

**2017 SAA Semina: Beyond Shakespeare's Genres Abstracts**  
**Leaders: Jane Hwang Degenhardt, University of Massachusetts, Amherst**  
**and Cyrus G. Mulready, SUNY New Paltz 1**

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**Charlotte Artese, Agnes Scott College**

**The Folktale Play: Genre, Source, and Folk Tradition**

In the introduction to my book, *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* (2015), I briefly proposed the genre of the folktale play, comprised of those plays with one or more plots based on folktales. In my seminar paper, I hope to work through the implications of and precedents for the folktale play genre by looking at both the role of sources and the role of folk culture in genre designations. The First Folio seems to grant its benediction to defining a genre by source type, since its Histories are derived from English chronicles, leaving plays based on Roman history to the Tragedies. *Lear* and *Macbeth* are not Histories, although their source stories are included in chronicles such as Holinshed's, perhaps in part because of their folktale elements—these two plays, like *Hamlet*, derive from legendary histories.

Several critics have grouped plays based on their relation to folk tradition. C. L. Barber defined the festive comedies as those plays that express the “folk cult” of “native holiday,” and decades later Naomi Conn Liebler examined festive tragedies. The problem plays, argued W. W. Lawrence, are problematic because their primitive, medieval, folktale sources are at odds with Shakespeare's naturalistic character development. Leo Salinger proposed the genre of the novella play, a designation based on a type of source with deep folktale affinities, as the Italian novellas Shakespeare chose to dramatize were often literary versions of folktales.

My aim is not to justify the creation of a new genre, but rather to examine the roles of source type and folk tradition in forming genres that scholars have found convincing, suggestive, and useful.

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**Peter Berek, Amherst College**

**Margaret Cavendish: Genre, Gender and Folio Publication**

Is a printed volume itself a statement about genre? The title page of the 1623 Shakespeare folio announces itself as “Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies.” The generic formula persists when the folio is reprinted in 1632, 1663 and 1684. Both the 1647 and 1679 Beaumont and Fletcher folios use the words “Comedies and Tragedies” on their title pages. Though the first collection of plays for the professional theater in folio, Jonson's 1616 volume, called itself “Works,” as did its successors in 1631 and 1640, for plays by his celebrated contemporaries generic labels seem to have mattered as plays became literature in an expensive format.

Folio publication of plays is unusual in the seventeenth century. Moreover, in the decades after the 1647 Beaumont and Fletcher volume, octavo becomes the usual format for collections of plays by such writers as Cartwright, Shirley, Brome and Massinger. In these volumes, almost all published by Humphrey Moseley, title pages make no reference to genre; most have titles

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such as Six New Plays, as though "play" were genre enough and newness were the chief marketable commodity.

The narrative in the preceding paragraphs is relentlessly male. What happens to the story if one tries to include the two other seventeenth-century collections of plays in folio, Margaret Cavendish's 1662 *Plays* and 1668 *Plays Never Before Printed*? How does the physical appearance of these volumes, how do their paratextual materials, compare to the collections of Jonson, Shakespeare and Beaumont and Fletcher? How do they compare to Moseley's octavo collections? How does Cavendish's gender affect the way her volume presents itself to a potential audience? How does her rank as first, Marchioness, and then Duchess of Newcastle affect the presentation? What can we infer from Cavendish's statements, and from her silences, about her attitudes toward "comedies and tragedies"?

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**Lara Bovilsky, University of Oregon**

**Rogue Writing: Resistance to Comedy**  
**in Mary Cowden Clarke's "Rosalind and Celia; The Friends"**

Mary Cowden Clarke's 15 novellas detailing *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* stage a complex, creative interaction with Shakespearean works, combining literary criticism, homage, and feminist critique. Each novella provides a prequel of a Shakespearean play, focusing on the infancy and childhood of its chief female character and ending with that character's first line of dialogue. On the one hand, the novellas purport to offer imaginative background that would explain (and extend) Shakespeare's characterization and that could illuminate interpretive and textual cruxes that puzzled 19th-century critics. At the same time, Cowden Clarke's novellas regularly pull against their sources, changing Shakespearean emphases and dwelling on disturbing content, altering a reader's sense of Shakespeare's world. This essay looks at how Cowden Clarke's novella based on *As You Like It*, "The Friends," reframes elements of the play's generic and discursive components as troubling.

While *As You Like It* gently critiques courtship discourse from Petrarchism to pastoral through Rosalind's role-playing in and parodies of love plots, "The Friends" offers more biting criticism of both Petrarchism and the marital teleology of comedy. Within the story, Petrarchism is presented as the screen discourse that allows self-assured suitors absolutely to disregard female testimony and refusal, treating them as highly aestheticized fictions of their own, a "pretty simulation" bespeaking only consent. Meanwhile, Rosalind and Celia reject the ostensible trajectory of their own Shakespearean drama when they agree that marriage is frequently not the "blissful goal" suggested by "false rogues of writers," but "the prelude to care." Both to develop and solve narrative conflicts in "The Friends," Cowden Clarke has her protagonists borrow extensively from other, darker Shakespearean comedies and from contemporary novelistic genres such as gothic. Cowden Clarke's free mixtures of early modern and modern genres present an unorthodox but compelling method of literary and cultural criticism that anticipates modern readings of Shakespeare as well as the use of adaptation and fan fiction for critique.

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**David Sterling Brown**  
**University of Arizona**

**Shakespeare's Tragic Households**

This paper stems from a larger research project that positions the subgenre of domestic tragedy as a context for scrutinizing Shakespeare's tragedies by bringing together theory—feminist, genre, psychoanalytic, queer, and race—through a unifying concern with household matters. Given the early modern understanding of the state as a kind of family or household, I examine the domestic on both micro and macro levels. The larger socio-political consequences of dramatic issues related to sex and race, for instance, become evident due to certain characters' threats to social order. Despite their highborn nature, the domestic spaces in Shakespeare's plays share commonalities with those featured in domestic tragedies such as Thomas Heywood's *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. Modern scholarship centered on the household, or domestic tragedy, has primarily consisted of materialist and formalist criticism, thus inhibiting the kind of analytical technique that, for example, identifies the "ruined house" in *Timon of Athens* as queer because it challenges patriarchal and heterosexual order by welcoming same-sex desire. Shakespeare's Tragic Households contends that the core of Shakespearean tragedy is indeed in the household settings. Furthermore, it argues that Shakespeare's tragic canon acknowledges but innovatively departs from the domestic tragedy subgenre. Household dysfunction—chaos resulting from cuckoldry, incest, miscegenation, homosociality/sexuality, and violence—is the critical catalyst for tragedy in both Shakespeare's plays and the domestic tragedy subgenre, which achieved peak popularity between 1590-1610, the exact time frame during which Shakespeare wrote his tragedies. In this paper, I will offer an overview of my principal project and use a critical example from one Shakespearean tragedy to support my claims.

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**Loren Cressler, University of Texas, Austin**

**The Play Within: Embedded Plot Structures and Generic Innovation in *Lear* and *Hoffman***

This paper will engage with two distinct but related features of Shakespearean drama: metatheatricity and the subplot. I will argue broadly that the formal transgressions of Shakespeare's most generically mixed plays result from a tendency of early modern playwrights to treat plot structures as modular. This essay will consider two tragedies: *King Lear* and Chettle's *The Tragedy of Hoffman*. Both tragedies feature robust subplots that appear to deploy miniaturized, paradigmatic enactments of familiar play types.

For the purposes of this paper, I will examine the capacity of the revenge plot to be both expanded and contracted as an author wished. It will be my contention that the relatively rigid form of the revenge tragedy lent itself well to appropriation and adaptation in plays of multiple genres. *Lear* features a highly compressed revenge tragedy, while *Hoffman* embeds several of "Shakespeare's greatest hits" within its subplots in a seeming enactment of structural set-pieces.

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Whereas Hoffman displays an interest in the superstructure of the revenge play and builds formal innovation upon that scaffolding, Lear uses a ready-made dramatic formula in its subplot to resolve Gloucester's and Edgar's narratives. While Shakespeare's and Chettle's end products differ vastly in terms of critical reception, both authors use a quite similar technique: they retell a familiar story, but add variation by embedding subplots from different genres. Compressed and embedded plot structures aid in the development of such modern generic categories as the domestic tragedy, the city comedy, and the tragicomedy. The high degree of metatheatricality in early instantiations of the modular subplot (i.e. the play-within-a-play) displays authorial recognition of generic innovation; as the forms yielded by these techniques codify, their metatheatrical references recede and become naturalized and their dramatic referents become contemporary rather than classical.

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**Naomi Conn Liebler, Montclair State University**

**Holding out for a hero till the end of the night: Shakespeare's vexing tragedy**

Early Modern dictionary and scholastic "definitions" of Tragedy—e.g., J.C. Scaliger's and Philip Sidney's (but not Aristotle's which remains indispensable)—tell us little that we can use to understand the dramatic tragedies of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Such resources remain of interest historically—perhaps precisely because they were largely ignored by practicing tragedians on the early modern stage. In this seminar paper I would like to explore the interface between ignoring respected classical definitions and attending to other informative praxes: a native dramatic tradition traceable in biblical chapters, cycle plays, ballads, and other distinctly non-erudite and non-classical but absolutely living exempla of the genre as it evolved. What expectations did audiences bring to the theater? If they were not highly educated or familiar with scholastic "definitions," what did they anticipate in plays labeled tragedies? What demands did they—like the Grocer's Wife in the Prologue to Beaumont's *Knight of the Burning Pestle*--make upon the theater? We have some good idea of their expectations in satiric treatments such as *Pyramus and Thisbe* and Philostrate's preferred list in *MND*. Perhaps the most thorough-going intradramatic list of performative pastiche is the "everything pizza" heard in *Hamlet*: the play's references to jigs, mummers, Morris dancers, epic, tragedy, cycle play, ballad, *et alia*, signal a wide audience familiarity with and set of expectations about these typologies. Shakespearean tragedy was never *sui generis*; it begs, steals, and borrows from anything and everything its audiences might have already known. At the same time, something (perhaps *else*) seems to be driving the genre designations set out in F1 and some Q title pages or posters. My own students want tragic heroes to succeed, prevail, or at least survive. What did Shakespeare's groundlings think they were getting when they came to the theater under any of the advertisements of tragedy?

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**Patrick Hogan, University of Connecticut**

Generative Principles of Story Style: Shakespeare and the Integration of Genres

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We may understand style as a distinctive pattern for some scope (e.g., an author's work or a literary period) and some level of discourse. The level of discourse may be verbal, but it may equally be a matter of narration or story structure. An author's story style involves, among other things, genre--not simply the main genres he or she prefers, but also what he or she does with those genres. Like style, genre has different senses. A particularly important type of genre is defined by the category of goal that a protagonist seeks (e.g., romantic union or national autonomy). The most prominent genres of this type are the cross-cultural genres, romantic, heroic, and so on. I have argued elsewhere that, in a range of works, Shakespeare's story style involves distinctive, recurring specifications and alterations of the prototypical heroic structure. But of course stories may involve more than one genre. After considering the nature of style and the nature of genre, the following essay turns to the various ways in which different genres may be combined in a particular works. One stylistic feature of Shakespeare's story generation appears to be a particularly thorough integration of different genres. The essay ends by looking at several examples of such integration. Specifically, it treats the multiplicity of genre in *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, and *All's Well That Ends Well*, considering how genre integration contributes to the success of the first and second, as well as the "problem" status of the last.

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**Aileen Liu, University of California, Berkeley**

***The Tempest* as Metadramatic Romance**

In each of Shakespeare's romances, a patriarch must confront and embrace the limits of his own authority and autonomy. In the *Defence of Poesy*, Sidney insists that dramatists obey the unities of time, place, and action, as a way to assert their authority over their material, actors, and audiences. In *The Tempest*, the last of his romances, Shakespeare dramatizes a Sidneyan playwright through the figure of Prospero, a tyrant who is in the process of abandoning this perspective. In ceding the stage and his absolute powers to others, Prospero offers a paradoxical image of a tyrant who's controlling his own abdication.

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**Lucy Munro, King's College London**

**Travail Drama**

This paper will focus on a dramatic form that cuts across the divisions of the First Folio: travel drama. Several of Shakespeare's plays -- notably *The Tempest* and *Pericles* -- have been categorised as travel drama, and while this term would not have been familiar in the early modern period, there is some evidence to suggest that it was a meaningful category. Taking as its starting point the pun on travel/travail that is foregrounded the title of Day, Rowley and Wilkins's play *The Travels of the Three English Brothers*, performed by Queen Anna's Men in 1607, this paper will explore the role of *Pericles* as an enabling model for later plays of the King's Men, looking in particular at Massinger and Fletcher's *The Custom of the Country* (c.

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1620) and *The Sea Voyage* (1622), and Massinger's *Believe as You List* (1631). In doing so, it will explore questions about the theatrical, emotional and political appeal of stories about travel, and the ways in which these stories were shaped dramatically on Shakespeare's stage and those of his immediate successors.

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**James Newlin, Case Western Reserve University**

**Foul Pranks:  
White Resentment, Cuckold Plots, and Reading *Vice Principals* as a Comic *Othello***

While actor Danny McBride and director Jody Hill's *Eastbound and Down* was a cult hit during its four-year run on HBO, their follow-up series, *Vice Principals*, was greeted with critical derision, with one critic dubbing the show "Asshole TV." *Vice Principals* is the story of two white high school administrators who, when passed over for the position of Principal, dedicate themselves to sabotaging the black woman who unexpectedly becomes their boss. In the era of Black Lives Matter, the content of *Vice Principals* struck many as no laughing matter.

Yet, in detailing the story of two white subordinates plotting against the person of color whose promotion they violently resent, *Vice Principals* is also a surprisingly faithful adaptation of *Othello*. Moreover, by adapting *Othello* as a comedy—albeit a very dark one—*Vice Principals* illuminates Shakespeare's challenging use of genre. Since Thomas Rhymer's *Short View of Tragedy* in 1693, readers have recognized *Othello*'s nearly farcical structure. *Vice Principals* offers a vision of what a comic *Othello* might look like, with its characters' sense of emasculation as central to their motives as racial anxiety. In presenting cuckoldry as an object of ridicule, *Vice Principals* reinscribes *Othello* in the present political moment, where "cuck" is a frequent term of abuse in the white supremacist, "alt-right" community.

In this paper, I consider two possible readings of *Vice Principals* - one where this anxious vision of white men "cucked" by women and people of color wielding unearned power is mocked by the show's creators, and one where it is shared. Regardless of whomever the joke here is "on," reading *Vice Principals* as an adaptation of *Othello* indicates the challenge of engaging the play at the dawn of a Trump presidency and the role that genre analysis may play for such discussions.

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**Meg Pearson, University of West Georgia**

**"Mingle, mingle, mingle": Witches and Genre**

The interpolation of two songs from Middleton's *The Witch* into the First Folio's text of *Macbeth* is the image that drives this paper's query: what happens to genre when you add witchcraft? While it will attend to the social and political conditions that gave rise to plays containing witches by Shakespeare and his seventeenth-century colleagues, the paper's focus will be an exploration of how and why witch subplots transform the genre of their plays, using *Macbeth* as a departure. These "witch plays" are frequently classified as tragicomedy, but that

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vexed label fails to explain how these supernatural tropes can localize tragedy, amplify comedy, and distrust history.

Witch plays – such as *Macbeth* (tragedy), *The Witch* (tragicomedy), *The Witches of Lancashire* (comedy), and *The Witch of Edmonton* (tragicomedy) – deploy the supernatural trope of the witch and witchcraft, affiliate those liminal figures with extradramatic contemporary scandals or news, and then dismantle the witch's magic within the play in a fashion that frequently subverts the generic expectations of the play. Shakespeare and his contemporaries deploy the witch to dissect the cultural and political forces that created “her,” this figure who could be a stand-in for the Earl of Essex and his wife, a representation of the Scottish hag feared by the king, or an actual woman who hanged for the crime of witchcraft. In doing so, they detach their plays from the rules by which their art might be classified.

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**Tanya Pollard, Brooklyn College and the Graduate Center, CUNY**

**“Bastard begot, bastard instructed”: Illegitimate models and genres in *Troilus and Cressida***

Among *Troilus and Cressida*'s notoriously anti-heroic figures, Thersites stands out for his challenges to received conventions. Facing Priam's bastard son Margarelon, he announces that he will not fight. “I am a bastard too,” he explains; “I love bastards: I am a bastard begot, bastard instructed, bastard in mind, bastard in valour, in every thing illegitimate.” Thersites' outburst may seem gratuitous, but I propose that his delight in illegitimacy speaks to the play's core enterprise. The play identifies the Trojan War – widely seen in the early modern period as the origin of the European literary tradition – as a story about illicit mergers. Thersites' observation, “All the argument is a cuckold and a whore,” is as true of Shakespeare's retelling as of Homer's original, though the play shifts its gaze from the war's primary cuckold and whore, Menelaus and Helen, to their secondary analogues, Troilus and Cressida: begot and instructed, as it were, by their originals. These stories of unauthorized coupling similarly bring about illegitimate literary offspring. *Troilus and Cressida* occupies an uneasy generic status: omitted from the earliest editions of the First Folio, and accordingly never identified with one of its three generic categories, the play straddles comic, tragic, historic, epic, and satiric modes. In the context of early modern reversions to procreative vocabulary to describe convention-defying plays as mongrels, half-breeds, and hybrids, I suggest that the play reflects deliberately on the risks and potential gains of illegitimate, unlicensed authorial reproduction. By identifying Homer himself with illegitimacy, the play, like Thersites, revels in the liberating possibilities of its own bastardy.

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**Matthew Smith, Azusa Pacific University**

**The Postlude Jig After, Beyond, Through, and Before Shakespeare's Genres**

Recent discussions of the stage jig have recognized that jigs ranged from improvised banter with the audience to full-fledged mini sung dramas. These mature dramatic jigs should not

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be viewed as tacked onto the ends of plays for comic relief or merely for entertainment value but, rather, as portals to a broader performance culture. In this way, jigs connect inter-theatrically to other theatrical genres, and they also simultaneously invoke nostalgia for the pre-Reformational past and excite desire for aesthetic reform. When viewed in its eventuality and not merely as a textually bound drama, the postlude jig captures several currents of the play event. It extends the play into a complimentary dramatic experience *after* it. And it extends the play even further *beyond* the playhouse event into streets, alehouses, and churchyard walls in the form of broadside jig ballads as well as balladic adaptations of plays. The jig also engages the festival musicality that runs *through* the play, sustaining the continuity of narrative, incidental, ambient, and inter-act music and dance than occurred throughout the play event. In these inter- and intra-theatrical ways, the jig may in fact challenge the fixity of theatrical hierarchies that attribute the "play" with decided predominance over its contextual performances. And finally, the jig reaches back *before* the play event into the culture of medieval drama, interlude, seasonal game, and liturgical festival from which it inherits its performative energy. To bring to a head these suggestions of the jig's capacities *after*, *beyond*, *through*, and *before* the play event, I reexamine the challenging historical question of bawdy and farcical postlude jigs that follow the final acts of Shakespeare's devastating tragedies, with the intention of unsettling a bit the historical supremacy of the play in the playhouse environment.

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**Matt Thiele, Glenville State College**

**"It...makes him stand to and not stand to":  
Tragicomic Juxtaposition in Shakespeare's Tragedies and Comedies**

This essay offers a new perspective on the fairly well mapped oscillation between comedy and tragedy in Shakespeare's plays. It proposes replacing a well-worn and frequently abused principle, "comic relief," with the broader and more useful concept of "tragicomic juxtaposition." It identifies the distinguishing features of comedy and tragedy and divides the scenes in Shakespeare's comedies and tragedies between those that are "dramatic" and those that are "humorous." It examines classic instances of supposed comic relief such as the porter scene in *Macbeth*, suggests reasons why the term "relief" might be inappropriate, and provides alternative explanations for the presence of humorous material at certain points in the tragedies. The essay also examines moments from comedic plays like *Twelfth Night* and *Much Ado About Nothing* as examples of the same general phenomenon. The essay proposes several potential effects for such moments in the comedies and tragedies. These effects can be structural; they may cause delay and/or generate suspense if they do not offer some kind of relief. They may also be thematic, as in *Hamlet*, and expressionistic, by projecting ambivalence. The essay may also tie in theoretical principles that seem relevant, such as defamiliarization and *différance*.