

Abstracts

1. Abdulhamit Arvas, Michigan State University
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Abducted Boys as Objects of Desire

My paper will trace the figure of the abducted boy as it appears in such genres as romance narratives, plays, and poetry in the early modern period. I ask, to what extent does the aestheticized image of the abducted boy (i.e., Ganymede) intersect with the historical phenomenon of vulnerable youths who were captured, converted, and exchanged within the global traffic in bodies. In order to better elucidate the iconic figure of the boy, I will focus on the global Mediterranean traffic, in particular Ottoman practices of abducting boys from European lands. Documenting the aesthetic, corporeal and erotic deployments of the boy in *Hero and Leander* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, my paper will ultimately explore the ways in which the circulation of these boys casts them as subjects of servitude, as well as objects of desire in the cultural and homoerotic imaginary that informs cross-cultural encounters. Does the sexualized image of the boy, both a captive and eroticized beloved, cross boundaries between nations, embodying the coercive and violent history of abductions, conversions, and enslavements in the early modern period?

2. Paul Budra, Simon Fraser University
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Sex, Lies, and Hypocrisy

The majority of the sexually anomalous characters on the early modern stage are members of the upper classes. The necrophiliacs, bondage enthusiasts, sodomites, incest practitioners, and adulterers tend to royal, noble, or members of the citizenry. The obvious reason for this demographic is the majority of *characters* on the early modern stage are from the higher and middling classes, but there may be something else going on. These are the very people who look down upon the socially marginal—the prostitutes and beggars, the dispossessed and homeless—sometimes with a contempt that veers into somatic revulsion (think of *Coriolanus*). The reaction of the marginalized and powerless to this abhorrence is, for the most part, suffering with the occasional explosion of mob violence. But there also emerges, in some of the plays, what William Miller has called an “upward contempt” that is “intimately connected with the revelation of hypocrisy in its object.” I would like to discuss this possibility by reversing the question of this seminar and asking how the sexualized representations of upper classes plays to the contempt of the underprivileged and marginalized.

3. Mario DiGangi, Lehman College, CUNY Graduate Center
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Mirthful Misprision and Political Critique in *Edward IV*

In his description of the aims of this seminar, Ari Friedlander asks, “What effect does thinking about sexuality through figures ‘outside’ the social system have on the binaries we commonly use to structure historicist work, such as order/disorder, social/sexual, and licit/illicit?” In this paper, I aim to complicate the binary between licit/illicit speech by addressing the figure of Hobs the Tanner in Heywood’s *Edward IV*. Hobs is not exactly a “social outsider,” in that he is a working tanner with a place in his local rural community. Still, Hobs’ mirthful, and erotically charged, misprision in his encounters with the court allows him to voice, from below, doubt about the legitimacy of the sitting monarch and resentment about the suffering of the poor. Hobs’ misunderstanding of hunting terms such as “hart,” “deer,” and “embossed” allows him to engage in inappropriate erotic banter with the Queen and the Duchess of York. Through this erotic banter, Hobs expresses concern about the “deariness” of grain and cowhides, and suggests that the Queen might be a “quean.” Hobs’ complaints resonate with the economic motives of famous rebels such as Tyler, Cade, and Straw, who demanded redress for “mending measures, or the price of corn, / Or for some some common in the weald of Kent” (2.30-31). They also resonate with Elizabethan complaints, such as the 1596 “Ballad on the Want of Corn” and the seditious words spoken by laborers and recorded in the Assize Records: in 1592, a tailor was whipped for declaring that “there would never be a myrrie worlde before there were a newe alteracon; And by gods wounds, the Queene ys a whore.” Through Hobs’ dangerous but “mirthful” (and hence unpunished) speech, we can address the political dimensions of sexuality from below.

4. Kyle DiRoberto, University of Arizona South
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Chastity and Liberty in Puritan and Popular Pastoral

The puritan writers Fraunce, Spenser, and Sidney represent restraint in pastoral literature in order to construct a particularly puritan allegory of chastity as liberty. In opposition to this puritan agenda, Greene, Nashe and Marlowe—from their low status as popular writers—parody these pastorals and overturn this appropriation and representation. From the trials of Philomela, which reflect Greene’s engagement with Fraunce’s literary and legalistic reform in *The Countesse of Pembroke’s Iychurch* and *The Lawyer’s Logic*, to Marlowe’s inordinately ambitious former shepherd Tamburlaine as contestation of *The Shepheardes Calender*, this paper explores these popular writers’ representation of incontinent desire as not only driving puritan representations of chastity but also simultaneously and significantly as the origin and exploration of evolving notions of essential liberty in classical and contemporary continental pastoral.

5. Joseph Navitsky, West Chester University
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Sexual Slander and Marginal Acts in *Measure for Measure*

Does any Shakespeare play focus more intently on the sex lives and vulgar speech of its characters than *Measure for Measure*? From bawds, prostitutes, and condemned prisoners to unmarried pregnant women and dead-beat dads, this most famously problematic of the problem plays presents a world in which even the personal lives and predilections of aristocrats come under close inspection. To be sure, sexual relationships in the play do not occur across class boundaries. Yet the irresistible temptations posed by curiosity, rumor, and defamation mean that all the characters, regardless of class affiliation, participate in a socio-sexual system that is built on talk about erotic desire as much as it is on the consummation of that desire. In this seminar paper, I examine how the words and backstories of Lucio, Mistress Overdone, and other marginalized figures color the play's much-discussed depiction of sex. Ultimately, I think that despite differences in status and fortune, both the privileged figures and the social outcasts in *Measure for Measure* share a common language about sex and exhibit strikingly comparable attitudes toward public discussions of private pleasure.

6. Nicholas Radel, Furman University
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Sodomy, Erotic Volubility, and Class: The Case of Massinger and Fletcher's *The Little French Lawyer*

An issue that has absorbed me for a long time are the strategies by which early modern playwrights represented embodied eroticism or even sex (especially male-male versions of it) through dramatic and rhetorical structures that attempt to dis-articulate the agency of those who practice it—in other words, the ways they attempt to situate unauthorized eroticisms and desires in a non-place of agency and desire. In particular, I am concerned with the ways these play create ideological structures that shape and limit thinking about sex between men so that such behavior is rendered not a location for the free play of desire but a tool for stabilizing hierarchies of gender and class by rendering the conception of agency around such behavior difficult if not impossible. For the 2016 SAA seminar on Sexuality from Below, I will look at Massinger and Fletcher's *The Little French Lawyer* (1619-1623). My essay will concentrate primarily on the rhetorical and dramatic strategies through which explicit articulations of male-male desire in the eponymous figure La-writ are rhetorically and dramatically positioned as low, unspeakable, and disallowed, even as male homosocial bonds (which were always potentially erotic or sexual) remain a primary condition for some men's securing their place in the hierarchies of class and the privileges of gender.

7. Kathryn Schwarz, Vanderbilt University
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Held in Common: The Promiscuous Seduction of Plague

My essay takes Mercutio's curse—"A plague o' both your houses!"—as the starting point for some thoughts about communion and contagion. The line's fame tends to obscure its commonness: Shakespeare uses versions of the curse at least 30 times, giving it voices illustrious (Lear, Falstaff) and obscure (the Third Fisher in *Pericles*), valences vitriolic ("A plague upon your epileptic visage!") and comic ("a plague o' these pickle-herring!"). It is this quality of the common—common as quotidian, common as shared—that I want to press. For *Romeo and Juliet*, references to plague illuminate an infectious morbidity that is indivisible from desire. This gestures toward the broader sense in which contagion, as irrefusable interrelation, mingles functional subjects with disposable persons, yokes flesh acts to speech acts, and locates sexuality not in a fixed relationship to social value but in a supple, capacious lexicon of ways in which all mortal beings might touch. In its commonness and its commonality, the cliché that equates desire with disease resists logics of exceptionalism and segregation. Can bodies devalued by mortality, whose self-loss bleeds beyond the bounds of self-government, transect or explode social taxonomies? Does the indiscriminate communion of contagion create renegade sexualities? And on what terms might we understand such sexualities as queer?

8. Christopher Shirley, Northwestern University
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Wasted Words and Lush Lust: Alcoholism and Sexuality in Early Modern Literature

Recently, studies of early modern sexuality have shifted from analysis of models of sexual *identities*—or queer contestation thereof—to consideration of particular erotic *acts*; as the 2013 collection *Sex before Sex* demonstrates, the latter encompasses a greater range of practices than we typically consider sexual. This paper builds on these developments to consider the intersection of excessive consumption of alcohol and illicit erotic acts, particularly in popular literature marked as unserious. This intersection, I will argue, provides new insight on the frontier between acts and identities through the figure of the drunkard, as the vernacular term "suck-spigot," a quasi-identitarian and subtly erotic appellation for that figure predicated on the act of imbibing, implies. The paper will briefly consider vernacular terms for the drunkard—the early modern equivalent of the alcoholic—such as that mentioned above before turning to an early seventeenth-century closet drama by Thomas Randolph entitled "The Drinking Academy," a brief comedy that imagines drinking, smoking, and sexual seduction on the curriculum of its titular London institution. In its representation of a paradoxical school of disorder, Randolph's play both stages the intercalation of erotic and vinous acts and blurs the distinction between sexuality from *above* and sexuality from *below*.

9. Christi Spain-Savage, Siena College
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Sexuality, Space, and Spectacle in Bridewell Prison Narratives

For our seminar I will investigate the gendered and classed sexualities of Bridewell Prison. Literary works, including Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore, Part II* (1606), Edward Ward's *The London Spy* (1703), and several ballads of the period, depict the public whippings of naked prostitutes in Bridewell and the voyeuristic entertainment such punishment became. Though male prisoners resided there and similarly received the penalty of whipping, the salaciousness of women's public lashings entered the cultural milieu and garnered currency. These brutal sentences, which played into the public's feelings of scorn, fear, fascination, and desire regarding female sexuality, also had a class dynamic since they targeted poor prostitutes, who could not afford more lenient measures, and were conducted and witnessed by notable public officials, who exploited the women's vulnerability. In *The London Spy*, for instance, Ward gives a detailed account of witnessing female Bridewell prisoners, noting that the punishments were "designed rather to feast the eyes of the spectators than to correct vice, or reform manners." These voyeuristic punishments had the effect of stoking rather than curbing the prurient fascination with the sex trade.

10. Stephen Spiess, Stanford University
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Othello's *Honest Whore*; or, Undoing Whoredom ca. 1604

I am currently working on a larger project that examines the various social and linguistic processes through which the "whore" was materialized in early modern England. In this piece, however, I want to consider an inverse trajectory: under what conditions, and through what discursive practices, might an individual "undo" their whoredom? Who qualifies for such a transition (conversion? disembodiment? resignification?), what is required of them, and how might their social status—as cultural insiders or outsiders, as aristocrats or commoners, as "honest" wives or veteran prostitutes—inform the possibilities for such an undoing?

As my objects of inquiry, I take two plays first staged in 1604: Shakespeare's *Othello* and Dekker/Middleton's *The Honest Whore*. Where these works envision different trajectories for their whored figures, both nonetheless reveal a crucially narrative aspect of early modern whoredom, one wherein dissident bodies are rendered intelligible—and (un)livable—according to a seemingly inflexible socio-sexual script. Yet when viewed contiguously, as I argue they must be, *Othello* and *The Honest Whore* not only undo each other's whore narratives, revealing their contingency and instability, but in so doing help illuminate the complex discursive *processes* through which embodied meanings—including those forged at the intersections of gender, class, and sexual status—were materialized and contested in early modern England.

11. Chantelle Thauvette, Siena College
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Cross-dressing and the Erotics of Class Identity in “The Female Captain”

Mainstream moral accounts of sexuality maintain that sexual desire for a partner cannot coexist with a desire for the money or class-advancement that partner could bring to the person who desires them. While class status sometimes seems like it should be stable set of circumstances that determine the boundaries of erotic desires in early modern England, in what ways does erotic desire overlap with desire for class identity? To answer this, I will look at the ways of reading sexual and class identities in “The Female Captain,” a late-seventeenth-century ballad. In the ballad, Mary Plunket, a sex worker, finds herself marginalized and assumes a false identity in order to marry into the gentry. Rather than angle for a wealthy male gull, Plunket assumes the identity of a young male heir and arranges to marry a young gentlewoman. My paper explores the different ways of reading Plunket – as a class-climber, a transgender man, or as a window into unarticulated lesbian desire – and argues that the desire to secure one’s class status is an inseparable part of early modern eroticism for individuals like Plunket who find themselves on the outside of early modern systems of social and sexual legibility.

12. Jordan Windholz, Fordham University
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Yerking and Firking Journeymen in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*

“Punish the journeyman villain, but not the journeyman shoemaker,” Firk tells the Earl of Lincoln in Dekker’s *The Shoemaker’s Holiday*. He’s responding to a threat; frustrated with Firk’s dissimulations regarding the whereabouts of Lacy and Rose, both the Earl and the current Lord Mayor, Sir Roger Oatley, aim to discipline this “base crafty varlet.” While in his response Firk recalls the line between the masterless man and the mastered one, Firk also identifies the journeyman as particularly vulnerable to the vicissitudes of legal retribution and social disenfranchisement. Attending to the various journeymen in Eyre’s household, this essay will argue that *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* represents the journeyman’s precarity using bawdy language that not only allies his industriousness with sexual vigor, but also evinces the social limits of his sexual power. Even as *The Shoemaker’s Holiday* presents fantasies of economic mobility and social harmony, it also suggests that the yerking and firking journeyman can just as easily be, as Firk himself worries, “firked and yerked” by his social betters.

13. Respondent
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