

Abstracts for SAA seminar, “Good Governance”

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Aphra Behn: Legal Eagle?

In 1688, during the period culminating in The Glorious Revolution, Aphra Behn wrote her final play, *The Widow Ranter*. Performed seven months after her death, Behn’s tragicomedy dramatizes Nathaniel Bacon’s failed 1676 rebellion in Jamestown and is the first play known to feature an American colony as its setting. Bacon, who was historically labeled a traitor and was the instigator of the rebellion, attempts in the play to deal honestly with the council, only to find himself on the wrong side of the law, even though Behn positions him on the right side of civil service. This conflict is at the heart of good governance: should individuals create their own authority when the need arises, or should they rely on the democratic process? Behn’s play answers this question and, in doing so, serves as an elegy of the Restoration. Bacon’s failure signals an end to cavalier heroics, idealism, and chivalry. His death legitimates the authority of the council; its members have flaws but are nonetheless pragmatic leaders elected through the democratic process.

Central to the council’s dismantling of Bacon are anti-dueling and slander laws that had become popular during the reign of James II. Dueling was a perk of the nobility, and, as monarchical power began to wane at the end of the Restoration, so too did dueling as a sanctioned form of aristocratic violence. Behn’s play therefore depicts a judiciary that harshly prosecutes the pugilistic Bacon as a means of control. Furthermore, the slander statute known as *scandalum magnatum*, which had largely been forgotten during the Interregnum and Restoration, allowed the peerage to sue commoners for slander. In *The Widow Ranter*, the council invokes its own legal authority by (mis)appropriating the language and law of the nobility to institute legal proceedings against Bacon and others to great comedic effect.

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Advice on Ruling Babylon: The Traveling Players’ *Esther* and Imperial Politics

The English traveling players of the sixteenth and seventeenth century have received significant attention for their performance and translation of works by Shakespeare, Marlowe, Decker, Middleton, and other major English playwrights, but among the most consistently-performed material in their repertoires was biblical drama. Recent scholarship has shown how the biblical stories told in these plays were invested with typological and political meaning, and as the players performed in the Holy Roman Empire, their performances of biblical and religious material engaged in contemporary debate about a range of political and religious issues, from the role of councilors to the proper manner of a godly emperor. In this paper, I examine the *Esther* play associated with the traveling players from 1620: *Comoedia von der Königin Esther und*

Hoffertigen Haman. Situating the traveling players' *Esther* within the vast field of early modern Esthers – developed in plays, religious commentaries, conduct books, and political treatises – I argue that the players subtle shifts in the story respond to their status as strangers. Capitalizing on the “exilic” resonances in the text, these players offer conservative advice on kingship while also promoting the value of foreigners within a multi-confessional and multiethnic empire. Their experience as travelers, in other words, informs their interpretation of the biblical account and provides them room to advise, both at court and city, on good government, imagining a space for strangers within the body politic. At the same time, through the implicit typological readings of the Esther story, the travelers attempt both to capitalize on shared Protestant sentiment through typological readings while also promoting a kind of ecumenical understanding in the empire that would facilitate their travel.

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Power and Love: Castiglione's Model of Political Friendship

In Castiglione's wildly popular dialogue, *The Book of the Courtier*, Sir Frederick argues that his ideal counselor, the eponymous Courtier, though *essentially* a prince-pleaser, is not a flatterer. Sir Frederick's Courtier differs from the common “jolly flatterer” insofar as he *loves* his Prince like a friend. While a flatterer is equally disloyal to his Prince and his “friend,” the Courtier concerns himself with the Prince's well-being as he does his friends. In order for a Courtier to effectively educate his Prince in virtue and dissuade him from vice—which is the office of a friend—he must win the Prince's confidence and love, and most importantly, that immunity to speak freely which only friendship affords. However, as Sir Frederick recognizes in his discussion of the kind of conversation which the Courtier must be able to have with his Prince, the necessary inequality between the Prince and his Courtier precludes the possibility of true Aristotelian or Ciceronian friendship. Sir Frederick does not explain *why* we can term the conversation a Courtier has with his Prince “conversation” (which implies the equality of friends), but he asserts that the company ought to “so term it for this once,” and the rest of the dialogue becomes, in some way, an exploration of this paradoxical relationship. While the model which Castiglione proposes seems unattainable—or naïve—if we attend to the principles which undergird his understanding, a kind of radical other-centeredness which we do not often associate with the High Renaissance emerges. Such a vision of human flourishing becomes especially interesting when we remember that this was one of the most ubiquitous texts in Tutor England.

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Conscience, Good Governance and Political Accountability in *Hamlet*

As part of a longer project on *Hamlet* and accountability, in this paper I examine the play in light of the role of *conscience* within “good governance.” After Hamlet has dispatched Rosencrantz and Guildenstern to their deaths, apparently to the shock of Horatio, he remarks that “They are not near my conscience” (*F* 5.2.58). And yet with regards to the king, in the Folio, Hamlet then rhetorically asks, “is’t not perfect conscience / To quit him with this arm? And is’t not to be damned / To let this canker of our nature come / In further evil?” (67-70). Hamlet’s sense of obligation in the latter passage alludes to the right and duty described in texts, such as the Huguenot treatise *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (1579), for a “Magistrate”—that is an officer of the state or what the treatise calls an “inanimated and speaking law,” not a private individual—to oppose a king who has become tyrannical. The authors of the *Vindiciae*, believed to be Hubert Languet and Philippe Duplessis Mornay, claim that proper governance by “good Princes” also requires acknowledgment of the need for such magistrates to have the power to contest tyranny. Good governance for the authors means establishing and upholding a system of checks against bad governance. Hamlet, I argue, assumes this role of magistrate under the good king, his dead father, in order to contest the tyranny of Claudius. Moreover, he assumes the right in his capacity to dispense with the king’s flatterers and bad counsellors such as Polonius, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern as part of his public, political conscience in upholding a righteous state, despite the potential impact on his private conscience as subject to God. Hamlet therefore attempts to reconcile his private moral accountability with the sense of political accountability he feels as Prince of Denmark.

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"Good Governors: Fashioning the Deliberative Audience in *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*"

Thomas Elyot’s *Book of the Governor* is adamant that good governance is the result of good education—particularly instruction in poetry, which presents models of virtue for the future governor to emulate. Others, like antitheatricalist Stephen Gosson, objected that poetry and plays, in presenting figures of both good and evil, only confused the issue: audiences, especially popular ones, cannot always be trusted to discriminate among various models of conduct. But as the public theater was coming into its own in the late sixteenth century, playwrights were beginning to experiment with theatrical instructional methods that did not necessarily depend on these models. Though they aimed at a more heterogenous audience than Elyot, playwrights like Shakespeare and Jonson also sought to create a nation of good and virtuous governors. Unlike Elyot, their method relied not on providing models for emulation but on providing occasions for the exercise of deliberation.

In this paper, I argue that Shakespeare and his contemporaries sought to use plays as a means of inculcating political virtue in their audiences by helping them develop the deliberative habits necessary for participation in civic life. Drawing on their rhetorical training, these playwrights, as other critics have observed, created political dramas that argue *in utramque partem* about the issues they raise—dramas that are designed, I contend, to exercise deliberative judgement. By reading scenes of debate in *Richard II* and *Julius Caesar*, and scenes in which the theatrical spectators are cast as judges of national issues, this paper will show how Shakespeare exploited commonwealth

needs—and how even depictions of bad governance, and governors an audience shouldn't wish to emulate, could be used to develop the habits necessary for good governance.

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“What with the sweat”: Measuring the Public Health Effects of Syphilis in Shakespeare’s *Measure for Measure*

This seminar paper reads *Measure for Measure*'s evident anxieties concerning the corrupting and corrosive influence of sexual activity on the body politic as a symptomatic response to the syphilis epidemic afflicting early modern London. Despite the fact that E.K. Chamber's influential classification of the “Documents of Control” has led to a commonly perceived (and frequently cited) ideological opposition between London's civic governors and the city's burgeoning commercial Theatre in the late-16th and early-17th centuries, I argue that as one of the few designated locations where a substantial cross-section of the city's populace could gather as an embodied mass of people, the physically shared spaces of commercial theatres were unique cultural venues for exploring London's environmental and public health issues. Contextualizing Angelo's decree that “all [the] houses of resort in the suburbs shall be pulled down” alongside similarly worded proclamations issued under Elizabeth I and James I, which explicitly sought to curb the spread of disease(s) among the urban populace, I further argue that this historical parallel is representative of the degree to which Renaissance dramatists engaged with the same fundamental socio-environmental problems confronting London's civic and royal officials at the turn of the 17th century. Of particular, site-specific relevance to the play's earliest audiences would have been the Globe Theatre's immediate proximity in Southwark to the Clink liberty's well-known brothels, where sexual commodification and the threat of disease-transmission historically went hand-in-hand.

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Law and the Origins of the Essay

At various times in his life, Michel de Montaigne was a councilor, a magistrate, a mayor, and a prisoner. He was a man responsible for interpreting, shaping, and enforcing the law—and was also subject to the law. Despite—or because of—his intimate familiarity with it, he ultimately believed that the law had a “mystical” foundation, no discernible basis. Law had traditionally been associated with reason, but Montaigne found reason a tool easily corrupted and of limited range. He recognized that his own society—and probably every society based on laws—was in fact lawless, in the sense that laws could be interpreted in any way a person pleased. Despite his surface conservatism, there is a strong current in his *Essays* indicating that good governance ideally would

not be controlled by law, but would allow communities to order a society that promoted attempts at understanding other people.

My paper will argue that the essay form Montaigne created adopts and reenacts some of the strategies of his legal thinking. With his literary form, Montaigne put common impressions on trial, eschewed certainty, and dismissed the possibility of perfection. Like the law itself, Montaigne recognized that his essays could never truly determine the truth, and that humans and legal systems were often better served by admitting ignorance and embracing uncertainty. Ultimately, for Montaigne, good governance came down to an attitude of humility on the part of the government and the people.

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Shakespeare's Good Dukes

Shakespeare's plays are frequently noted for their interest in tyranny, ambiguously virtuous rulers, and generally bad governments—hence the topic of this seminar. In this essay, I suggest that where Shakespeare shows us good governance and good rulership, it is typically under conditions in which power is explicitly and clearly restricted or distributed among multiple poles. I will focus on Shakespeare's portrayal of a particular class of rulers to demonstrate this: his ruling dukes, those monarchs who do not enjoy the omnipotent title of a king or emperor but nevertheless are the highest individual authority in their independent countries. I will suggest that for Shakespeare these rulers (unsurprisingly mostly found in the comedies) serve as a model of proper use of power by combining in one position the authority of a monarch and the restrictions necessary to avoid tyranny.

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Good and Bad Governance in *King Lear*

This paper will explore the intersections between good and bad governance in Shakespeare's tragedies, primarily *King Lear*. From the opening scene, where Lear presents his measured plan for avoiding “future strife” with the division of the kingdom and immediately negates it by rashly redistributing Cordelia's share, the play depicts extremes in the exercise of power. Paradoxically, Lear inspires intense personal and political loyalty even as his royal governance is characterized by misjudgments, rashness, and folly.

Legitimacy is an obvious issue: how exactly does Lear's banishment of Kent under threat of immediate death differ from Cornwall's torture and dismissal of Gloucester? how does Edmund's Machiavellianism differ, if it does, when it is used to effect the disinheritance of Edgar and when,

his title of Earl of Gloucester recognized by Cornwall, though not Albany, he exercises military command and condemns Lear and Cordelia?

The play explores the contradictions in personal rule, where political processes employing patronage networks built on personal bonds exist to satisfy the ruler's or other princes' needs and desires. Lear's retainers stress their personal loyalty and desire to please the King even while risking his displeasure by urging him to reverse his decisions; they repeatedly seek to balance what they see as their duty to offer sound advice with his desire for submission. We may distinguish the Fool's relationship with Lear from Kent's or Gloucester's more political ones, or Cordelia's familial one, but all are personal relationships with political dimensions.

The process by which Lear comes to understand and atone for his limitations and his misgovernment—his unawareness of the plight of the unfortunate, his indifference to justice—goes some distance in rehabilitating him. Powerless and mad on the heath, he projects his own situation on to Poor Tom and insists that Tom and the Fool join him in trying the case of his daughters, the only formal effort to dispense justice in the play. Even as he becomes more thoughtful about the nature and limits of power over the course of the play, Lear appears generally indifferent to the mechanisms of governance, good or bad. In this he is unlike King Claudius in *Hamlet*, who energetically and self-consciously presents himself as an active ruler concerned with administration even as he takes devious and extra-legal measures to secure his desires.

My discussion of governance in *King Lear* will proceed with reference to topical English concerns, including the new Stuart monarch's absolutist theories of government and the relatively informal practices of government employed to implement them and handle day-to-day administration.

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Rogue Bureaucracy: The Fantasy of Government in Shakespeare and Cervantes

Complicity is a central theme of Stephen Greenblatt's recent study of tyranny in Shakespeare, *Tyrant*. Resistance is another. Taken together, the two comprise a dynamic not unlike that of Greenblatt's more famous description of early modern theater in terms of subversion and containment. One, perhaps surprising, term that emerges in Greenblatt's reading of *The Winter's Tale* is "bureaucracy." There, in his chapter on "Madness and Great Ones," he writes that included among the effects produced by Paulina's resistance to the paranoid tyrant Leontes is a brief "glimpse [into] the bureaucratic structure that characterizes all regimes and that becomes particularly important when the leader is behaving in alarming ways" (128). In his concluding Coda Greenblatt notes that Shakespeare "repeatedly depicted the chaos that ensues when tyrants, who generally have no administrative competence and no vision for constructive change, actually get possession of power" (187). While "bureaucratic structures" and "administrative competences" are not usually invoked in discussions of *The Winter's Tale*, these nevertheless identify crucial aspects of both good and bad governance: namely, its systems and organizations of power. My contribution to the seminar attempts to pursue these more systematic considerations by focusing

on the relationship between governance and administration in two plays that in these terms could be considered companion pieces. The first thread takes up the seminar's suggestion to reconsider the question of governance in *The Winter's Tale*, not from the point of view of the sovereign but rather from the rogue angle presented by the play's thief, Autolycus, whose "traffic in sheets" invokes power's dependence on paperwork. Not naturally honest, Autolycus sometimes becomes so, "by chance" (4.4.692), How do the arts of petty thievery and paper peddling prepare the way for contingent goodness in terms of governance? Taking up the seminar's welcome invitation to pursue comparative relations, my other thread pursues the same question in another play of rogue fiction. In Cervantes late and "never represented" *Pedro de Urdemalas* (1615) (variously translated as "Peter the Schemer," "Peter the Plotter," or Pedro the Great Pretender), governance is similarly explored in terms of the relation between power, wit (ingenio) and paperwork. In both cases, what we get is a glimpse of the early seventeenth century breakaway of theories of governance from the concept of sovereignty and the figure of the king.

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Good Governance and Affective Labor among Masters and Servants

This paper will consider how prescriptions for good household governance prescribe the management of masterly emotions and affective investment in the establishment and maintenance of household hierarchies. It will examine how prescriptions work to smooth over the contradictions of household mastery, the norms of which in some ways called upon masters to have very intimate and even familial relations with their subordinates, and yet in other ways demanded of them – especially via dramatic representations of failed, over-emotionally-invested masters – that household masters keep their emotional distance from their inferiors. First, I will present a literary example from Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humour* to demonstrate how domestic masters were cautioned away from certain expressions of affective investment in their subordinates. Such expressions were labeled excessive and indicative of ineffectual mastery in dramatic representations. Then, I will turn to William Gouge's *Domestical Duties* to consider how prescriptive texts deal with the problems presented by contradictory expectations for both loving relations and affective distance in household governance, striking a careful balance between prescribing and limiting the use of affects like "love" in the maintenance of a harmonious household. In seeking to endorse cooperative household management while avoiding the pitfalls of asking masters to become too affectively involved in the process of governance, Gouge places the primary burden of affective labor on servants rather than masters. In this, Gouge departs from the standards of prescriptive texts addressing other sorts of domestic mastery, where the master is expected to do more, or at least a great deal, of the necessary affective labor.

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Elizabeth Elsewhere: Shadows of Good Rule in Two Early Jacobean Plays

This paper developed out of my having noticed that presentations of good governance on the early modern English stage are actually pretty rare—that playwrights in the period appear to be reluctant to show rulers in the act of ruling well. To try to make sense of this reluctance, I discuss two plays that pair off naturally with each other, both of which *could* stage good governance directly but opt for indirection instead. Thomas Heywood’s *If You Know Not Me, You Know Nobody*, Part 1 (1605), and Thomas Dekker’s *The Whore of Babylon* (1607) are the earliest extant Jacobean plays to portray Elizabeth I on stage, as they could not have done while she was still reigning but were enabled to do after her death. For the purposes of the drama, Elizabeth might be the best choice among recent English monarchs to appear as an exemplar of benevolent government; yet neither play makes much of this (indeed Elizabeth is only just coming to the throne at the end of the first part of *If You Know Not Me*). The figure of the good ruler in Heywood’s play is, oddly enough, Philip II of Spain, who steps in as Princess Elizabeth’s defender against Queen Mary’s depredations. The strategy of displacement in Dekker’s play, on the other hand, involves transforming Elizabeth into an allegorical figure, Titania, who rules over Fairyland and fends off attacks from Babylon, but is also off stage during substantial portions of the play. In both cases a full-on portrayal of Elizabeth on the throne and directing the course of the nation is avoided. Among various possible reasons for this is a sensitivity on the part of these playwrights to James I’s prerogative, and his claim to the mantle of the “good ruler.”

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Ad Salutem Publicam: Public Health and Pastoral Government in More’s Utopia

Discourses of health and disease pervade More’s *Utopia*, as the text insistently plays upon the ambiguities of *salus*, a term with a wide semantic range that may refer to spiritual salvation, the physical health of the individual body, or the wider welfare of the commonwealth. This network of metaphors of health, disease and medicine, as well as the specific medical institutions and practices envisioned in Utopia, highlight how More’s text transfigures forms of Christian pastoral government to construct its radical experiment in state governmentality. In this regard, More’s text can be productively put into dialogue with Foucault’s extended discussion of the Christian pastorate as a significant background and “prelude” to the emergence of liberal governmentality (in the lecture series of the late 1970s, *Security, Territory, Population*). The Utopian hospital is a microcosm of the Utopian project writ large, yet its prominence in the spatial structure of the ideal republic reveals contradictions in the dialogue’s larger scheme. The language of health and disease apparently reinforces, but also potentially undermines, the opposition between the necropastoral dystopia of Book I’s England and the wholesome totalized pastoral care of the Utopian commonwealth in Book II.

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Judging Escalus

In *Romeo and Juliet*, Prince Escalus indicts himself for poor governance twice implicitly and once explicitly. The first implicit indictment comes with his reference to “three civil brawls” between the Capulets and Montagues with its implication that he has failed to solve a chronic problem; the second is his declaration that “Mercy but murders, pardoning those that kill,” which has often been interpreted as a reflection upon his refusal to punish, rather than just threaten, past brawlers. The explicit indictment comes very near the end of the play: “And I, for winking at your discords too, / Have lost a brace of kinsmen. All are punished.” The focus of my paper is critical response to the Prince, which is much more varied than his own judgements of himself. Machiavelli’s *Discourses* have been a favoured touchstone for critics who take the Prince at his word, Richard Hosley, in his Yale edition of 1954, quoting this text to show that the Prince had three alternatives: executing the brawlers, banishing them, reconciling them under the threat of punishment if they transgress, this last choice, which is the Prince’s, being the worst according to Machiavelli. For many critics of very different persuasions, though, the Prince is a success. His success lies, for one, in his leading Capulet and Montague to find a socially acceptable way to continue the feud in vying with each other in expenditure as they array with gold the statues of each other’s dead children. For the conservative critic Northrop Frye, Escalus is to be elevated to association with Elizabeth I “in their personal dislike of duels and brawling,” and the Prince’s role reaffirms monarchical power. In a Marxist perspective, the Prince’s “royal disciplines and punishments reveal [in his commodification of human lives] the workings of the play’s industry-driven monarchy to ensure that Verona remains a well-run machine.” Such is a preliminary sample. I search for the possible view that the Prince is too politically weak to punish the feuding magnates, with whose families the Prince’s own kinsmen Mercutio and Paris have either aligned themselves or sought to do so.