and swearing. But many of Shakespeare’s prayers have content. My paper examines two examples from nearly contemporary plays: Claudius’s attempt to pray in *Hamlet* and several prayers spoken by Henry V. My argument is that prayer in these plays reveals a subtle and sophisticated understanding on Shakespeare’s part of contemporary thinking about prayer and its function in everyday life.

Mark Dahlquist

“Scandal, Space, and Memory in *A Lover’s Complaint* and Samuel Daniel’s *Complaint of Rosamond*”

“We are back in the sour grey rain of ruins,” writes Roger Kuin, turning to discuss *A Lover’s Complaint*. And yet the ruins described in this strange poem are figured only by implication. By considering the 1609 *Complaint* in connection with Samuel Daniel’s

Complaint of Rosamond, this paper examines the concern with architectural space and the theology of scandal that are explicit in Daniel’s poem (which mourns the destruction of Godstow Abbey and Rosamund Clifford’s tomb therein), but also observable in the complaint attributed to Shakespeare, in which the presentation of gifts at the altar of love’s devotion results not in the literal death of the poem’s forlorn female speaker, but in a strange ghostly status, in-between life and death. I will argue in this paper that the ambiguous status of this poem’s speaker bears relation to the late sixteenth century revival of the theological discourse of scandal, which also blurred the lines between the living and the dead, as it cast a cold eye upon church monuments and threatened to call into question the royal supremacy in matters of religion.

Setting aside the question of the authorship of *A Lover’s Complaint*, Catherine Bates proposes that it is more interesting to consider what about this poem “nags, troubles, and complains”—what makes it strange enough to inspire repeated efforts to distance it from the Shakespearean canon. In this essay, I’ll consider the possibility that the *Complaint* of the 1609 *Sonnets* follows the example of Daniel’s earlier complaint, not only by being published together with a collection of sonnets, but also by taking up the newly-emergent theological question of scandal that Daniel considered explicitly in *Rosamond*. I’ll suggest furthermore that the strangely discomfiting sense that this poem inspires derives in part from its employment of the logic of scandal. Whereas Daniel’s poem presents a victim led astray by the bad arguments of a caretaker, *A Lover’s Complaint* presents a character who, having been seduced, loses her humanity and operates as a kind of dangerous image herself. Thus the poem disturbs because it applies to human love relations a logic more typically present in discussions of the scandalous implications of the images, tombs, and abbeys that decorate Daniel’s poem, but which are invoked more subtly in *A Lover’s Complaint*.

Doug Eskew

“Being in More Places than One’: Simultaneity, the Church and the Shakespearean Stage”

The devotional writer, Christopher Sutton, is known to Shakespeareans primarily for his 1600 treatise, *Disce Mori: Learn to Die*. Among his contemporaries, however, Sutton was also known for his popular *Godly Meditations*, first published in 1601. An enlarged edition of *Godly Meditations* appeared in 1613--the primary difference between this edition and the 1601 text was the addition of some "Godly Meditations Concerning the Divine Presence" in which Sutton's concern for the "needless" character of the doctrine of transubstantiation gathers theatrical figuration. For Sutton, the moment the historical Church began seriously to discuss the nature of divine presence, it fell into a tragedy. If disputes about transubstantiation are begun by a tragic hero, he claims, they are continued by a comic fool. At one time there was "no division of the East against the West Church, or of the West against the East. [They] all agreed about the truth of this Holy Mystery" of the Eucharist. But after the question was raised and the Church instituted the question in the academy, "with what a spirit of giddiness were they whirled to and fro, as he of whom the comical poet maketh mention, which way to betake him he knew not this it is to run into needless mazes."

In this paper, I will examine how Sutton aligns his entropic worldview with a linear view of theatrical genres. Sutton believes the Church has slid into degeneracy and that it continues to slide, continues to run into needless mazes. There is no sense of a tragic return that might re-elevate the scene, no return to that founding moment, no sense that comedy's solution of sex and marriage is the necessary condition for the death-solution of tragedy. I will suggest that Sutton's view that the theater is unable to perform simultaneously multiple generic functions is especially appropriate for his hostility toward transubstantiation--which for the Church functioned as the philosophical basis of simultaneity itself.

Loreen L. Giese

“A Measure of the Church’s Material and Legal Roles in Mariana’s Marriage in *Measure*”

Early modern English ecclesiastical law—the law that regulated marriage—did not require a couple to marry in a church to form a legally binding union. Instead, a valid marriage included a variety of agreements, many of these unfamiliar to modern readers: a verbal contract without a clergyman or solemnization (which according to canon law was legally binding), a verbal contract with solemnization, a verbal contract witnessed by a clergyman away from church, a ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer conducted by a clergyman in church, and a ceremony from the Book of Common Prayer conducted by a clergyman away from church. According to English ecclesiastical law, although an individual did not need the church—its buildings or clergymen—to form a valid marriage, she or he required the church—both its laws and buildings—when seeking a ruling to enforce or dissolve a marriage or charging a spouse with cruelty—adultery, physical violence, neglect, or desertion—because church courts adjudicated these cases. This paper explores the absence of the material church and canon law with respect to the solemnization of the marriage of Mariana and Angelo and to the charges she brings against him in Act V of *Measure* in light of contemporary ecclesiastical prescription and practice.

David George

“Religious Ceremonies in and Abuse of Sacred Spaces”

This essay covers Shakespeare’s church (Holy Trinity, Stratford) and his school chapel (the Gild Chapel), and his probable faith; illustrations of the plans of English churches in Shakespeare’s day and of Holy Trinity; deaneries, chapels, cathedrals, and abbeys. Shakespeare frequently uses chapels in his plays, which can be satellites of a parish church, royal chapels, or monastery chapels. Cranmer’s baptism of Elizabeth in 5.5 of *Henry VIII* evidently takes place in the royal chapel at Hampton Court, though almost no editors recognize the location.

Many weddings in the Italian-setting plays take place in monastery chapels, and hence are irregular (without the witnesses required by the Council of Trent), but in *Merry Wives* a deanery is the chosen sacred space. The baptism in *Henry VIII* is highly irregular.

The conflict between the “old church” (ceremonial Anglican based on Roman practices) and the “new church” (reformed Anglican) led to a series of disturbances, defiances, and mockeries in English churches between 1603 and 1626. Cases from the Consistory Courts are mentioned; the most scandalous being given in full. The 1626 case

from Holcombe, Lancashire, of an impersonation of the minister and mockery of his sermon is the most egregious.

Abram Steen

“Preparation for Death and Reform in *Hamlet*”

My paper examines Shakespeare’s relationship to the church in early modern England by looking at how preparations for death are represented in *Hamlet*. The main liturgical form used before death in this period was the Book of Common Prayer’s “Order for the Visitation of the Sick,” a portable service of prayer and sacramental aid. Puritans objected to the order because it resembled the Catholic ministry of last rites, but the more interesting development that I will discuss in my paper was the effort by Puritan writers to fashion and promote an alternative preparation for death. Two texts in particular – Thomas Becon’s *The Sick mannes Salve* (1560) and William Perkins’ *A salve for a sicke man* (1595) – were important in presenting a more individualized and spontaneous process of prayer and dialogue before death. The treatment of death and dying in *Hamlet* suggests Shakespeare’s awareness of both the older liturgical tradition that the Church of England maintained and the efforts to reform it. My analysis begins with consideration of the many instances of *mors improvisa* or sudden death in the play and the spiritual disturbances they create. In presenting sudden death as a persistent threat and depriving characters of traditional preparations, Shakespeare speaks to a very real anxiety in post-Reformation England about the church’s ability and willingness to provide spiritual aid to its members before death. But I will argue that there is also a surprising shift and development late in the play with Hamlet’s death. Liturgical preparations are again absent in this instance, but they are replaced by a process of dialogue and reflection similar in many ways to that recommended in Becon, Perkins, and other Puritan writing on death.

Brian Walsh

“London Parish Comedy: Middleton’s *The Puritan Widow*”

In this paper I will explore the intersection of city comedy with the representation of religious difference in Thomas Middleton’s 1606 play *The Puritan Widow*, performed by the Children of Paul’s. At the center of Middleton’s play is the gulling of a Puritan family by a clever and shameless scholar, whose bravura plan involves convincing the family that he possesses supernatural knowledge, including knowledge of the suffering of their patriarch in Purgatory. I will suggest that while the play’s conventional—and very funny—comedy of intrigue participates in the commonplace undermining of “godly” Londoner’s spiritual authority, it also leaves room for a measure of sympathy for them that most other plays with Puritan characters withhold. Above all else, the Puritan family is shown to be denizens of the city, enmeshed in local day-to-day life, and thus vulnerable to the same vicissitudes of urban existence as its audience. As a conclusion to my reading of the play’s representation of religious identity, I will address at the end the controversy caused by *The Puritan Widow*’s apparent insult to two London parishes and suggest some ways that this controversy allows us to better understand also the play’s threat to church authority.

Benjamin Woodring

“Asylum, Liberty, and Identity in *Comedy of Errors*”

My paper examines the role of the sanctuary in *Comedy of Errors* as a space of refuge, arbitration, and storytelling. I trace the play’s sources through Plautus’ *Menaechmi* and *Amphitruo* as well as the Apollonius of Tyre story, showing how Shakespeare blends the zany plot of the double identities with a surprising resolution in a sacred space. I argue that the play pivots on the extra-legal intervention of the Abbess at the end, inviting imaginative revisions to governance and social order. I place the asylum scene in conversation with the other closed spaces of the play—the locked domestic dining room and the dark basement for the ostensibly insane—and argue that the church’s refuge zone brings together and works through important themes of “liberty” and “liberties” that are woven discursively throughout. Finally, I argue that the sanctuary protection is profound precisely because it is ultimately contentless, a structural stay against hasty persecutions and prosecutions. Even though the Abbess’ moralistic assessment of the characters is dubious and wrongheaded, the immunity offered by the protective zone still allows for the correct resolution in the end, where the proper recognitions can occur and the full story can be untangled and elaborated. In other words, the sanctuary space, by virtue of its utility and not its message, offers justice despite itself. Shakespeare seems fascinated by this operationally neutral space, as it is a useful tool for avoiding tragedy and securing comedy.