

2017 SAA 2017 Seminar: Theatrical Historiography Abstracts
Leaders: Amanda Eubanks Winkler, Syracuse University
and Richard Schoch, Queen's University Belfast 1

Clara Calvo, Universidad de Murcia (Spain)

‘Shakespearean Theatre Practice and the Edwardian Turn of Mind’

In his seminal study on the early years of the 20th century, *The Edwardian Turn of Mind* (1968), Samuel Hynes argued that between the death of Queen Victoria and the beginning of the First World War, the intellectual, artistic and cultural climate of the British Isles was sufficiently different from the Victorian period to deserve being analysed on its own. Hynes's ideas have not had impact on theatrical historiography or Shakespearean Studies, as both still tend to regard—with a few exceptions—the first decade and a half the 20th century as an extension of the late Victorian period. In this paper, I argue that in the two decades that go from the death of Victoria in 1901 to the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, several different modes of performing Shakespeare—some new, some old—co-existed and occasionally merged, suggesting that Edwardian Shakespeare should be approached as distinct from Late Victorian Shakespeare. To sustain this claim, I look at the Festival season arranged by Martin Harvey at His Majesty's Theatre in 1916, which offered a sample of the plurality of styles in which Shakespearean plays were being performed in the first decades of the 20th century.

Rinku Chatterjee

‘Shakespeare performance in Colonial Calcutta’

The Universities of Calcutta, Bombay, and Madras, established in 1857, were invested in spreading English education, and Shakespeare featured prominently in their curriculum. Bengali intellectuals like Rabindranath Tagore, and Ishwar Chandra Vidyasagar engaged in translations of Shakespeare's plays, like *Macbeth*, and *The Comedy of Errors*. The theater houses of the time often had productions of Shakespeare's plays, in both Bengali translations and English. In my paper I would like to explore performances of Shakespearean plays after 1857 in Calcutta.

Lauren Eriks Cline

‘The Precarious Live: Epistolary Narrative and the Production of Theatrical Liveness’

Is performance live? While for many early performance theorists, the answer to this question was an emphatic yes, more recent scholars have not been so sure. Philip Auslander, for example, claims that the “liveness” of performance is not an inherent quality, but a historically variable effect produced by the development of recording technologies. While these complications of the “live” have emerged from studies of the multimedia present, I see them as opening up possibilities for historiographers engaged with the more distant past. If we accept Auslander's claim that the liveness of

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performance is not an inherent quality, but one produced in part through discursive representations of theatergoing, theater historians might see the archival documents that “record” performance as constructing liveness rather than failing to capture it. Narratives about performance might be approached as a medium that –even before Auslander’s history of radio and video technology –produces the “historically variable effect” of liveness. In this essay, I ask how narratives of spectatorship written by historical spectators contribute to performance’s phenomenology of “liveness.” Specifically, I focus on how Victorian spectators used one particular recording technology characterized by “to the moment” temporality and interpersonal exchange: the epistolary narrative. I track the qualities of epistolarity in Wilkie Collins’s novel *No Name* (1862) and Fanny Kemble’s memoir *Record of a Girlhood* (1878): two texts that are framed as retrospective narratives, but which nonetheless use letters to represent key performance events. Epistolarity’s investment in presence, I argue, allowed these authors to construct a theatrical liveness oriented toward a precarious future and disabled presence.

Anne Gossage

“Up and Down:” Vestris’s 1840 *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*

This paper examines a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* that opened at Covent Garden on November 16, 1840, in which actor-manager Lucia Vestris played Oberon. The production used the language of Shakespeare’s play in setting many short pieces of the text to music sung by Vestris and the other fairies. The songs in this production emphasized a pattern of “high and low” that appears in the language of the play and that reflects ideas about human vulnerability and the parts each individual plays in his or her community. Songs sung in parts, rounds, and call-and-response show the fairies to be superior singers and performers. The humans perform their “parts” less well, missing their cues and confusing their roles. While in early modern England, the working class might sing part-songs to entertain the nobility, it would never go the other way around, and the play reflects this by making the fairies workers who sing. The Vestris production exemplified and reflected particular cultural tensions surrounding Victorian class, theater, and performance. The songs in performance underlined the other-worldly and sometimes threatening nature of the powerful fairy world in the play, mirroring Victorian class divides; yet they also helped provide a sense of festive, comic unity and celebration appropriate to a culture celebrating a royal marriage and developing exciting new ways of performing and consuming Shakespeare. Shakespeare productions in the Victorian period deserve more attention by music and performance scholars.

Sharon Harris Jeter

**‘Between the Stage and Concert Hall:
The Masque as Shakespearean Adaptation in Purcell’s *Fairy Queen***

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Present-day scholarship on musical adaptations of Shakespeare tends to begin in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with the popularization of opera in England. The first musical adaptations of Shakespeare, however, were not operas: Restoration theater generated musical adaptations of Shakespeare on the grand scale of Italian opera, but, while some adaptations approached opera in their form, there was no English tradition of grand opera to evoke on the Restoration stage. We should resist the temptation to think of these productions as way stations toward developing an English operatic tradition nor as simply stage plays with ancillary music added. Instead, this paper argues that these Restoration musical adaptations merit consideration as a distinct kind of dramatic adaptation and as the first major musical interpretations of Shakespeare. A handful of these adaptations took a distinctly English musical form, the semi-opera. With insertions of dance and spectacle, the court masque was, in some ways, as close a predecessor to the semi-opera as were early modern plays. This paper explores how Purcell's 1692 semi-opera *Fairy Queen* reads *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and recreates it through interpolated masques between the five acts of the original play. Purcell's musical setting of Shakespeare provides an example of early creative hermeneutics of Shakespeare while also turning the theatrical stage into both a masquing hall and concert hall, expanding the domain of Shakespearean genre and performance.

Cary M. Mazer

'Taking Dictation'

History, it is often said, is written by the victors. In my contribution to our seminar on Theatrical Historiography, I wish to make a different point altogether: 'The person who gets to write the history *becomes* the victor'. In my essay, I consider the efforts of contemporary theatre artists and companies to bolster their importance in theatre histories yet to be written (the historiographic equivalent of SEO—search engine optimization) by controlling the contemporary narrative about their work. The various means by which theatre artists and companies do so include: creating scholarly advisory boards, not to advise the companies but to ratify the historicity of their work; sponsoring on-site scholarly conferences that incorporate theatregoing and/or draw upon the company's actors for lecture-demonstrations, which in turn generate volumes of scholarly essays about the theatre company's work; and using company websites and social media—what theatre managers and dramaturgs call 'audience engagement'—to shape the reception and discourse around individual production. I also consider the 'echo chamber' effect, whereby artists and companies (historicist and avant-garde alike) base their productions on scholarly articles to create productions which are then written up in articles and reviews by the very same theorists who had written the original scholarly articles, and which are published in the very same journals in which the scholarly articles had first appeared.

Daniel Pollack-Pelzner

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**'Presentist Historiography; Or, Why The Victorians Said They Stopped Messing
With Shakespeare's Language'**

When the Oregon Shakespeare Festival announced last fall that it was hiring 36 playwrights and companion dramaturgs to translate all of Shakespeare's plays into contemporary English, the project provoked a nationwide debate about the sanctity of Shakespeare's language, with charges of butchery and blasphemy abounding. As far as I could tell, this reaction presumed that Shakespeare's genius lay in his language—a view we take for granted now, but which would have surprised many a critic and practitioner before the nineteenth century, when the assumption was often that Shakespeare's plays had to be purged, adapted, and improved for the stage. So what changed? Macready's "restoration" of something like Shakespeare's *Lear* instead of Tate's version at Covent Garden in 1838 is often hailed as the turning point in performance history. But I wonder if this narrative, an unusually salutary one for Victorianists, in which our chosen period redeems the Bard from the clutches of what the Victorian editor Charles Knight called "Tatefication," has helped to turn textual Bardolatry into the norm and adaptation into the deviant, rather than the other way around. In this paper, I investigate the historical forces that shaped the Victorian paradigm shift (antiquarian staging and scholarship, linguistic nationalism, Romantic aesthetics, the role of memorization in standardized education, the need for a new secular scripture as Darwin challenged biblical literalism) and the historiographical forces that have made us adopt this restrictive paradigm as our own.

Amanda K. Rudd

**The "New" Pictorialism?:
Performing the Stage Image from David Garrick to Greg Doran'**

Visual histories of Shakespeare in performance have typically observed changes in visual style as a key organizing principle by which to periodize theatrical history. The poses of the eighteenth century's star actors, the elaborate pictures of the Victorian stage, and the emergence of modernist symbolism in the twentieth century each mark different political and interpretive approaches to the plays. In this essay, I speculate that attending to the responses invited by the stage image rather than the aesthetic choices by which such tableaux are produced, yields surprising affiliations between performances of radically different periods. Observing the marked referentiality of the stage image or pose, their paradoxical temporality, and their tendency to become detached from performance (either by memory or appropriation), I propose that focusing on these tableaux might offer an inroad for blurring some of the rigid boundaries that have been drawn by theatre historians. I compare the responses invited by stage images in performances of *King Lear* by David Garrick in the eighteenth century and the recent RSC production directed by Greg Doran. Later, I draw on recent correspondence with the producer of several RSC Live from Stratford Upon Avon broadcasts to suggest that the increased use of cinematic techniques for recording and archiving performance might impact the ways we look at

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Shakespeare both in performance and in the archive. Notably, these new mediations may inadvertently be generating a renewed orientation toward the tableau.

Denise A. Walen

“Singing Witches”

I am interested in the intertheatricality of Shakespearean performance and the intertextuality of Shakespearean performance scripts. The ways in which different scripts of the same play and performances of those scripts relate to and affect each other has a recurring influence on production choices and also affects our comprehension of Shakespeare's plays. Tiffany Stern, in *Making Shakespeare*, argues that the versions of Shakespeare that have come down to us have inevitably been formed by the contexts from which they emerged; being shaped by, for example, the way actors received and responded to their lines, the props and music used in the theatre, or the continual revision of plays by the playhouses and printers. In the case of *Macbeth*, the recursive performance option I find most intriguing has to do with the addition of song and dance. At some point in the 1660s, William Davenant added a remarkable scene to the second Act of the play, one that does not appear in the Folio version. That scene, or a version of it, which is an extravaganza with dancing, singing witches, remained in performance scripts for more than two hundred years, at least through the 1880s. The scene has, apparently, been “maligned by musicians and literary scholars alike,” and yet its recurrence over two hundred years suggests an ongoing popular appeal and a formative effect on the text and production of *Macbeth*. This essay will use annotated scripts to investigate the scene in performance.