

**2018 SAA Seminar: Jonson and Shakespeare 1**  
**Leader: Lynn S. Meskill, Université Paris Diderot, Sorbonne Cité**

**Peter Berek, Amherst College**

**Talking Politics in Jonson and Shakespeare**

Celebrated for its extensive marginal annotations in print, *Sejanus His Fall* in performance places at the margin of the stage characters with little power who observe, comment, and endure the consequences of the deeds of major figures in Roman politics. Margins in print are a way of occluding or forestalling seventeenth-century politics; margins on stage are a place for talking politics rather than doing politics. Jonson's representation of the Germanicans talking politics while the audience simultaneously sees Sejanus and Tiberius doing politics is quite different from the representation of political talk in Shakespeare's plays of English and Roman history. In Shakespeare, marginal commentary is sometimes formalized and ritualized (as in *Richard III* or *Richard II*) or a strategy for comic exposure (as in *1 Henry IV*, *Much Ado* and *Twelfth Night*). Commentary from the margin in *Troilus* helps create the play's effects of cynicism and instability. The choric *Grex* in *Every Man Out of His Humor*, presumably also placed at the margin of the stage, showed Jonson's interest in reflecting on action even while dramatizing action. Characters speaking from the margins in *Sejanus*, also reflecting on action, imply as well that Jonson could imagine discourse about power by those who lacked imperial or royal authority; that he could imagine a kind of discourse that Jurgen Habermas and Michael Warner associate with their concepts of the "public sphere."

**Gabriella Edelstein, University of Sydney**

**Jonson and Shakespeare Only?:  
Author Figures in *Eastward Ho* and *Measure for Measure***

On first impression, *Measure for Measure* and *Eastward Ho* are two remarkably dissimilar plays. The former is an uncomfortably cynical portrayal of the Viennese justice system, whilst the latter is a joyous romp through London's trade community. These two plays, however, have more in common than first impressions suggest. Written and first played within a year apart from each other, *Measure* and *Eastward Ho* both consider the nature of trust and value, considerable parts of both plays are set in prison, and both end with a bravura performance that supposedly highlights the singularity of the playwright-performer. The plays have another commonality: they are both disruptions within their playwrights' respective corpora. *Measure for Measure* is Middleton's 1621 adaptation of Shakespeare's play, and *Eastward Ho* is Jonson's collaboration with Chapman and sometime enemy, sometime friend, Marston. This paper argues that in *Eastward Ho* and *Measure*, the theatricalised process by which singularity and authorship is recalibrated is conversant with the play's material conditions of collaboration. Although performing a solo song-and-dance routine to win his freedom, Quicksilver in *Eastward Ho* is dependent on collaboration with Golding for his comic ending. In *Measure*, the Duke's apparent singularity is undermined by the presence of Lucio, another potential author-figure in the play. Both *Measure* and *Eastward Ho* put pressure on Jonsonian solitude and Shakespearean exceptionalism through the collaborative origins of the plays as well as the social and political worlds that the plays depict. Although now the critical tide is now accepting of collaborative models of authorship for early modern playwrights,

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*Measure* and *Eastward Ho* still seem to be within and without their playwrights' respective canons.

**Miles Parks Grier, Queens College, CUNY**

**“A Wanton Epigram”: Rethinking the Black Characters of Posterity in *Titus Andronicus*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *The Masque of Blackness***

Lynn Meskill has paid keen attention to writing as an activity and subject of dialogue in *Antony and Cleopatra* to reveal Shakespeare as a dramatist who—counter to our sense that his medium was ephemeral performance—might share at least a portion of Ben Jonson's interests in writing and posterity. Her insight makes it possible to consider an aspect of their work often invoked but rarely in the context of character as *graphic inscription*. Attentiveness to ink and paper onstage often brings us to dramas of dishonor, figured as shame printed and published. However, the medium of that publication is, in the case of performance, the body of the player. Jonson's nymphs bear “TANIA” on their foreheads and carry double-sided fans: “*in one [side] of which were inscribed their mixt names, in the other a mute hieroglyphic, expressing their mixed qualities.*” All of Shakespeare's moors are also associated with textual objects and opportunities to read: the Prince of Morocco reads caskets; Othello kisses paper and describes Desdemona's face as “fair paper” marred, ostensibly, by the paint that covers him; Cleopatra calls for ink and paper, darkens Antony's name, and suggests an equivalence between Egyptian messengers and the pages from her they bear. Does the stage moor serve a special function in the logic of characters that Meskill, Jonathan Goldberg, and Karen Newman (among others) have identified? What could it mean if some types of persons were understood as bearing in their skin a sign of legibility? What can be made of the transferability of this characterizing stain, especially when it comes to the maintenance of gendered honor? Finally, do Shakespeare and Jonson align here or are there important distinctions to be made in their treatments of the blackface moor as bearer of ink?

**Marc Jason Juberg, University of Minnesota, Twin Cities**

**Stubborn Critics:**

***Poetaster*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and the Hermeneutics of Hypocrisy**

The ostensible purpose of Jonson's comical satires was to eradicate general vices by personifying them on stage and exposing them to ridicule. His last comical satire, *Poetaster*, boasting a “well erected confidence” (1. 74), takes specific aim at the envy of inferior poets and informers, who misinterpret texts by straining the “general scope and purpose of an author / To (their) particular and private (spleens)” (5.3.138-39). To fend off these detractors, Jonson enlists support from three sources of authority: his own unflappable merit, his audience's disciplined resistance to envy's temptations, and the cultural capital of Augustan Rome. Should any of these fail, the bulwark of sanctioned interpretation might collapse and enable envy's resurgence. The audience's deference depends on Jonson's ability to prove himself free of the same vices that in his eyes disqualify poetasters from earning legitimacy as poets.

I suggest that *Troilus and Cressida* dramatizes the inevitable degeneration of “confidence” into envy when the realities of theatrical interpretation strip Jonsonian

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satire of its pretense to authority. Instead of building a case for unimpeachable authorial merit, Shakespeare stresses the mutual culpability of author and audience, who connive to preserve hypocritical, overly subjective, and self-deluded interpretation of satirical drama. The invidious strain of satire that Jonson sought to contain here mutates into a more insidious limit on theatrical meaning. Whereas Jonson appeals to literary authority in order to protect his satirical play from Envy, Shakespeare illustrates how the conjunction of Jonsonian satire and live theatre empowers rather than eliminates envious interpretation. Ultimately, I argue, Shakespeare creates a form of theatrical satire that impugns *all* overconfident interpretive judgements, authorial and envious, for subscribing to incomplete truths.

**John Kunat, Sonoma State University**

**Moors, Gauls and Goths:  
Race and Ethnicity in Jonson and Shakespeare**

Studies of social issues often have a documentary orientation, reading literary works as data to determine what people in the Renaissance thought about matters such as race, ethnicity and sexuality. This paper takes a different approach, reading Ben Jonson's *Catiline* and William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* as imaginative engagements with the discourses of antiquity, in which early modern views of racial and ethnological geography are blended with those inherited from Rome and to a lesser extent Greece and other parts of the ancient world. I examine how Jonson and Shakespeare employed barbarian *dramatis personae* to comment upon the racial and ethnic politics of Rome, with an eye towards how the mixing of peoples in the classical era compares to what was occurring in their own. In particular, I investigate how the traditional tripartite division of the world into Asia, Africa and Europe tacitly provides a background against which the texts of both authors can be read.

**Katarzyna Lecky, Bucknell University**

**'Meere English Flocks':  
Pastoral Pollution in Jonson and Shakespeare**

This essay places the pastoral into conversation with the everyday to focus on Jonson's and Shakespeare's concordant uses of this tradition in *The Sad Shepherd* (1641) and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (1600). Although they were published forty years apart, both plays draw from the pastoral as the idealized site of an ordered natural society in ways that uncover its affinity with sovereign coercion. Each begins with a leader circumscribing the landscape and the people on it within strict timescales and emotional states; each explores how this prescriptive ideal is ultimately only able to establish the fiction of an organically unified society through unnatural force. At the same time, each play seizes on the potential of pastoral to redefine the nature of society by making visible pockets of an alternate mode of pastoral existence -- one which portrays human collectives in distinctively botanical ways. In an era when the "nature of nature" increasingly becomes the focus of study, Jonson and Shakespeare thus both work to recast the pastoral (a prime medium of political, religious, and social critique in early modern England) as the topography of the rhizomatic many rather than the central few, and the literary terrain of ontological change.

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**Margaret Maurer, Colgate University**

**The Shrew and the Silent Woman in Shakespeare and Jonson**

John Fletcher's *The Woman's Prize, or the Tamer Tamed* suggests that he saw a connection between Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* and Ben Jonson's *Epicoene, or the Silent Woman*. Pursuing this suggestion leads to a consideration of elements of Shakespeare's play that appear in *Epicoene* but are put to very different use. Shakespeare's *Shrew*'s silent woman, Bianca, is a character who originates in George Gascoigne's *The Supposes*, where the intrigue that surrounds her poses a legal problem that is resolved without the law, by physical evidence. Shakespeare complicates this intrigue considerably, ultimately leaving Bianca in a situation in which what she says or does not say might also create a dilemma in law. More fundamentally, however, Shakespeare's shrew play is presented metatheatrically, that is, as itself a play, with a plot that contrasts the silent woman with a shrew who is ultimately converted into a woman who is neither. The action that introduces this plot emphasizes that women on the early modern English stage are theatrical constructions involving a male player costumed and trained to impersonate a woman. Jonson's play involves the contrasting types of silent woman and shrew by having the silent woman Epicoene transform herself into a shrew when she is married. Epicoene's husband looks to the law to be released from the marriage, but his divorce is accomplished by the revelation that the person he married is a boy.

**Bernice M. Neal, York University**

**Niobe's Stone Translated:  
Speaking to Monarchs in Jonson's *Cynthia's Revels* and  
Shakespeare's *A Winter's Tale***

*Cynthia's Revels* and *A Winter's Tale* constellate issues of crime, punishment, and reformation between ruler and ruled with matters of materiality: flesh and stone, the inanimate and the animate. This paper looks at Jonson's and Shakespeare's use of statues, the improbable events of royal subjects translated in and/or out of stone onstage, in order to consider the fact of royal absolute power. It argues that Shakespeare was influenced by the affective dimensions of Jonson's use of the weeping stone Niobe to dramatize the implications of absolute royal power in *Cynthia's Revels*. In *A Winter's Tale*, Leontes' demonstrably grievous error in judging Hermione's chastity alone suggests the play's reservations over his royal prerogative. But it is telling that the King, not the statue, sheds what I argue are Niobe tears; like Jonson's, this play attends to the deleterious effects of absolute rule not only upon subjects but on the very monarch who wields it. On the other hand, a comparison of *A Winter's Tale* and its meditation on absolute monarchism with *Cynthia's Revels*, ostensibly a panegyric of Cynthia / Elizabeth written on the eve of the Jacobean regime, illuminates how covertly subversive is Jonson's interrogation of Elizabethan governance. Jonson's Niobe provides the poet with the means to glance critically at the divine and mythic representations crafted for and by the Queen that were a feature of her particular statecraft. *Cynthia's Revels* charges such a monarch with enabling a destructive politics of flattery and favour.

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**Stephen Orgel, Stanford University**

**Lascivious Grace**

Iago, as the deviser of plots and amoral manipulator of characters, has often been seen as a figure for Shakespeare the playwright. He can also be seen as Shakespeare's most Jonsonian creation, the sort of character who, in Jonson's hands, drives the plot toward comedy, in full complicity with the audience. The performing tradition has generally loaded the case against Iago, making him saturnine and unattractive, thereby rendering his persuasiveness throughout the play dramatically unsupported, at best a kind of mesmeric magic. But it was Jonson's genius to see the charm of a Mosca or Face as the enabling factor in successful villainy.

**Vimala C. Pasupathi, Hofstra University**

**“The Best Militia in th' World,” from *2 Henry IV* to *The New Inn***

My paper will be what is, I suspect, the only paper to date to bring Shakespeare's 1590s history play *2 Henry IV* into conversation with Jonson's 1620s comedy, *The New Inn*. My point of comparison, the militia and its primary manifestation in the muster, justifies this move, for both plays feature a type of county activity that was as familiar to early modern subjects as the work either playwright—if not more so. My consideration of these plays and their depictions of the muster is part of my (always-unfinished) book on English drama and the militia; in it, I discuss Shakespeare's scene at Gloucester as merely one of many theatrical portrayals of county administration. From 1558 to 1663, the militia was the only line of defense against foreign threats and, increasingly, at the center of problems of domestic governance. Although it is set in Lancastrian Gloucester, Shakespeare's muster scene depicts the militia of the Tudors, responding to the absenteeism and other behaviors that feature as admonishments in Elizabeth's proclamations and statutes passed in the reigns of her predecessors. Jonson's by contrast, is set in Barnet, concerned with distinct problems that emerge with Charles I's attempts to produce a “perfect militia” and find expression in Parliament's own admonishing Petition of Right. In *The New Inn*, Jonson shows his understanding of the militia's history in both the commentary preceding the play and in his depiction of the blustering Colonel Tiptoe and the Light Heart's “Militia below the Stairs.” Both plays allow us to see the stage as a forum for an enduring and evolving discussion on military obligation, and the militia as a significant factor in the development of regional and national identity within communities in and outside of the theaters.

**Nicole Sheriko, Rutgers University**

**Structuring Laughing Matter:  
Jonsonian Clowning and the Shakespearean Clown**

What is the Jonsonian clown? Clowning has long been acknowledged as vital to Renaissance dramatic performance, but most attempts to define its techniques and development are rooted exclusively in Shakespeare. This essay seeks to bridge the divide between the well-theorized Shakespearean clowns and the under-theorized Jonsonian clowns by considering the clowns of two contemporary plays—

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Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (likely written 1610 or 1611) and Jonson's *The Alchemist* (1610)—played by the same clown actor, Robert Armin. Considering the structural use of the same actor in two different parts not only what characterizes Jonson's use of clowning, but how it indexes larger historical shifts in the narrative role of clown characters and the theatrical value of the virtuoso clown actors who played them. Shakespeare's play, by creating spaces for improvised musical and verbal play, follows an earlier tradition traceable through his company clowns of Richard Tarlton, Will Kemp, and Robert Armin, of writing specifically for the talents of the professional clown actor. Jonson's play, in its tight integration of the clown into the main plot follows a growing trend in limiting or removing the clown's improvisational episodes and diffusing the clown's functions as social critic, transgressor, and source of humor across a greater number of characters. This reorientation of the dramatic clown function deemphasizes the celebrity and singular virtuoso skill of famous clown performers and suggests that the social locus of folly and its criticism is not so easily rooted out.