

**2017 SAA Seminar: Women, Performance, and the Dramatic Canon Abstract
Leader: Clare McManus, University of Roehampton 1**

Morwenna Carr, University of Roehampton.

**‘We are all perfect in the plot, I think’ : Appropriation, Performance and
Representation in Early Modern Women’s Drama**

This paper will begin by considering the representation of canonical works in early modern women’s dramatic writing, tracing the ways in which female writers envisaged themselves and their works to be connected to their predecessors. Margaret Cavendish’s play *The Convent of Pleasure* (1668), for example, shares elements with Shakespeare’s *Love’s Labour’s Lost* (1594-95); the court of King Ferdinand of Navarre with its three years of ‘painful study’ is a silent all-male enclave which ‘no woman may approach’ (2.1.23-24), somewhat different to the all-female convent envisaged by Lady Happy as a place of ‘all delights and pleasures that are allowable and lawful’ (1.1.14-15), a site not of restraint but ‘a place for freedom’ (1.1.14-16) including dancing and playing. *The Convent* also presents audiences with an all-female play-within-a-play, a device which is visible in James Shirley’s *The Bird in a Cage* (1633). Focusing on female-authored texts in which female performance is made visible (for example, through play-within-a-play, among others modes of performance), this paper explores connections between the re-writing of female performance by female dramatists and their appropriation of earlier, “canonical” texts. It will argue that the performance of appropriation and of female drama in these texts demonstrates an attempt to take some control of a developing literary canon, and to carve out a female space for drama both on these authors’ contemporary Restoration stage and retrospectively on the earlier pre-1642 stages which they looked to.

Brian Chalk, brian.chalk@manhattan.edu

**“I can no longer hold me patient”:
Competing Playwriting Characters in *Richard III***

In the opening scenes of *Richard III*, Richard recruits the audience as allies in his quest to secure the throne in part by patrolling the perimeter of the stage and alerting us of his every move. Achieving his objective by becoming king, Andrew Gurr has pointed out, forces Richard away from the margins of the stage and into the center, where he no longer has unmediated access to his co-conspirators. In gaining the crown, then, Richard loses the audience and, by extension, the theatrical charisma that got him there. What has inspired less scholarly attention, however, is the way in which Queen Margaret subverts Richard’s theatrical authority in act one by delivering asides that predict his downfall long before he takes the throne. Like Richard, Margaret hovers around the perimeter of the stage as she plots her revenge. Margaret, that is to say, literally speaks to the audience behind Richard’s back. The stage picture these early moments of theatrical subversion create, I suggest, anticipate the dream that Richard appears to share with Richmond act five. A ghostly presence that constantly speaks in prophecies, Margaret predicts that

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Richard's nightmares will coincide with Richmond's dreams. The staging of this shared dream in which the audience participates becomes a collective experience

In my paper, I want to take Margaret as an early example of a female playwriting character, and to consider how Shakespeare's women frequently inspire or participate in the dreams and nightmares of male characters in their respective plays in order to exert shaping power over the plays they inhabit. As I hope to demonstrate, Margaret's asides represent the first time in *Richard III* that Richard fails to command the dramatic space prior to becoming king. To work her way into the narrative, Margaret must insinuate herself into the dreams of the dominant males, Richard and Richmond. To Richard, her prophecy guarantees "fitful" sleep that also prevents Queen Anne from sleeping; to Richmond, she offers confirmation of the crown.

Catherine Clifford, ccliff1@graceland.edu

Elizabeth I and the Chivalric Fictions of the Tiltyard

This paper is interested in the commonplaces of Elizabeth I's role in tiltyard entertainments, where she not only served as the convener and ostensible object of the tournaments, but as the one participant whose good-humored cooperation was required for the chivalric spectacles to function smoothly. Dramatic tournaments, that is, tilts and martial entertainments with narrative dramatic elements, are often overlooked as "legitimate" drama in part because of their awkward generic location somewhat between pageantry and sport. However, under Elizabeth, they took on a more recognizably narrative dramatic role, and, provocatively, positioned the Queen as a central but unscripted actor in the spectacles. Elizabethan court entertainments, in general, often positioned the Queen as a figure who had to intervene in the dramatic action in order to affect resolution, and, even though there is no evidence of Elizabeth herself taking a scripted role in dramatic entertainments, she was often imagined, nonetheless, by the devisers of court entertainments as an actor in the drama. She became a participant in Philip Sidney's progress entertainment *The Lady of May* and George Peele's play *The Arraignement of Paris* for instance because their successes hinged upon her willing participation. She was, thus, grafted into many types of entertainments as a participant, and her failure to participate, as in the court performance of Ben Jonson's *Every Man Out of His Humour*, could result in an awkward outcome for the dramatists, but offer a clear reminder that the Queen was the ultimate agent in situations that asked her to play along. Gesturing towards an inclusive view of monarchical performativity that extends to the royal person's awareness of herself as spectacle, I argue here that Elizabethan tilts and tournaments, especially those with overtly dramatic elements, sought to re/create Elizabeth as a character in their chivalric narratives that feminized her two bodies and called upon her to reify that characterization. However, the agency of the monarch as actor was not necessarily bound by the creative visions of these narratives. How, then, are we to understand her "role", and in what ways might martial entertainments be reconsidered as dramatic events in which distinctly feminine authority was enacted before thousands of spectators?

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Samantha Dressel, University of Rochester

**“Were I but a man as others are”:
Secrecy and Gender on the Renaissance Stage**

Epicene is a biting satire in which the curmudgeonly Morose is tricked into marrying Epicene, a silent woman who after marriage becomes a voluble scold. William *The Fatal Contract* is a brutal revenge tragedy in which the mysterious Eunuch plays the different factions of the French court off of each other in order to cause large-scale bloodshed and death. The two were written roughly three decades apart. What these plays share, however, is the shocking revelation of a disguised characters throughout. Through an examination of these two plays, I discuss the use and significance of impenetrable gendered disguise. I argue that while the trope itself is subversive, both plays mediate their subversive potential by falling back on standard tropes of gender and genre. Both plays present the challenge that gender is highly performative, but they soothe such a presentation in different ways. *Epicene* presents its titular character as the ultimate actor, but the fact that he is revealed as male reinforces gender roles, in that women were assumed to be naturally sneaky, but unable to maintain a single, constant disguise. *The Fatal Contract* is similarly ambivalent, presenting the heroine in an unprecedentedly violent role for a female protagonist, yet mediating that subversion with her adherence to revenge norms of plotting and disguise, and ultimately allowing her emotions to overwhelm her disguise. I hypothesize that the very different attitudes of actresses, with *The Fatal Contract* being written when traditions of court masquing and foreign performance were at their height.

Gabriella Infante, King’s College London

**Gendered cartography on the English stage:
feminine spheres of action in the Restoration**

*‘But since his knowledge of the town began, he thinks him now a very civil man’
The Wild Gallant (1663), prologue*

Gender and power dynamics in Restoration London created an articulated web of unwritten rules established by men – Charles II and the two men-led companies, to which he gave patents. In 1660 a significant change for the English theatre occurred: ‘all the women's parts [...] may be performed by women so long as these recreations [...] may [...] be esteemed not only harmlesse delight but useful instruction.’ How did the English stage subsequently voice the reaction towards an increasing female presence in the theatrical environment?

Through excerpts from Susanna Centlivre’s *The Busy Body* and other plays of the canon spanning the years 1660-1714, my paper aims to consider female agency in Restoration drama through the ways in which it was staged in relation to the gendered spaces performed, in particular parks. I am interested in the complex interaction that took place between the advent of actresses, libertine court, and use of socially meaningful

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places, which shaped the cultural geography of the Restoration stage with regards to femininity through the creation of permanent patriarchal structures. By closely considering the dynamic relation between performativity and gendered spaces, my paper will not only provide reflections upon the contemporary anxiety towards the growing presence of women in the theatre, but also an occasion to suggest the necessity of establishing a dialogue between Restoration drama and studies of female performance on pre-1660 English stage(s).

Melinda J. Gough, McMaster University, goughm@mcmaster.ca

Continental Women Players and the ‘All-Male’ English Stage in *Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women*, Act 5 Scene 2

This paper considers the potential impact of continental early modern women as authors and actors through a particular case study focused on events in the “orchard” setting of the anonymous English play *Swetnam the Woman-Hater Arraigned by Women*, act 5 scene 2. Much criticism on this play examines its participation in the *querelle des femmes*, particularly the Jacobean pamphlet debate about gender known as “the Swetnam controversy.” I, too, remain interested in this play’s connections with the English pamphlet debate, but in this paper I consider *Swetnam the Woman-Hater*’s relationship to the famous women who performed onstage and directed acting troupes in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century Italy, in particular Isabella Andreini, the famous author-actress of the pastoral tragicomedy *La Mirtillo*. In my reading of *Swetnam the Woman-Hater* act 5 scene 2, the play’s lead defender of women, Prince Lorenzo, defeats the woman-hater Joseph Swetnam, alias Misogynos, by redeploing a version of the satyr-nymph theatregram that had been revisioned, already, in Andreini’s *La Mirtillo*. Indeed, the skills of playing required by the English male actor who played Lorenzo/Atlanta on the Red Bull stage look quite similar to the skills of playing for which Andreini herself was so famous.

Eder Jaramillo, University of Nebraska-Lincoln

**“‘All the world’s a stage’:
Women’s Performance in Shakespeare’s Meta-theatricality”**

Performance in the words of Jacques in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* takes place on the world stage where “all the men and women as merely players”. Jacques’s depiction, students of Shakespeare readily note, focuses solely on how a man “plays many parts/ His acts being seven ages”. A stage in its own right, the classroom is as effective a setting where notions of performance can be investigated. This essay considers the discussions the classroom setting yields on the subject of performance as we emphasize the roles women play in the world. What exactly constitutes performance for Shakespeare’s female characters? As a classroom stage sets the tone of metatheatrical conventions such as the play-within-the-play, I wish to highlight the ways in which staging a performance, although often allegedly undertaken to see the responses of the

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audience, are equally revealing of the anxieties of the playwright figure that stages the show. I specifically examine this dynamic in *Hamlet* as the title character's memorably stages *The Mousetrap* while haunted by a "ghost" that stands as anxieties for women's "performance". My analysis is based on personal experiences in the classroom that show how my own "ghosts" drove discussions on women's performance. Indeed, my pedagogical questions center on how to allow for genuine student expression and calls for us as teachers to be more aware of how our "ghosts" shape our performances and thus also help drive the responses of students. In turn, I will show how the playwright (or instructor) understands drama as conflict that incites anxieties, which in turn demands resolution; Hamlet's staging and directing of *The Mousetrap* suggests that staging our anxieties about women's performance is itself a form of resolution.

Natasha Korda, Wesleyan University

"Feminist Theater Historiography and the Dramatic Canon"

This paper briefly examines the disciplinary aims, methods, and boundaries established by E. K. Chambers and others in the early twentieth century in their effort to define the "proper" object of theater historiography--the "all-male," professional, London stage of "Shakespeare's time"—and the dramatic canon associated with it. Rather than reifying these disciplinary parameters, the paper looks at the emergence during the same period of "first-wave" feminist theater historiography, practiced by scholars such as Winifred Smith, author of *The Commedia dell-Arte: A Study in Italian Popular Comedy* (1912) and Mary Sullivan, author of *Court Masques of James I: Their Influence on Shakespeare and the Public Theatres* (1913). These early studies ventured beyond the strict confines of the professional London stage in an effort to consider the performance practices of continental actresses and aristocratic female masquers and their influence on the development of English drama. In so doing, they pushed back against the androcentric definition of the field at the very moment of its institutionalization, while reversing its centripetal tendencies with more expansive, centrifugal investigations of performance practices across geographic and temporal boundaries. The paper concludes with an overview of second- and third-wave feminist theater scholarship, and how it has furthered these investigations, while proposing new directions we might take.

Katherine R. Larson, University of Toronto

The Songs of Women's Household Drama

Since the publication of Alison Findlay, Stephanie Hodgson-Wright, and Gweno Williams's influential *Women and Dramatic Production 1500-1700* fifteen years ago, scholars and students have become increasingly attuned to women's active contributions as writers and as performers to household theatricals. The groundbreaking stagings and video recordings that have emerged alongside their scholarship, meanwhile, have showcased the performance potential of plays authored by women for domestic and coterie contexts, whether read aloud communally or staged. Despite growing evidence

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supporting the performability of women's dramatic writings, the musical facets of these so-called "closet" works have remained largely muted. This essay explores the implications of considering the songs of women's household plays in acoustic terms, with particular reference to Jane Cavendish and Elizabeth Brackley's collaborative playtexts and Jane Lumley's *Iphigenia at Aulis*. Drawing on the musical contexts that helped to shape these works as well as details from contemporary stagings, I articulate a performance-based methodology that brings vital musical insight to often overlooked textual markers of song. More broadly, my analysis underscores the affective significance of music and song in plays that continue to be undervalued as viable performance documents within the early modern dramatic canon.

**Clare McManus (University of Roehampton), on behalf of the project team
*Early Modern Women's Performance and the Dramatic Canon: a collaborative
research project***

This contribution is not a conventional research paper, but a description of an international collaborative project on the effects of early modern women's performance on the dramatic canon and its modern afterlives. The project team in Canada and the UK (listed below) is currently working together to develop a funding bid to the UK's Arts and Humanities Research Council and they have kindly agreed that I can share this work with the seminar. For SAA purposes, this outline might serve as a position paper of sorts, setting out one possible set of future directions for studies of women's performance.

The project team

Clare McManus, University of Roehampton; Peter Cockett, McMaster University; Melinda Gough, McMaster University; Lucy Munro, King's College London; Morwenna Carr, University of Roehampton, has been supporting this project in its development.

In brief, the project is designed to assess the effects of the traditions of women's performance in and beyond early modern England on the writing, staging, acting and texts of the early modern dramatic canon. It assesses the influence of early modern women's performance on the Shakespearean canon by combining Practice as Research theatrical workshops with the methodologies of textual editing, and archival and historicized analysis. In so doing, we propose to explore a revised theatre history that accounts for women's theatrical activities, offering a new context for the understanding of canonical plays, of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century playhouse practice and of the construction of the early modern dramatic canon.

We envisage three strands. In each, theatre workshops in the Sam Wanamaker Playhouse and at McMaster will work with key moments from early modern English and continental plays in which representations of gender and of female characters pose compelling questions about actorly skill and performance. Melinda Gough is editing *Swetnam the Woman Hater*, Clare McManus is editing Shirley's *The Bird in a Cage* and Lucy Munro is editing Massinger's *The Picture*. Taking these play-texts as starting points, our workshops will trace skills necessary to the performance of gender -- and the effects they create -- into the heart of the dramatic canon.

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Our first strand will focus on transnational women's performance, bringing together scholars of the French, Italian and Spanish theatrical traditions who are often kept artificially apart to explore the interplay between actor training and the skills required of a playing company or a specific character role. Our focus will be the Italian *commedia* pairing of the mistress/witty servant and English analogues such as *Othello* and *The Duchess of Malfi*. Our second strand takes these findings into a reconsideration of the practice and training of the English boy actor and the multidisciplinary skills required for early modern playing. Potential case studies include the skills of song and improvisation, and the gendered use of props in swordplay and needlework. Thirdly, we will investigate the traces of women's performance in the canon of early modern English drama through textual history and editing. Using our three edited plays, we will use workshops to test out editorial questions in practice and our editions will disseminate our findings to audiences of scholars, performers and graduate and undergraduate students.

We are also interested in the consequences of a new understanding of women's relationship to theatre history and the canon for present-day actors and their relationship to the canon. As part of the project's impact strand, we hope to work with female actors with long experience of the Globe's *Read Not Dead* stage reading series to explore how their practice might alter with exposure to the tradition of women's performance. For instance, what difference might a paradigm of feminine inclusion rather than exclusion make to present-day actors' practice? How might that practice be changed by the understanding that today's actresses in fact stand in a tradition of female performance that also contributed to early modern and Shakespearean theatricality?

Caitlin Thompson, University of Toronto

**“Gabble that we may understand you:”
Female Welsh Characters on the English Stage**

In *Henry IV Part One*, Lady Mortimer's stage time is indicated by stage directions such as “*The Lady speaks in Welsh,*” which highlights the character's alterity and her unwillingness to assimilate into the dramatized English society. Dekker, Chettle and Haughton's *Patient Grissil* and Middleton's *A Chaste Maid in Cheapside* similarly dramatize female Welsh characters that speak and sing in their native language to align their ethnicity with their nonconforming femininity. While Shakespeare's Welshmen, Fluellen and Sir Hugh Evans, emphasize their Britishness in attempts to fit into an English narrative, these three female characters are written as representatives of Wales through which English male characters are able to dramatically tame and negotiate their anxieties about the border country and its citizens.

In my paper, I will explore how the heightened theatrical manifestations of female Welshness in performance shape interwoven ideas about Wales and (bad) femininity. I see the Welsh language in these plays as a particularly female rupture of the normative space causing male anxiety about the uncontainable female linguistic leak.