

2019 Seminar Abstracts: Shakespeare and “Minor” Dramatists
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“Heywood’s *Ages* and *The Tempest*”

The leaders of our seminar have stated that Heywood is not a minor dramatist, but I think he would be so viewed by many Shakespeare scholars. In any case I hope this paper will contribute the main drift of the seminar, which I take to be a reexamination of Shakespeare’s participation in what Janet Clare calls the “stage traffic” among the ordinary working playwrights of the period, a participation that devotees of Shakespeare have tended to ignore. Shakespeare’s company collaborated with Heywood’s in the production of some of the plays in the *Ages* series. Shakespeare was writing *The Tempest* at about the same time, and seems to have taken advantage of this contact to access some of the costumes and flying technology of the Queen’s Men. He also took a few ideas from these plays and perhaps relied on audience familiarity with *The Silver Age* to simplify the presentation of the masque. But *The Tempest* is so much the opposite of Heywood’s grandiose works that one suspects that Shakespeare’s main response to them was one of repugnance. *The Tempest*’s modest compass and limited action contrast with sprawling episodic structure of the *Ages*. More significantly, the rather strict moral tone of *The Tempest* contrasts with the pagan license of the *Ages*. Viewed against the backdrop of the *Ages*, *The Tempest* is revealed to be a remarkably Christian play, a fact that would have been quite apparent to its original audiences.

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“John Marston and the Revolution at Paul’s Playhouse (1599-1601)”

More than any significant work of the English Renaissance, John Marston’s drama has been derided by unsympathetic modern critics as embarrassingly incompetent. In reviewing H. Harvey Wood’s edition of *The Plays of John Marston*, for instance, T.S. Eliot expressed “bewilderment, that anyone could write plays so bad and that plays so bad could be preserved and reprinted.” Seeking to rescue Marston’s reputation from Eliot’s critique, Anthony Caputi, R. A. Foakes, and Philip Finkelpearl developed an influential answer to Eliot’s assessment. Foakes, representatively, argued that Marston’s “grand speeches are undermined by bathos or parody, and spring from no developed emotional situation, so that we are not moved by them, and do not take them seriously.” But in characterizing Marston’s approach as being entirely satiric, this defense ignores the manner in which the four or five plays Marston wrote for production by the Children of Paul’s between 1599 and 1601 consistently extend the boundaries of late Elizabethan drama in a more comprehensive fashion by creating a kind of “mingle-mangle” drama that occasionally attempted to capture a mode of linguistic sublimity. The advantage of acknowledging hyperbolic excess in Marston’s drama is that it ultimately leads to a more precise evaluation of his “mongrel” poetics than is possible by reducing his work to one-dimensional parody. It allows us to come to terms with Marston’s wider field of poetic aspiration. Doing so reveals a writer who, in Shakespeare’s shadow, replaced his former poetic persona, “W. Kinsayder,” the snarling verse satirist, with a more accommodating image of himself, in drama, as “the new Poet Mellidus.” This essay indicates

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how Marston’s re-naming of himself at Paul’s provides evidence of how he re-defined himself and redirected his work as a playwright.

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“Shakespeare and Nashe”

Thomas Nashe (1567-c.1601) was a minor, if celebrated, dramatist. The only sole-authored play of his that survives is *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* (1592). However, we know he collaborated with Ben Jonson on the notorious satire *The Isle of Dogs* (1597), now lost. Nashe’s name also appears alongside Marlowe’s on the title page of *Dido Queen of Carthage* (printed 1594).

It seems unlikely that this short list of Nashe’s work for the theatre is complete or accurate. At various times modern scholars have suggested, for instance, that Nashe collaborated on *I Henry VI*, *Edward III*, *A Knack to Know a Knave* and *Dr Faustus*, and that he did not in fact have any hand in *Dido*. This seems an obvious case for quantitative work. Yet confirming Nashe’s dramatic canon and potentially extending it on internal, stylistic grounds is made difficult by the slenderness of Nashe’s confirmed dramatic canon.

In this paper I will present the results of a new attempt to detect Nashe’s hand in *I Henry VI* in particular. I will use *Summer’s Last Will and Testament* not to form a profile of Nashe’s dramatic writing but as a check on whether a classifier based on Shakespearean drama and Nashe prose is reliable in attributing drama samples to and away from Nashe. I will use four separate methods, based on word frequencies. Those methods which are successful in these trials in distinguishing Nashe from Shakespeare will be applied to rolling 2,000 word segments of *I Henry VI*.

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“School Plays and the Gendering of Learning”

This paper proposes to examine three Tudor dramas written for schoolboy performance—John Redford’s *Wit and Science*, Thomas Ingelend’s *The Disobedient Child*, and the anonymous *Nice Wanton*—to think about the role of gender in the early modern schoolroom. Each of these plays features anachronistic educated female students in the classroom, raising questions about the ways in which humanist pedagogy invited schoolboys to understand the gendering of learning and knowledge. Thinking of these plays in relation to Shakespeare allows us to see the ways in which his young educated female characters are sites of reflection on the humanist pedagogical project under which he was trained. These “minor dramatists”—often schoolmasters themselves—set a framework for thinking about the complex relationship between gender, education, and speech that is echoed in plays like Shakespeare’s *Taming of the Shrew*. Paying attention to these marginalized voices, and the role played by drama in the early modern classroom more generally, complicates and enhances our understanding of the early modern humanist pedagogical project.

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“Th’equivocation of the fiend that lies like truth’: Equivocation and Poison in *Macbeth* and *The Devil’s Charter*”

It is perhaps no great tragedy that only one play by Barnabe Barnes survives. First performed for King James in 1607, *The Devil’s Charter*, a play of ‘blood and tragedy, murder, foul incest and hypocrisy,’ chronicles the fall of the Borgia family, was written to capitalize on the anti-Catholic sentiment following the Gunpowder Plot. At first glance, Barnes’s play appears to be nothing more than the clumsy offspring of *Macbeth*, possessing all of the melodrama and none of the sophistication. Yet a comparison of the two plays yields interesting results. *The Devil’s Charter* and *Macbeth* both connect gunpowder with poison, poison with equivocation, equivocation with the devil, and the devil with poison. This commingling of poison, deception, fire, the devil, and Catholicism are subtle in *Macbeth*, overt in *The Devil’s Charter*, and unmistakable when both texts are read side by side.

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“Shakespeare as minor dramatist”

At some point in the 1580s, Shakespeare began an acting and writing career so obscure it can not now be reconstructed. Philip Henslowe's 'diary' records the authorial activities of a range of playwrights from 1590 to 1604, in which Shakespeare is conspicuous by his absence, despite the fact that later dramatists who inherited his role as resident playwright habitually worked for other companies too, and despite scholarly suspicions that Shakespeare may have done exactly that by having a (minor) role in the revision of *Sir Thomas More*. In 1595, *Lochrine* became the first play to claim somebody called 'W.S.' as a creative contributor, three years before Shakespeare's full name appeared on a play title page. In 1609, Shakespeare's *Sonnets* were published in an edition which appeared to receive little attention. And across these years, only around half of Shakespeare's surviving output went into print in single-play editions, and many of these never went into a second edition. If book historians often describe a book appearing in 'only' one edition as a 'failure', what does this say about the roughly 50% of Shakespeare's surviving plays that were never printed in stand-alone editions at all?

Meanwhile Shakespeare could seem a problematic figure to his contemporaries. A 1592 pamphlet attacked the author not only as minor but as *a* minor, an inconvenient, jumped up, terrible, bombastic youngster. John Fletcher, Ben Jonson and Thomas Middleton rewrote, ridiculed or critiqued Shakespeare's work in terms that suggest they found it dated and unsatisfactory. Whilst these literary heavyweights seem to have had an uneasy relationship with Shakespeare, it is noticeable that those willing to state unqualified approval of at least some of his work, such as Francis Meres or Gabriel Harvey, tended to be at the periphery of literary culture. In 1623, that most significant of years for Shakespeareans, a Revels Office document refers to an already 'olde playe called *Winters Tale*'. The play was only 12 years old, and about to go into print for the first time.

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Literary scholarship treats many of these moments as anomalies in Shakespeare's career. This paper asks what happens if we instead privilege them as windows into Shakespeare as minor and marginal dramatist.

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“Shakespeare and Heywood: Repetitions and Iterations”

My contribution to our seminar will explore moments of potential influence between *Hamlet* and *A Woman Killed with Kindness*. As scholars have long demonstrated, Heywood had a sustained and career-long indebtedness to the works of Shakespeare. Clare Smout and Douglas Arrell push even harder at our assumptions about professional borrowings from one playwright (and one company) to another by arguing that the influence was reciprocal. Smout finds evidence of Shakespeare borrowing from the subplot of *Woman Killed* in his treatment of Isabella and Claudio in *Measure for Measure*, and Arrell locates in Hector's challenge to the Greeks in *Troilus and Cressida*, Heywood's handling of *The Iliad* in his *Age* plays. My essay will focus on the main plot of *Woman Killed*. Much has been written about this plot in relation to *Othello* and “domestic tragedy”, but I am not aware of any scholarship noting the links to *Hamlet*. I'll focus primarily on Scene 6 (the seduction scene), and also reach into Scene 13 (Frankford discovering the lovers in bed). My argument is that Claudius lies somewhere behind Heywood's characterization of Wendoll, and that Heywood's structuring of Scene 6 before Anne Frankford's entrance is partly indebted to *Hamlet*'s prayer scene (3.3). The borrowing must be from Shakespeare to Heywood due to the reasonably certain dates of the plays, but given the proximity of the plays' dates it perhaps seems especially likely that Heywood might have *Hamlet* in his mind when he turned to *Woman Killed*. The potential link interests me because the seduction scene in *Woman Killed* is a sticking-point for so many readers, who argue the scene is unconvincing and Mistress Frankford lacks motivation for adultery. My idea is that looking at the Wendoll-Anne Frankford-Frankford triangulation through the lens of the Claudius-Gertrude-Hamlet triangulation might prove interpretively rich.

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“Authorless Plays, 1592-1594”

Theater historians have little evidence but many opinions on the stage history of plays in playlists in Henslowe's *Diary*, 1592-4. A few of these plays can be found in the repertory of companies post-June 1594, but the majority disappear from theater records. For the most part, their authors are nameless. In this commentary, I focus on the prodigality of the repertory system in its discard of commercial material and the implications (if any) of this circumstance for questions of authorship.

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“The Canon of William Haughton’s Works, such as it is -- or could be”

This seminar paper will outline a study that has been in progress since the mid 1980s. Without the evidence of Henslowe’s Diary we would have no clue that William Haughton was even a playwright, let alone what plays he wrote. But perhaps Haughton is not as minor as we think.

His traditional canon consists of *Englishmen for my Money*, *Grim the Collier of Croydon*, *Patient Grissell*, and *Lust’s Dominion*, the latter two being collaborations with Dekker and others. With the help of these and some more marginal Henslowe material we can arrive at an estimate of his style and preferences.

Three more plays can then be assigned to Haughton, although much of the work to provide acceptable statistical, linguistic and literary arguments for these remains to be done: *The Wit of a Woman*, *Wily Beguiled* (part?), and *The Merry Devil of Edmonton* (part?). The first two have been mostly ignored by theatre historians, although they recently have been attributed to Haughton by another scholar working independently. *Merry Devil* has earned some attention but mostly because it was acted by Shakespeare’s company and was once attributed to him. There are also up to half a dozen other plays that may reward further study for possible Haughton involvement, including another King’s Men’s play.

These attributions can help shed light on Haughton’s work for other companies beside the Admiral’s, his skill in domestic tragedy, his attitudes towards women and marriage, as well as his influence on several later playwrights.

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“Munday, Chettle, Davenport and the ‘Minor’ Intrigues of King John”

This essay examines the contributions of “minor” dramatists to the early modern stage tradition representing the reign of King John: Anthony Munday, with additions by Henry Chettle, in *The Downfall* and *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon* (c. 1598), and Robert Davenport in *King John and Matilda* (c. 1628-34). As has long been noted, Davenport’s play draws heavily on the tragedy of Matilda Fitzwater embedded in Munday’s *The Death of Robert, Earl of Huntingdon*; in both plays John lusts for and attempts to seduce or coerce Matilda, and in defeat orders her poisoned. While seemingly invented in the context of 16th-century popular romances on Robin Hood, later identified by Munday with the earl of Huntingdon, John’s lust for Matilda serves in these plays as an emblem of the dangers of arbitrary rule and disregard for traditional English aristocratic liberties, an eroticization of the politics of Magna Charta. These plots point to the dominant trend of translating politics into eros taken by historical dramatists writing after Shakespeare. This essay considers how political absolutism is critiqued here through the victimization of baronial women and children, including John’s poisoning of Matilda and famishing of Lady

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Bruce and her child, resulting graphic spectacles that at once testify to John's tyranny and the transcendent power of resistance. The paper finally asks what constitutes “minor” contributions to the stage, particularly given that Munday/Chettle's and Davenport's King John plays participate in the major shift in seventeenth-century English historical drama towards female protagonists and a focus on the sufferings of victims of political history.

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“Minor Plays”

This paper will address the subject of minor dramatists by considering the phenomenon of the minor play. Many of the plays we now think are minor (or, to put it more accurately, that we don't really think about at all) were written by writers we would probably think of as major dramatists. Conversely, some of the period's most famous plays have been written by writers who we nonetheless tend to treat as minor dramatists. Taking the careers of John Webster and John Fletcher as examples, the paper will place the supposedly major plays these playwrights produced next to the larger mass of apparently minor material they also authored. How accurately does *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The White Devil* represent the playwrighting of Webster? Are they simply better and therefore more deserving of their ‘major’ status than *Appius and Virginia* or *Anything for a Quiet Life*? What can we learn about the dramaturgy of John Fletcher if we focus on *Rule a Wife and Have a Wife* rather than *The Woman's Prize*? Does our understanding of the canon of Fletcher's drama accord with earlier conceptions, and if not, what can learn from paying closer attention to earlier attempts at constructing a canon? By addressing such questions, I aim to shed light on the vexed terms, ‘minor’ and ‘major’ which are so central to the seminar.

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“*Jack Juggler* and the Lost Bodies of Eucharistic Comedy”

This essay situates the academic comedy *Jack Juggler* (ascribed to Nicholas Udall, c. 1547-1553) within a nuanced conversation on the eucharist and its embodied implications that extends from Edwardian England to Shakespeare's stage. As an artifact of pre-Shakespearean comedy, *Jack Juggler* illustrates how a relatively unknown play, performed by student-actors, participated in the most controversial theological debate of the era and anticipated, if not influenced, the representation of bodies in Shakespeare's comedies. *Jack Juggler*, a comedic critique of the Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, depicts the embodied consequences of the Mass from the perspective of a Protestant polemicist. Jenkin Careaway, the character who bears the brunt of transubstantiation's supposed trickery, experiences this “juggling” as a loss of his own body, wherein he comes to mistrust the sensory experience of his body and effectively “loses” his “name, body, shape, legs, and all.” This experience of bodily disorientation reflects Protestant discourse on transubstantiation, a doctrine that (according to Reformers) constituted a radical reconceptualizing of the body and its epistemological borders. *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*, while not overt participants in this religious polemic, share *Jack Juggler*'s strains of embodied veracity, loss, and limitation in ways that gesture to the larger religious landscape. While drawing a definitive line of

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influence between *Jack Juggler* and Shakespeare may not be possible, this essay considers the religious, and even eucharistic, light that might be shed on Shakespeare’s comedies when seen as dramatic inheritors of *Jack Juggler*’s eucharistic bodies.

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“Three Types of Minority”

William Empson began his *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930) with a definition – ‘An ambiguity, in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful’ – that quickly gave way to another: ‘I propose to use the word in an extended sense, and shall think relevant to my subject any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language’. In this paper, I hope to make a similar critical movement – albeit an abbreviated one, three types rather than seven – with the notion of ‘minority’ and the ‘minor’, both in the early modern period itself and viewing that period in retrospect.

I will begin by thinking about how drama of the early modern period is repeatedly and routinely concerned with ‘minority’ in the OED’s initial sense (OED n./adj. 1) ‘The period of a person’s life prior to attaining full age; the state or fact of being a minor’, given its presentation of boy actors on stage. I will then consider this minority ‘in the extended sense’, borrowing from Empson, as ‘the condition or fact of being smaller, inferior, or subordinate in relation to something else’ (OED n.adj. 2 – see also ‘minorize’, v., and ‘minorate’, v.) How might the early modern debates about boy acting bequeath us a sense of ‘minority’ and the ‘minor’ – both as noun and verb – that has come to characterise many of the ways we think about early modern drama, and its authors, participants and creators, today?