

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Fellowship in Shakespeare's Time
Stephen Guy-Bray, University of British Columbia
Nathan Szymanski, Kwantlen Polytechnic University

Professor Rob Carson

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Our conception of the self has been overwhelmingly shaped by ideas from the Enlightenment. However much we might try to think outside the box of neoliberalism, we nevertheless still tend to default toward thinking of ourselves as individuals, as thinking things, as rational free agents. We typically imagine atoms as if they were logically prior to molecules, trees as if they were logically prior to forests, and selves as if they were logically prior to communities, but of course this is merely one way of looking at things. Fifty years ago, structuralism encouraged us to turn these things another way around in our heads, although this is a lesson we seem to keep forgetting.

My current book project engages with the idea of intersubjectivity in the early modern period. The early modern subject wasn't born in a day, but instead emerged over more than a century, starting perhaps with Luther's re-imagining of the individual Protestant soul and taking a definite shape with Descartes's re-imagining of the self as a thinking thing. Shakespeare, of course, wrote his plays in the midst of the throes of this labour. In my book, I consider the ways in which the experience of community and collectivity might have differed for early modern audiences who were not yet so firmly wedded to the primacy of the individual subject as we are.

For this seminar on fellowship, I'm going to explore something new that might be interesting or might turn out to be a dead end: collective speech. By my count, in the Shakespeare canon there are 174 instances where a group of people delivers a speech in unison (i.e. speeches assigned to "ALL" or "BOTH" or "CITIZENS," and so on). We might observe that no one ever says "Jinx!" after this happens. My hope is that digging down into the phenomenon of collective speech in Shakespeare's plays will reveal something useful for us about early modern fellowship.

John Fletcher's "Bedfellows"

Dr. Huw Griffiths
University of Sydney

The practice of sharing beds has long been seen as a measure for historical difference in our understandings of gender and sexuality. Alan Bray, in his formative work on early modern same-sex relationships, described an early modern society, "where most people slept with someone else and where the rooms of a house led casually one into the other and servants mingled with their masters".¹ Bray outlines a culture in which to be

¹ Alan Bray, "Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England", *History Workshop* 29 (1990), 4.

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somebody's "bedfellow" included a range of social and sexual relationships that were not confined to heterosexual marriage.

John Aubrey describes John Fletcher's living arrangements with Francis Beaumont, sharing clothes and sleeping "with one wench between them", and Fletcher shares his grave with Philip Massinger, another of his writing partners. It would appear as if Fletcher exemplifies both the promiscuous sociability and the queer potential of early modern "bedfellowship". And "bedfellow" is a word that does appear relatively often in his works, both sole-authored and collaborative.

But, when the word "bedfellow" is used in plays associated with Fletcher, it almost always refers to one half of a heterosexual couple. In this paper, I want to make some headway with a philological investigation into uses of the word, "bedfellow", in plays associated with Fletcher. In doing so, I take seriously our seminar title's other key phrase: "in Shakespeare's time". Fletcherian drama played a pivotal role in the transformation of socio-sexual mores not only during the years in which his plays were first written, but also during the longer early modern period when they were adapted by his successors.

I intend the work for this paper to be a first step in plotting the uses of "bedfellow" against the backdrop of a variegated history of gender and sexuality.

The Fellowship of Dangerous Seeds in the
Querelle Des Femmes* and Spenser's *The Faerie Queene

Dr. Megan Herrold
University of Southern California

In this paper, I will explore the ways early modern writers—and specifically women writers in the *querelle des femmes* tradition and also Spenser—grapple with conventional misogyny as they imagine the possibility to build and encourage the growth of communities of women. Specifically, I'm interested in the gendered and community-building implications of their use of the word "seed/seede" as they envision the radical project of women's collectivization. While we might tend to associate the word "seed" most readily with husbandry and gardening tracts in the period, it also registers more widely, including its connection to the Parable of the Sower—a story referenced widely in printed materials of the time that urges a reciprocal openness and concord between parties (sower and soil) in order for the Word to flourish and bring about Christian community—and its associations with the word "seminary," the Latin for "seed-plot," which can mean both the ground in which plants are sown for eventual transplantation and a school for the training of priests for the priesthood. And while we might more readily associate the reproductive capacities denoted in the words "seminary" and "seed" with maleness, "seed" was also the gender-neutral term early moderns heard in God's promise in Genesis 3.15 to put enmity between Adam and "the woman, between thy seed and her seed." But what I'm especially interested in is how women—specifically Jane

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Anger and Ester Sovernam—also use the term to register a community of women: Anger refers to anger (the emotion and herself) as a “seed” she plants in her readers that they might, also in anger, reap; and Sovernam literally dubs herself a “sower,” who, “neither Maide, Wife nor Widdowe, yet really all,” is not only “therefore experienced to defend” but also, I would add, unite—“all” women.

To highlight the way these women writers use the word as they build communities, I want to pit their iterations of “seed” against Spenser’s more troubling use of the term in *The Faerie Queene* Book V; there, he calls the massacred bodies of Irish people and the spilled blood of a decapitated Amazonian Queen and her followers as the “seeds” for England’s proper colonial future. It is my contention that the gendered implications of the word “seed” therefore help us think through the period’s interest in the power of female community-formation—as well as its dangers.

**The Double Guard:
Duplication and Redundancy in *The Spanish Tragedy***

Professor Kimberly Huth
California State University, Dominguez Hills

Repetition and imitation have long been recognized as motifs in early modern English revenge tragedy. This paper examines the structural functioning of such duplication in the conceptual economy of *The Spanish Tragedy* and the resulting redundancy of young male characters and their labor in Kyd’s play. The first on-stage appearance of the (living) younger generation of males introduces audiences to the problematic duplication of their roles in the martial and courtly economies of Spain: Horatio and Lorenzo enter holding Balthazar in a “double guard,” which makes the King “doubt” who most deserves reward (1.2.123, 152). This triad of male characters acts, as Sedgwick has theorized of erotic triangles, as a means “by which individuals negotiate with their societies for empowerment,” yet it is only a starting point for such negotiations. As the action of the play develops, this triangulation is further complicated when Balthazar and Horatio become rivals for the love of Bel-Imperia. Balthazar’s ascension from the feminized and passive position of prisoner of war to suitor favored by Bel-Imperia’s father is aided by his social and courtly shift, at the decree of the King, to royal guest. Kyd’s play chronicles continual shifting in the structural positions available for young men to occupy—including murderer and victim within the economy of vengeance that comes to consume the play. Though homosocial similarity is achieved through a variety of methods in revenge drama—imitation, competition, remembrance, repayment—*The Spanish Tragedy* meditates on the structural redundancy of young men and its destructive consequences.

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**Fellowship as Ritual in the Late Elizabethan Court:
 Emotion in the Essex Circle**

Dr. Bradley Irish
Arizona State University

This paper adopts a sociological lens to consider the mechanics of fellowship in late Elizabethan England. Drawing on Randall Collins's interaction ritual theory—which argues broadly that “culture is generated by...[ritualized] patterns of social interaction”—I argue that the social dynamics of the Elizabethan court can be fruitfully viewed as a series of ritual engagements—engagements that generate solidarity among participants. To test this claim, I consider the case of the Earl of Essex's infamous circle—a group of individuals who forged a collective identity within the factional environment of the late Elizabethan court. I demonstrate how the components of Collins's interaction ritual model can be exemplified by the actions of the Essex circle, and how fellowship was created through the mutual participation in ritual acts. Building upon my prior work on the affective dynamics of the Essex circle, I pay particular attention to the mechanics of emotion in this process—for it is collective emotion, in Collins's theory, that is the glue of solidarity. Fellowship is a kind of emotional relation, and I argue that its generation can be usefully considered in terms of social ritual.

**From a Competition of Mourning to a Community of Sorrow:
 The Improbable Alliance of Women and Melancholic Solidarity in *Richard III***

Professor Tai-Won Kim
Sogang University

Since Madonne M. Miner's trailblazing essay in *The Woman's Part* (1983), quite a few feminist critics—including Phyllis Rackin (1985), Nina Levine (1998), Patricia Phillippy (2002), Katherine Goodland (2006)—have persuasively argued that the mourning women play a crucial role in helping the order get restored and thus gain a kind of political agency. While challenging such a feminist recuperation of (dis)empowered women, Mario DiGangi (2016) contests that “that the Queen and the Duchess share Richard's self-serving understandings of rhetorical power, and that they deploy the rhetoric of motherhood to enhance their own social and political status in a time of crisis” (429). DiGangi claims that the women are after all not much different from Richard in their pursuit of power as well as rhetorical abuse. While acknowledging that the women are often competitive in lamenting their loss of status and power and that they are not dissimilar to Richard in rhetoric, I believe DiGangi does not pay enough attention to the play's changing representations of women characters in terms of their relations to each other. The play stages a gradual formation of community among the competitive elite women through the shared experience of mourning, cursing, losing, and grieving. The women begin to communicate with each other, feel sympathy towards the others' loss and pain, and thus develop a sense of solidarity. The female alliance certainly offers an

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alternative perspective to Richard's frequent invocation of friendship—a new kind of fellowship, a fellowship based upon the shared experience of sorrow. As Christina Luckyj & Niamh O'Leary (2017) show, “female alliances, much like male friendship discourse, had political meaning in early modern England” and served as “a powerful emblem of political critique” (8). As pitted against the friendship of Richard and his cohorts who tend to repeatedly betray, exploit, and ridicule its humanist ideal, the female alliance in *Richard III* points to the limit case of melancholic solidarity that a shared experience lends itself to a symbolic front of resistance without producing a sense of belongingness or a firm ground of identity.

The variety and vulnerability of good fellowship

Professor Rebecca Lemon
University of Southern California

This paper takes up the seminar's invitation to study applications of the word “fellowship” by investigating the term's appearance in cultural conversations on faith and festivity. If this focus does not entirely resonate with the seminar's investigation of fellowship and sexualities, my hope is that querying this alternate use of fellowship might provoke discussion about the term's peculiar range. Fellowship represents, in some contexts, the ritualistic, medieval festivity familiar from a figure like Robin Goodfellow. In other contexts, fellowship signifies knights and soldiers returning from battle: as Christine de Pisan notes, it is the “good felawshyp of men of armes.” Or fellowship designates the tavern societies, such as the one at the Mermaid Tavern visited by Ben Jonson; as Richard Brome writes in “The Club,” “Let the glasse still run its round / And each *good-fellow* keep his ground.” Finally, fellowship announces the unity of the godly within Jesus. To the godly, among them Joseph Bentham, fellowship designates the “incomparable good fellowship with all true believers, the Father, and his Sonne Jesus Christ.” In each of these cases, good fellowship signals men gathered together for festivity in the face of something that might threaten them: the end of the holiday, in the case of the fellowship built around the ritual calendar; the end of life, in the case of soldiers who survived battle; the end of days for those godly worshippers celebrating a community of the elect; or the end of Anglo-Catholic ritual and custom, in the case of tavern societies threatened by the godly reformers. And this danger to good fellowship is posited to come from without. Thus invocations of good fellowship seem predicated on their dialogue with a conflicting force, once that seeks to destroy conviviality. As a result, good fellowship has an elegiac quality, an awareness of its own potential demise. This paper investigates, then, fellowship's range within cultural debates about ritual, faith, and custom, while also exploring its link to loss and, perhaps surprisingly, to the rhetorical slight of hand known as *paradiastole*. As Surrey wryly laments in “Myne owne John Poins,” he proves unable, “with nearest virtue, ay to cloke the vice,” namely “As dronkenness good fellowship to call.”

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The Politics of Female Friendship in Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*

Dr. Christina Luckyj
Dalhousie University

Mary Wroth's *Love's Victory*, observes Barbara Lewalski, imagines a "community in which friends aid, console, and sacrifice themselves for one another." In a dangerous world ruled (in the Penshurst manuscript) by the tyrannical Venus and Cupid and contaminated by the Iago-like villain Arcas, the play represents both male and female same-sex friendships as means of negotiating conflict. Yet though the "band of friendship" of the "long-held love" (2.2.5) between male shepherds Philisses and Lissius is initially invoked as code for anti-tyrannical politics, its impact on the plot is negligible and its licensing of the trade in women open to critique. By contrast, the friendship between shepherdesses Silvesta and Musella actively thwarts tyranny when Silvesta's allegiance to Diana works to support Musella's insistence on marital consent. Unlike Elizabeth Cary, whose *Mariam* represents male friendship and female chastity as alternate correctives to tyranny, Wroth rejects both the implicit misogyny of the former and the cloistered exclusivity of the latter. *Love's Victory* is frequently discussed as a thinly veiled autobiographical work embellished with multiple layers of allusion to the Sidney family. But read against the backdrop of the urgent crisis unfolding in Bohemia, Wroth's representation of friendship between chaste Silvesta and constant Musella becomes a call to Elizabethan-style military intervention in the Jacobean crisis of 1618-20. Like Philisses and Musella, Frederick and Elizabeth, whose 1613 union had been widely celebrated as the central hope of international Protestantism, faced both a hostile takeover (the Hapsburg army) and the obstruction of a father's will (King James's) in their attempt to honour the consensual political union between the Bohemians and their elected monarch. Reviving Spenserian pastoral modes of anti-court critique, the play celebrates a female alliance that unites Queen Elizabeth's brand of political chastity with her namesake's marital commitment to political reform.

Alienation in Sonneteering Fellowships

Dr. Kris McAbee
University of Arkansas, Little Rock

This essay will consider the tensions between the social structures created by sonneteers and the resultant alienation of the sonneteer persona in reaction to those fellowships. I argue that the sonneteer persona—the speaking character created by the lyrics themselves—appears outside of sonnet sequences proper to perpetuate a self-alienating stance in the very social world their poems help create. Specifically, I examine Barnabe Barnes' participation in sonnet culture through both his odd and genre-bending sequence *Parthenophil and Parthenophe* and also in his use of these sonneteering characters outside of his sequence about them. Barnes makes use of the sonneteer as character type in his contribution to *Pierce's Supererogation*, Gabriel Harvey's 1593 rebuttal to the

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recent insults of Thomas Nashe's *Strange News*. Barnes supplies three sonnets for Harvey's text, attributed to Barnes himself, Parthenophil, and Parthenophe, respectively. What most clearly delineates the powerful nature of the sonneteer character as an alienated but social figure, however, is not simply Barnes's reference to those precedents who have contributed to the formation of the character, but, moreover, his subsequent discussion of his own characters, Parthenophil and Parthenophe, as though they were not simply fictional but, rather, significant entities within this culture. This triad of sonnets proves that early modern readership accounted for a clear distinction between the voices of different sonneteering characters and that of the sonnet writers. Barnabe Barnes's participation in the craze for sonnets provides unique perspective on the constraining nature of the Petrarchan conventions and the poetic fellowships of sonnet culture. While Barnes's sequence breaks free of the unconsummated desire of the sonnets proper, his female character of Parthenophe provides a much more radical break, not simply by acquiescing to her lover's wishes, but rather by providing a powerful example of not the flatly rejecting passive object, but of the resistant thinking subject who rejects Parthenophil, not because convention would have her do so, but, rather, on her own poetic terms.

**“But never doubt I love”:
 Faith and False Friends in Hamlet**

Ms. Jennifer E. Nicholson
University of Sydney

Hamlet and Horatio's friendship is both perfect and false because it is predicated on doubt. Typical early modern friendship emphasises sameness and a kind of “perfect friendship” where “each gives himself so completely to his friend that he has nothing left”.² However, within friendship, false amity or flattery can foster doubt. As Laurie Shannon argues, “flattery presents an epistemological dilemma for friendship practice” because “mere simulation can look a lot like the similitude friendship celebrates”.³ Horatio is the prince's only true confidante, but Hamlet's soliloquies reveal his belief that he lacks perfect friendship. In speaking to perhaps-absent listeners (God, Old Hamlet, and the play's audience) instead of Horatio, Hamlet indicates that his relationship with Horatio is mediated by humanist values that preclude him from perfect sameness. The prince therefore does not reciprocate, but Horatio's own stalwart trust in Hamlet wavers only in the face of eschatological doubt. In turn, the audience's faith in these characters and others draws together a relationship between faith and doubt that permeates three kinds of faith: friendship, Christian koinonia, and the contract of trust between audience and actors. The similitude and doubt of early modern friendship are also essential to faith

² Michel de Montaigne, “De l'Amitié,” in *Les essais de Montaigne d'après l'exemplaire de Bordeaux*, eds. Pierre Villey and Verdun-Louis Saulnier (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 2004), 191. Original: “chacun se donne si entier à son ami, qu'il ne lui reste rien à départir ailleurs”.

³ Laurie Shannon, *Sovereign Amity: Figures of Friendship in Shakespearean Contexts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002), 47.

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(which is, of course, an antidote to doubt). All three are essential for reading fellowship in Hamlet.

**“Married Chastitie”:
 Asexual Love in “The Phoenix and Turtle”**

Mx. Ashley O'Mara
Syracuse University

According to legend, the phoenix reproduces itself asexually in the biological sense, without a partner and without increasing its population. But the phoenix of Shakespeare's "The Phoenix and Turtle" is neither solitary, nor does she show any sign of regeneration after she and her beloved turtledove are consumed in flame. These two elements of the poem, the companionship and apparent death of the phoenix, together represent a paradigmatic shift in the myth, one far more significant than Robert Chester's sexualization of the phoenix in the first poem of *Love's Martyr*.⁴ My paper takes direction from James Bednarz's argument that Shakespeare "was intrigued by the possibility of adapting the psychological dynamic of Trinitarian paradox to questions of human desire."⁵ Rejecting the strain of interpretation that reads the poem as an allegory for Catholic martyrs, Bednarz argues that Shakespeare finds his inspiration in Protestant tradition, but he does so only by dismissing substantial allusions to Catholic tradition⁶ — especially the valuation of celibacy inside and outside of marriage. By discounting the importance of chastity both in the poem and in the rhetoric of religious controversy in the period, Bednarz misses something essential about the relationship of the poem's vision of spiritual love to sexuality; or, more accurately, its relationship to asexuality. In order to more fully appreciate the poem's argument about affectionate fellowship, I reintroduce two possibilities that Bednarz rejects. The first is that Catholic notions of consecrated chastity are represented in the titular birds' "married Chastitie" (line 61); the second is that this purposeful sexual abstinence is essential to understanding the poem's radical endorsement of a paradigm of asexual love that runs counter to the expectations and values of Protestant heterosexual marriage culture. Despite their carnal refusal, the birds' platonic love is not Platonic because it remains corporeal in their consubstantial relationship.

⁴ James P. Bednarz, "The Mystery of the Phoenix and Turtle," in *Shakespeare and the Truth of Love: The Mystery of "The Phoenix and Turtle,"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31.

⁵ Bednarz, "Incorporate Selves: Shakespeare's Mythmaking," in *Shakespeare and the Truth of Love: The Mystery of "The Phoenix and Turtle,"* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 109.

⁶ Bednarz, "Mystery," 31; and "Selves," 115. See also F.W. Brownlow, "Shakespeare and the Truth of Love: The Mystery of 'The Phoenix and Turtle,'" *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2: 715.

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Fellowship and Protestant Nonconformity in Early Modern Britain

Dr. Alison Searle
University of Leeds

Protestant nonconformists offer a distinctive contribution to our understanding of fellowship in early modern Britain through their focus on its vertical dimension (in relation to God, particularly the person of Christ), and in the way their theological commitment to the church as the Body of Christ reshapes the horizontal dimension of fellowship (in relation to other humans) partially reconfiguring traditional social and hierarchical distinctions between men and women on the basis of gender or class and, to some extent, erasing the boundaries between individual and corporate entities. Using the letters of the Scottish Covenanter, Samuel Rutherford (c. 1600- 1661), as a case study, I will consider how this triangulation between the personal, transcendent and corporate, with its deliberate intermingling of the spiritual and corporeal, reshapes and creates models of desire, competition and kinship between men and women, nonconformist communities and national churches (Scottish, Irish and English).

The biblical and baroque emotional affect that characterises Rutherford's epistolary prose is also deeply political. His letters invite us to examine the etymologies, emotions, histories and practices that constitute fellowship in nonconformist communities and networks. This paper will analyse how, and in what ways, fellowship intersects with ideas of friendship, companionship and desire within these communities, as materialised in the genre of the letter. It will also assess how gender continues to be a significant factor shaping experiences and practices of fellowship within nonconformist religious communities. Finally, the paper will trace how Rutherford's radical eschatological vision disrupts political temporalities, intimately shaping ideas of likeness and difference that were central to the group identity of like-minded Protestant nonconformists, energising a vertically-inspired concept of fellowship that disrupted other hierarchical ways of organising people in early modern Britain.

Queer Fellowship in *Coriolanus*

Dr. James W. Stone
American University

In 4.5 of *Coriolanus*, instead of being angry to see his Roman enemy before him, Aufidius offers surprisingly what looks like a long epideictic and homoerotic speech addressed to Coriolanus, professing that the sight of him "more dances my rapt heart / Than when I first my wedded mistress saw / Bestride my threshold" (118-20). Male fellowship and male erotic bonds displace heterosexual marriage; the martial supplants the marital bond (it seems), the two bonds fusing in the fantasy of a playfully erotic combat-union. Caius Martius is here celebrated as Eros, worlds apart from the cold and isolated fighting cyborg that won him initially his agnomen "Coriolanus" (when he

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defeated Aufidius's nation). From the 1980's onwards, feminist criticism has made much of Coriolanus's capitulation to his mother and family in the final act of the play. Why must the potentialities of gay fellowship, mimetic desire and emulation, and amorous mock-combat in act 4 cede to the demands of the heterosexual family in act 5? The climax, when the homosocial gang of Aufidius and his male companions in arms murders Coriolanus, reverses the potential fellowship that had been held out as lure. As so often in Shakespeare's comedies, whose genre demands that incipient lesbian bonds must be broken to make way for compulsory heterosexual marriage, so in this classical tragedy the death-driving telos insists that enemies who verge on erotic reconciliation in defiance of familial and nationalistic exigencies must consummate their relationship in violence and death.

The Template:

Amicitia Perfecta* and Non-normative Friendships in *Twelfth Night

Dr. Robert Stretter
Providence College

In this essay, I am interested in a very narrow type of friendship – idealized male friendship on the classical model – that has broad applications in Renaissance drama. From Aristotle to Montaigne, friendship theorists insisted that *amicitia perfecta* (Cicero's term) could create "one soul" or "another self" of two noble men who love each other for the sake of virtue. Shakespeare plays with the conventions of *amicitia perfecta* throughout his dramatic career, from *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the start to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* at the end, as well as in his sonnets. Never does he take the grand claims of virtuous friendship seriously on their own terms – i.e., no sex, no women, no problems. Instead, I argue, he uses the best part of *amicitia perfecta*, the notion of a fellowship of equals so complete as to be actual union, as a template for imagining non-normative forms of friendship -- or, alternatively, as a way to expand what counts as ideal friendship.

In the case of *Twelfth Night*, Shakespeare draws on the conventions of ideal male friendship to provide a model for precisely the types of relationships that authorities on friendship traditionally excluded, namely marriage and homosexual relationships. My analysis will focus on Viola/Cesario's enactment of both maleness and friendship with Orsino, and on Antonio's love for Sebastian. Despite the fact that the play's conclusion marginalizes Antonio and stops short of offering real marital equality to Viola, Shakespeare gestures toward a world in which men and women can be friends and lovers in any configuration.

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Bonding in *Hamlet*

Professor Richard Strier
University of Chicago

My paper will examine the rich roster of male-male relations in the play. The focus on the hero and his psyche has occluded this. The play seems to me deeply interested in male-male horizontal relationships -- in friendship but also in male fellowship, which is not entirely the same as friendship, though not, of course, unrelated to it. Horatio is Hamlet's special friend, the friend of his adulthood or late adolescence -- his time at Wittenberg -- and the one he singles out -- for quite odd reasons that I will put some pressure on -- as especially valuable to him. But Hamlet has other males of his generation to whom he does or has felt close. He addresses Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, whom he has known since childhood, as "dear friends," and "conjures" them "by the rights of our fellowship" to speak truthfully and frankly to him. My paper will take this relationship seriously, and not dismiss it out of hand as superficial. It will think about the word "love" in this relationship, and not simply to ironize it. Similarly, a good deal of my paper will explore Hamlet's relation to Laertes, another young aristocrat whom Hamlet has, presumably, known since childhood. It will examine in some detail what Hamlet says about their relationship, and how he acts in relation to it. Again the word "love" comes, surprisingly, into the picture.

Guendolen's Boys: Richard Barnfield, Penelope Rich and the politics of 1590s homoerotic verse

Dr. Will Tosh
Shakespeare's Globe

The Affectionate Shepherd (containing 'The Teares of an affectionate Shepheard sicke for Love', 'The Shepherds Content', 'The Complaint of Chastitie' and 'Hellens Rape') was published in 1594, Richard Barnfield's first (or possibly second) major poetic work. Raising eyebrows in its own time, *The Affectionate Shepherd's* unabashed homoeroticism -- expressed in 'allusions of an equivocal tendency', as one eighteenth-century critic put it -- confined Barnfield's poetry to the margins for much of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Even today he is little known, and his verses are not available in an accessible collected edition.

Part of a larger project aimed at re-introducing Barnfield to a wider readership, this paper asks new questions about the patronage circle to which Barnfield appealed in 1594 as a young poet of twenty years old. *The Affectionate Shepherd* was dedicated to Penelope Rich, sister of Robert Devereux, earl of Essex, and a significant late Elizabethan politician in her own right. More than one critic has seen in 'The Teares of an affectionate Shepheard' and 'The Shepherds Content' an explicit portrayal of the real-life

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relationships among Rich (allegedly the poems' 'Guendolen'), her estranged husband Richard Rich, her lover Charles Blount and her late wooer Philip Sidney, despite the implausibility of such a direct parallel. My concern here is with Rich's wider literary and political clientage in the 1590s, which included figures such as Francis and Anthony Bacon, the Spanish defector Antonio Pérez, Michael Drayton and – through Henry Wriothesely, earl of Southampton – William Shakespeare: all men who celebrated eroticised male fellowship in their epistolary and literary productions. This paper seeks to put Barnfield's poetry in the context of the tastes of a cultural and political circle that was peculiarly open to, in the words of Kenneth Borris, 'the possibilities of homoerotic desires'.