Amy Cooper
SAA 2019: Pleasure and Interpretation in Shakespeare and Spenser

Title: Textual Pleasure in *As You Like It* and *The Faerie Queene*

Abstract: This paper will juxtapose two moments from the ends of *As You Like It* and Book II of the *Faerie Queene*: Rosalind's epilogue and Guyon's restoration of Grylle to human form. Rosalind's epilogue points to an underlying infinite regress which underpins the play of gender identity in *As You Like It*: acknowledging his own sexed body, the boy actor playing Rosalind wryly remarks, "if I were a woman I would kiss as many of you as had beards that pleas'd me" (18-19). Rosalind is a boy, playing a girl, playing a boy, playing a girl. There is a similar infinite regress that closes out Guyon's dubious triumph over Acrasia (whose name means "sensual pleasure"): Grylle is a man, transformed into a beast by Acrasia, whom Guyon and his Palmer then restore to "manly appearance," but who laments this transformation and insists he is a beast. In both cases, what appears to be depth turns out to be surface: both scenes resist the depth model of reading by trapping readers in a logical paradox—an infinite regress—that denies us the reality beyond the appearances which we insist is there and to which we desire access. Significantly, both moments appear in discussions of pleasure—Grylle's predicament is the result of languishing in Acrasia's Bower of Bliss and Rosalind's gender play is acknowledged in an address which implores the audience to "like as much of this play as please you." I argue that both texts point to a model of reading designed to frustrate suspicious readers—readers like Guyon and his anti-theatrical, puritan counterparts—readers, that is, who are suspicious of pleasure.

PLEASURE AND INTERPRETATION IN SHAKESPEARE AND SPENSER
SAA SEMINAR, APRIL 2019

Hannah J. Crawforth, King's College London

SHAKESPEARE, SPENSER AND DIFFICULTY

Rita Felski has recently challenged the presumption latent within much contemporary critique that texts deliberately withhold meaning and resist the reader's efforts to assimilate them with anything other than what she calls 'ubiquitous criticality'. Why does literature need to be so difficult? Or rather, how should – or how can – literature be difficult? Shakespeare and Spenser have both been termed 'difficult' poets, but in very different ways; Shakespeare exploits what George Steiner might have described as 'ontological' difficulty (his texts ask us to question the very existence of literature itself), while Spenser's difficulties have been seen as more 'modal' (his deliberate archaism) or 'tactical' (the prevalence of allegory in his work). Both writers have exercised generations of editors with their 'contingent' difficulties – aspects of their language, in particular, that need to be 'looked up'. Yet critics and audiences alike return to the works of Shakespeare and Spenser at least in part because of their difficulty. This paper will ask what the value of difficulty is in thinking about these two poets, paying particular attention to the affective powers of difficulty in our reading or listening processes. Can Shakespearean or Spenserian difficulty be pleasurable to us as readers, writers and critics?

Clare Kinney
University of Virginia

Selective Pleasure, Selective Interpretation: *The Tempest* 3.3.

Shakespearian drama at times strikingly complicates both the experience of pleasure and the pleasures of interpretation through its representation of the responses of on-stage characters to embedded, scripted performances or elaborately framed spectacles. *Our* responses to the metatheatrical event must enter into dialogue with that event's mediation by the audience within the play. If, moreover, we are watching the Shakespearian text in performance, the negotiation of both pleasure and understanding will be further complicated by our response (critical, appreciative, enchanted, alienated) to a particular re-staging or reinvention of such an intricately inflected dramatic moment.

This paper will focus upon *The Tempest* 3.3., a scene in which a magician-scriptwriter-director crafts a theatrical spectacle and an associated fiction of cosmic revenge which together variously beget pleasure, wonder, the awakening of guilty memory, horror and derangement in an on-stage audience. The characters' parsing of their experience is perplexingly multifarious and indeed offers an incisive representation of the very experience of playgoing. Any audience member is likely to be selective in what she remembers or forgets, appreciates or resists (and these same acts of selection will inflect her interpretation of what she has seen and its entanglement with the pleasure she experiences.) Furthermore, this selective pleasure—or pain!—will itself have been shaped and mediated by the re-framings, refractions, erasures and reinterpretations that inform a particular iteration of the play in performance. This is perhaps even more true of cinematic versions of Shakespeare where the aggressive cutting of text, the camera's appropriation or reframing of point of view, the selective language of montage and the translation of text into image collaborate to manage and "re-mediate" pleasure and interpretation. Looking closely at Derek Jarman's reinvention of 3.3. in his 1979 film adaptation of *The Tempest*, I will argue that this director's "selections" enter into a productive and illuminating dialogue with Shakespeare's own provocative practice, even as they draw new attention to the *processes* of performative mastery and beguilement.

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The Pleasures of Punishment in Spenser and Shakespeare

SAA 2019: Pleasure and Interpretations in Shakespeare and Spenser
Led by Leah Whittington and Joe Moshenska

In her 2015 book *The Limits of Critique*, Rita Felski titles a section of her third chapter "Critique is not a Capital Crime (Only a Misdemeanor…)." In it, she argues that reading shouldn't "always be a matter of guilt and innocence, crime and complicity," proposing a vision of literary studies that is defined less by "suspicion" (of the text, of the reader herself, and of the society that produces both) than by "pleasure" and "appreciation." "Suspicious reading," Felski argues, needs to become aware of the fact that it too is "pleasure-driven." Felski is partly making a joke with this section title, but it strikes me as somewhat suspicious that someone who opposes associating literary criticism with policing and legal trial, on the one hand, and social struggle, on the other, should still be committed to the determination of what crime Critique itself is guilty of: capital or misdemeanor. My paper will suggest that some literary determinations of guilt and innocence are more self-aware of how they are pleasure-driven than Felski's account might suggest, and that such self-aware pleasure is itself a problem to be interpreted. I will study passages from book 5 of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice* where determinations of guilt and criminality—themselves acts of interpretation—produce kinds of pleasure that characters seem aware of and that the texts themselves seem suspicious of. "Suspicious reading" may not be the best name for the modes of critique that Felski is so wary of, but the term's relevance is tantalizing when applied to moments of juridical interpretation, and the representations of pleasures they produce, in Spenser and Shakespeare. My essay will ask: What is the relationship between the pleasures of interpretation and the pleasures produced by determinations of guilt and criminality? How do Spenser and Shakespeare meditate on bad enjoyment in legal interpretation (the pleasures produced by the suffering of others) while still supplying us with tools to cultivate pleasure in our own interpretative work as readers?

Ticklish Reading: Cressida, Hellenore, and the Disruption of Pleasure

Andrew Miller, Williams College

As the centers of scenes of fraught voyeurism, Shakespeare's Cressida and Spenser's Hellenore occasion forms of textual extremity. Troilus's deeply confounding speech on beholding what "is, and is not, Cressid" and Malbecco's metamorphosis into Gealousy have both been read as exemplary distillations of the skeptical and allegorical commitments of their respective texts. But Cressida's and Hellenore's actions (and the in-text observation of those actions) have also served many schools of criticism as exemplary moments of disruption, as failures to conform to interpretive schemas of increasing complexity ranging, roughly, from characterological consistency to Western metaphysics to the *Faerie Queene*'s pedagogy. This paper proposes that many of these readings share a common investment in changes in authorial and readerly pleasure: how Shakespeare's usual delights sour, and how Spenser's moralism gives way to poetic indulgence. In both cases, this interpretive focus on verbal texture arises partly in response to each character's complex intertextual debt to genre and literary precedent. But this reading for pleasure and displeasure is also cued by the way that both texts stage these characters as canny interpreters of their own wooing—and then shroud them in forms of voyeurism that mystify female pleasure.

Pastoral: Reading Pleasure
Kevin Pask, Concordia University

I propose to address pleasure and interpretation in the context of the Renaissance generic form most clearly aligned with pleasure: pastoral. In particular, I will look at two quite different forms of literary pleasure associated with pastoral: Touchstone as a pastoral parodist of love poetry and the idea of pastoral itself in *As You Like It* and Calidore's response to (and interruption of) the pastoral scene of Colin Clout's piping in Book 6 of *The Faerie Queene*. Because *The Faerie Queene* weds romance to an ethical system, its use of pastoral is more conventionally recognizable as literature when instruction trumps pleasure (Horatian *utile* over *dulce*), as it tends to do in the highly professionalized and institutionalized reproduction of literary culture in the last century. Even the title of Shakespeare's play, on the other hand, suggests a different approach to the affordances of pastoral. My paper will examine these different versions of pastoral for Renaissance ideas of literary pleasure and some of their consequences for modern ideas of literary reading.

Robert (Robin) Reid, “The Harvest of Mysticism in English Renaissance Literature: Ascesis in Spenser and Shakespeare.”

Some of my main sources:
Augustine, Confessions.
K.E. Kirk, The Vision of God.
B. McGinn, The Presence of God, v.4.
Asceticism, ed. V. Wimbush & R. Valantasis.
Asceticism and the New Testament, ed. L. Vaage & V. Wimbush.
D. Miller, The Poem’s Two Bodies.
D. Trevor, The Poetics of Melancholy in Early Modern England.

The Uneasy Pleasures of Spenser and Shakespeare

Michael Schoenfeldt

University of Michigan

Both Spenser and Shakespeare exhibit intense anxiety about the pleasures their works at once elicit and explore. Their pleasures are invariably hedged with moral and physical hazard. I wonder: Is an uneasy pleasure a pleasure at all? Or is it the only kind we have. I want to explore how these writers, amid a series of cultural imperatives that link pleasure with the devil and pain with salvation, manage to get to the place where, to borrow a phrase from Yeats, “the body is not bruised to pleasure soul.”

SAA 2019 Pleasure and Interpretation abstract Scott-Baumann

Interpreting sound: Feminine Endings, Pleasure, and Gender in Early Modern English Poetry

This paper will investigate the history of "feminine rhyme", both the term and the poetic feature, some elements of its usage in poems by Shakespeare and Spenser, and its interpretive challenges in the seventeenth century and the twenty-first. Since the fourteenth century, the term "feminine" has been used to describe words ending on an unstressed syllable. Modern critics and teachers are usually embarrassed by these terms: the latest edition of Blackwells's *The Poetry Handbook* apologetically advises, "these sexist terms are easily replaced by stressed and unstressed hyperbeats". Many writers choose instead to use the terms "weak" and "strong", which are problematic in different ways. But before these terms are dismissed as outdated, their history can illuminate certain gendered aspects of early literary criticism and poetic usage. The use of feminine rhyme was debated from the moment when the term entered English usage, probably in Philip Sidney's *Defence of Poetry*. It was freighted with associations both of pleasure (sweetness) and of interpretive difficulty (foreignness, need for regulation). By tracing the development of both the theory and the practice of feminine rhyme in English, I hope to provide a micro-history of the gender politics of this aspect of poetic form, connecting usage by Spenser and Shakespeare (written about by Maureen Quilligan, David Scott Wilson-Okamura and Ann Thompson, among others) to its as-yet uninterpreted use by sixteenth- and seventeenth-century women poets.

Elizabeth Scott-Baumann
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Jennifer C. Vaught
University of Louisiana at Lafayette

Book II of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and Jonson's *The Alchemist*

Book II of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* serves as a pivotal intertext for Jonson's *The Alchemist*. Though Patrick Cheney has examined how Marlowe's *Jew of Malta* informs Jonson's city comedy about worldly vanity and the desire for gold, few have explored in detail how Jonson draws extensively upon Spenser for his funniest play. Jonson's character name Sir Epicure Mammon and the prostitute Dol Common masquerading as the Faery Queen are explicit allusions to Spenser. The coinciding of the first performance of *The Alchemist* in 1610 with the publication of the first folio of *The Faerie Queene* in 1609 might have contributed to such connections between Spenser's epic and Jonson's drama. Jonson's marginalia in his copy of the 1617 Folio of *The Faerie Queene* provides considerable evidence that he was particularly intrigued by episodes involving Braggadocchio, Mammon, and Alma in Book II. All three figures shape various personae, themes, and features of language and setting for *The Alchemist*. Jonson creates Sir Epicure Mammon by blending facets of Spenser's Braggadocchio and Mammon and Shakespeare's Falstaff. This unholy trinity of hoarders and hedonists exhibits ties to the morality play figures the World and his cohorts Pleasure and Folly in *The Castle of Perseverance*. Jonson's intertextual borrowing from multiple sources illustrates how he read and wrote dialogically. Jonson's parody of *The Faerie Queene* is fiercely satirical not of Spenser's allegory but of pleasure-seeking Londoners and Puritans who are greedy, self-delusional, and dulled by their misuse and misunderstanding of language. In contrast to Spenser's mythical epic, *The Alchemist* is a social satire about thieves and gulls depicted in a gritty and realistic style.

Patricia Wareh (Union College)

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"Courteous Farewells in Spenser and Shakespeare"

This paper is a draft of the conclusion to my book project, *Courteous Exchanges: Spenser's and Shakespeare's Gentle Dialogues with Readers and Audiences*, in which I argue that Spenser's and Shakespeare's treatments of courtesy—a social practice that encouraged hypersensitivity to artful self-presentation— provided a vocabulary for them to comment on their own literary practices and to prompt readers and audiences to reflect on the constructed nature of both texts and aristocratic identity. The book as a whole explores the connections between Spenser's *Faerie Queene* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, and *The Winter's Tale*. Focusing here on the conclusions to *The Faerie Queene* and *The Tempest*, I argue that such moments directly challenge readers and audiences, approaching them and calling on them to recognize how their own investment in poems and plays renders these works meaningful. The representations of rupture in particular—the escape of the Blatant Beast in Book Six of *The Faerie Queene*, and Prospero's breaking of his staff—create spaces for readers and audiences to consider critically how their lives and environment relate to the texts' fictionalized worlds. While Spenser's narrator takes his readers to task, and Shakespeare's Prospero entreats them, both texts encourage their addressees to explore the nexus of relationships among courtesy, performance, and aesthetic pleasure. These deflating moments thus prod readers and audiences to reflect on how their aesthetic judgment helps to form their social identity.

Abstract for SAA 2019, "Pleasure and Interpretation in Shakespeare and Spenser"
Michael West, "When is the Pleasure of Interpretation?"

In asking "When is the pleasure of interpretation?" I mean this question in two senses. First, when we talk about "the pleasure of interpretation," is this pleasure primarily understood to be a feature of one's experience of a poem, text, or play? Or is this pleasure of interpretation primarily a feature of one's later working through that poem, text, or play, whether through rereading, note-taking, or writing?

Second: we know of recent theorizations of the pleasure of interpretation; but is there an early modern account of the pleasure of interpretation, or is this only a contemporary point of explicit interest?

My paper will have two parts, corresponding to the two senses of my overriding question. First, I outline what I think are the two best recent theorists of the pleasure of interpretation, both of whom focus on the pleasure of interpretation as a feature of readerly experience, not as its product: Stephen Booth and Eve Sedgwick. Sedgwick is better known for her work in this area, but Booth offers (in my view) the most compelling account of why and how the pleasure of interpretation is best understood as a phenomenon of readerly experience. And as we will see, both critics are invested in an account of the pleasure of interpretation that focuses not on "successful" interpretation, but on its failure.

The second part of this paper takes up the question of whether there is a specifically early modern account of the pleasure of interpretation. My argument is that while no unified account exists, glimmerings of such an account can be found by hunting around the tonal edges of Renaissance rhetorical and poetic theory: most clearly in Henry Peacham and George Puttenham.

Matthew Zarnowiecki
SAA 2019 – "Pleasure and Interpretation in Shakespeare and Spenser"

Working Title: "Social Song: an un-Spenserian Pleasure?"

Brief abstract: Spenser is often seen as much less interested in the positive dimensions of social song and music in practice than Shakespeare (or Sidney). Not only is *The Faerie Queene* full of examples of the lascivious dangers of courtly singing, but also Spenser himself seems not to have written much poetry at all designed for participatory, multi-part or social singing. This essay takes up the question of whether deriving social, participatory pleasure in singing is an un-Spenserian pleasure, one that thwarts or perverts the *Faerie Queene*'s purpose of fashioning "a gentleman or noble person in virtuous and gentle discipline." Specifically, I examine the madrigal settings of passages from the *Faerie Queene* by Richard Carlton (1601) and Orlando Gibbons (1612). If the chief pleasure of *FQ*, from the perspective of eudaimonic literary studies, lies in a gradual program of self-improvement achieved by the reader through aesthetic response and narrative work, then perhaps these multi-part song settings of small bits of text constitute willful misreadings of Spenser. If so, there may be a conflict between readerly responses involving pleasurable and social reproduction, adaptation, or appropriation on the one hand and guided self-improvement on the other. Might we call these Shakespearean and Spenserian responses, or even lyric and epic responses?